

# HELLO

*Inspired from the song sung by Adele  
Original song written by Gregory Kurstin and Adele Adkins*

*Hello, she said. It's me. I'm all alone here.*

*You probably can't even hear me. I'm not sure why I'm even trying this, but at this point I don't feel like I have any other choice. There's no one else I can talk to.*

*It's too late, I know. What's done is done. But I wanted to tell you that I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said those things to you. I was hurt, and the words came out of my mind before I even had a chance to think about them.*

*I was on my way to talk to you. You stormed out before I could take back what I had said, if that could even have been an option. I didn't mean it. You mean so much more to me than anything, and I wanted you to know that.*

*When this is all over, when this barrier is torn down, I'll be able to face you again and tell you again how sorry I am. How I forgive you for your part in everything. And you'll be able to hear me; that's my greatest wish right now. That's what keeps me going.*



“Hello,” he said. “Can you hear me?”

“Mr. Jones?” The doctor said, peaking into the room and knocking softly at the door. Rector stood up and the doctor came into the room. His tablet was on, the light reflected off of his face.

“Can you tell me if she’s still in there?” Rector asked. “Can she hear me still?”

Rector’s wife, Eva, lay motionless on the hospital bed, wires and tubes protruding from her arms and mouth. She wore a thin hospital gown for the essence of modesty. A blanket was draped over her for warmth. Rector reached down and

adjusted the blanket, to cover her up a little more.

“She’s in a coma,” the doctor said. “She suffered a traumatic brain injury in the accident, and we have her sedated to prevent further distress. At this point her vitals are normal. They’re low, but they’re in the range. It will be a long road ahead for her, but we will know more in the next day or two.”

Rector had been crying for some time, but this news brought a new wave -- both of relief and sorrow -- over him. He wiped away a tear that escaped.

“It’s all my fault,” he said. “I was driving--”

“Right now, the best thing you can do is be here for her, support her,” the doctor said. He placed his free hand on Rector’s shoulder. “And in answer to your question, it’s not definitive that people in a coma can hear their loved ones. But there is evidence to suggest that it may have some effect. At the very least, it can’t hurt.”



*I don’t know where I am, she said. I’m a little bit scared. This place is very strange.*

*Do you remember our first fight? It was about the stupidest thing, what we were going to get my nephew for Christmas. We had just started dating, and you were going to come home with me for the holidays and meet my family. I was so nervous; I just wanted them to like you. I wanted to be that “perfect” couple everything thinks exists out there somewhere. You wanted to get Jake a stupid toy car that flashed lights and made all sorts of annoying sounds. You thought it would be funny. I was not impressed.*

*I feel a little bad that I remember that, because you’re supposed to remember the good things. I’m supposed to remember the first time you made me laugh, the first time we kissed, the first time you spent the night. And I remember some of those things. We kissed on the first snow, as we were walking back from the restaurant and the*

*flakes started falling. You said it was good luck. I'm pretty sure you just wanted to kiss me that night. I didn't mind either way.*



“Eva,” he said. “I’m right here.”

He should never have been driving, not after how much he’d had to drink. It wasn’t even *that much*, not by the standards that I’ve been used to in the past. Since their wedding, he’d cut back quite a bit. In his bachelor days, he wouldn’t have even thought twice about shots. Now he had other things to think about, and the drinks didn’t matter as much anymore.

But they had gotten into such a huge fight. Probably the largest of their relationship, certainly the most intense. He had said things, she had said things. He knew he had hurt her, he could see the tears welling up in her eyes. She didn’t usually cry when they argued, she’d just get mad. When she started crying, he knew he had gone too far.

But then she’d taken it further, refusing to give up the last word. And he had been hurt, so angry with what she’d said that he realized he needed to put some space between them before either one of them said something else they’d regret. They could at least come back from it now, but who knows what would happen if they kept going down the road they were headed.

So he left. He grabbed his coat and walked out of the door. He could hear her calling after him, but he kept walking--down the hall and stairs, out of the building and down the street to his car. He got in and started driving.

There was a pub they liked to frequent about five minutes away. He walked in and immediately felt relief. He’d give it a few minutes to cool down, enough for a drink or two to loosen him up, and then he’d go back and they’d talk things out like civilized adults.



*Do you remember when we met? she asked. Do you remember what you said to me?*

*I was studying for my LSATs. I have no idea what you were doing there, in the library, because you never went to law school and you had no intention of continuing school past your bachelor's degree. You were graduating in May, you said, and you wondered what the chances were of you seeing me again after then.*

*I hadn't been paying attention to anything around me for hours, least of all you. You actually scared me a little, sitting down so suddenly across the table from me with your paper cup of coffee in one hand. You set a matching up down in front of me.*

*"You look like a caramel macchiato-type of girl," you said.*

*I looked up then. You'd said before that we'd met passing through the library doors--you on your way in and me on my way out--two weeks before. Maybe that's when you met me, but I met you in this moment, with the caramel macchiato and all of my study materials at that table in the stacks. I looked up at you ready to get at you for breaking my 'zone.' I was taking the test in a month and I had so much to get through before then.*

*But you were smiling, and my stomach flipped a little. You had such a boyish quality, the kind that's cute, not creepy. Your hair was tousled a little from the hat you had been wearing. Your hoodie sweatshirt was worn enough to look like the most comfortable thing in the universe.*

*"Are you studying for the LSATs too?" I asked, taking the first sip of my caramel macchiato. I didn't want to admit that you had me pegged from the beginning, but you did.*

*You laughed, kind of corny, but I smiled anyway. "I'm a business major," you said.*

*"You could still go to law school with a business degree," I said.*

*"You probably could," he said. "But I won't. Once I'm out of here, I'm done."*

*You held out your hand and told me your name was Rector. I laughed a little, because it's a strange name.*

*"You can imagine the nicknames in school," he said. "But I guess it fits--I figure I'm somewhere between an ass and the cloth most days."*

*"You must have been tormented," I said.*

*"Yes, but my dad was rich so they weren't too brutal," he laughed.*

*It struck me then how confident you were without seeming overly cocky. No doubt you were an arrogant bastard, but there wasn't something charming about you that balanced the frat boy-qualities.*

*You got up then. "Well, this was a successful first date, which means I get to ask you on another. You're going to need food in a few hours. How about I take you to dinner."*

*"I have to study," I said.*

*"You'll need to eat," you said.*

*"Fine. Dinner, then," I said.*

*You smiled and looked me straight in the eye. Your eyes were green, something I've never been able to resist. "You never told me your name."*

*"Eva," I said.*

*"It was nice to meet you, Eva," you said. "I'll see you in a few hours."*



That one shot turned into three very quickly. There was a bachelorette party at the pub, which should have been an indicator when he walked in that he needed to find another place of refuge, but he pushed the warnings away, walked up to the bar and ordered a scotch, neat.

"Look at you in your suit," one of the bachelorettes sauntered over to him. "You're pretty cute, Mr. Businessman," she pulled on his tie. She was quite drunk.

"Hi," he said, trying his best to ignore her and focus on his drink. "You look

like you're having a good time."

"It would be a better time with you," she said, leaning in close. He smelled vodka and cranberries on her breath."

"I'm married," he said.

"You know what they say," she said, leaning in even closer. "Yolo," she whispered loudly into his year. "You only live once."

"I'm alright for tonight," he said. "But thank you for the offer."

"Buy me a shot," she said.

He hesitated. "Just one," she said. "Pretty please."

One shot might get her off of his back. "One," he said. "Then I have to go home."

"To your *wife*," she accentuated the last word.

"Yes. To my wife," she said.

She ordered two shots of tequila, one for each of them. "You have to do it with me," she said.

He obliged. When they finished it she ordered another, and then another after that. After the third shot he paid the bill and told her goodnight.

It wasn't until he got into the car and turned it on that the effect of the three shots, plus the one scotch, hit him. But home was so close, he thought, and he needed to talk with Eva.

He drove slowly, he thought, focusing squinted eyes on the road ahead of him. If he kept an eye on the lines down the center of the road, he'd stay in his lane and he'd make his way home.

A pair of headlights shone at him, a car coming the other direction, and he looked up at them for one second too long. As if automatically, his car turned toward the light and before he could correct himself it was too late and they collided.



*I remember the sirens, she said. But I didn't put the details together. I thought they were for someone else.*

*I remember lying there, in my car after the accident. You hit me halfway between head-on and T-bone. My car flipped over and landed on the passenger side in the ditch next to the road. I was stuck, my leg jammed against some part of the car and the seat belt holding me in place.*

*I was on my way to you. I didn't know exactly where you'd be. You'd left your phone on the table when you walked out. I had an idea, though. I was headed to the pub. I figured you'd be there, you'd probably have a drink and then come home. But I didn't want to wait that long. I wanted to tell you that I shouldn't have said what I said about your family or their money. I knew it was a touchy subject for you and I shouldn't have gone there, but I did. I wanted to hurt you in that moment, and I shouldn't have said what I said.*

*I saw your car coming toward me on the road. I was going to pass you then find a place to turn around and follow you home. You were going pretty fast, and weaving a little bit.*

*But then something changed. Your car jerked suddenly, right into mine. If I had any time to think I would have turned out of the way in time, but you were too close for me to do anything. Your car hit mine and I felt the impact like a wall hitting me between the shoulders. I felt the car lift up and flip over. I felt the impact of it landing on its side.*

*Someone called 9-1-1, maybe it was you. I laid there for a few minutes, it seemed like hours, and then I heard sirens. Maybe that's what I was waiting for, the acknowledgement that help was on the way, because after I heard the sirens I closed my eyes and fell asleep. Then I woke up here.*



The biggest issue was that they just weren't spending enough time together.

She was busting her ass at the law firm, a young associate who desperately wanted to make partner. He'd been saying for a while that the name partners were taking advantage of her, giving her the junk cases and having her run errands any other associate would have turned down. Especially someone with as much experience as she had. She'd been in that same job for four years, and she was doing the exact same things for nearly the exact same pay.

She lashed back, telling him that most people have to do what she was doing to get ahead. He had it easy, she said. He graduated with his business degree and immediately went to work at his dad's company. That was plan all along, to follow in the family's footsteps. His grandfather had started the company, his dad had turned it into a Fortune 500 corporation, and now he was in the process of inheriting it and expanding it even further.

But that kind of life doesn't require much adversity. He was destined for the corner office, she said. He didn't have to work his way up like the rest of them.

That was the knife that cut the deepest. She knew that he had always been a little uncomfortable of his family's wealth. When they were first getting to know each other he had put out the confident facade, brushing over his family's financial success. But he knew that other people looked at him differently. He knew they talked about him, some with deep disdain, over the fact that his dad was the driving force behind one of the most successful companies in the world. They hated him, and not for his name. They hated him because they looked at him and saw privilege. They didn't see him, they saw his family and they saw his money.

Maybe that's what first drew him to her. She didn't see him at all. That first meeting, passing each other in the doors of the campus library, she walked right past him as if he was nothing more than a college frat boy. She didn't recognize him immediately like so many other girls had before her. She didn't even say "thank you," when he held the door open.

He walked past the library nearly every day after that. At first he would come up with an excuse, a book he needed or needed to return. But his friends never



bought it and they started to get suspicious.

He saw her one other time, not at the library. She was in line at the coffee cart outside the environmental sciences building. She was waiting for her order and he saw her reach for the steaming cup after the words small “caramel macchiato” were announced.

He couldn't read minds but his father had always told him to have a keen eye. When you're as powerful a man as he was, his father said, you need to be aware of everything around you. You never know the thoughts of other people, but you need to know their behaviors.



*I was so tired that night, she said. All I wanted was to come home, have a nice dinner and enjoy a glass of wine and a television show with you. We hadn't done that in months, just spend an evening at home together. Either you were working late, or attending a networking event, or I was working late, getting a case together for the next day.*

*We are at a point in our lives when we need each other the most but we have the least amount of time. We're in the early years of our marriage--the make-or-break years--but we're also in the early years of our job. We both talk about how different our experiences are--me, working my way up the ladder and you, proving that you belong at the top--but we're really working toward the same goal. We're a young professional in an old boy's game. We're millennials vying for our spot with the boomers.*

*Why couldn't we have seen this earlier? We would have saved ourselves so much heartache, to realize how similar we are. We could actually be the team we vowed to become, supporting each other instead of proving why we need to be so individual.*

*Promise me that, when this is all over and we start regaining some sense of*

*normalcy, that we'll realize this again. Promise me we won't forget that we're on the same path. We're on the same team.*



“Mr. Jones,” the doctor said, knocking lightly again on the door.

Rector looked up. He had fallen asleep by Eva’s bed, laid his head on his arms, crossed over her bed, and closed his eyes for a few minutes. He wiped the drowsiness from his face and stood up to welcome the doctor in.

“We have your wife’s tests back,” he said. “Right now she’s not completely out of danger, but things are looking good. She’ll have a long recovery, but I see no reason that she shouldn’t be able to return to her normal life over time.”

Rector sighed and smiled for the first time in three days. He picked up Eva’s hand. “That’s good news,” he said. “That’s the first good news I’ve heard all week.”

The doctor made a note on his chart and left the room. Rector walked out of the room briefly and got a cup of coffee from the hospital cafeteria. He came back into the room and sat by his wife’s side. His cell phone buzzed on the nightstand next to his chair. His assistant was texting him, asking how things were and if he had an idea on his schedule for the rest of the week. He responded that he’d stay in touch, but for the time being he was dealing with a personal event and would be unavailable.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Padilla is a journalist, writer, blogger and book reviewer who operates the blog Blondie Marie and writes for the Spencer Daily Reporter in Spencer, Iowa. She has written one collection of short stories, titled *Save Me, San Francisco* and she's tentatively beginning what she hopes to be a novel. When she's not writing (or reading), she's running, crafting or helping renovate the house she and her husband bought three years ago. She lives in Spencer, Iowa with her husband, their one-year-old son and two pugs.

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