Complete Strangers

Her left hand gently caressed his scratchy cheek. He hadn’t shaved in weeks. Sitting at his bedside, she thought about the first time they had laid eyes on each other. She sat on a big brown leather couch at a stranger’s party. Her supposed best friend had disappeared and left her to entertain herself. She hated when she did this, but she never could bring herself to tell her oldest friend no.

She caught a glimpse, from the corner of her eye, a tall man standing with two other guys. They had been standing over by the drinks table laughing loudly and telling jokes amongst themselves. The taller of the two wore a baseball cap, and she could tell when he glanced her way. There is always a feeling one gets when they know they’re being watched, but maybe she was imagining it. It was impossible to see his face hidden under the bill.

The time seemed to move slowly but when she checked her watch, ten minutes had past. She began to dial her best friend’s number but the call went straight to voicemail. She would have left if they had driven in her car, but she was stuck until her friend came to her senses and remembered that she had brought someone along for the ride. She leaned back into the couch and opened a game on her cell phone.

After another five minutes had passed by when she heard someone clear their throat and the weight on the couch shifted, as someone sat down. “Texting your boyfriend?” said the guy in the baseball cap. She looked at him and saw that his eyes were blue - baby blue. He had dimples on either side of his cheeks and a baby face. He was handsome, and she felt her heart and brain swoon simultaneously.
“Uh, no.” she laughed nervously holding up her phone to reassure him. What was she doing? She didn’t have anything to prove to him, he was a stranger. She felt the shame of embarrassment creep up behind her.

“What are you playing?” he asked, taking her phone from her hands.

“Snake.” she answered, watching him play a level. He seemed so comfortable sitting there next to her.

“So where is your boyfriend?” he continued still playing on her phone.

“Um…I don’t have one.” She felt stupid.

“Too bad for him.” he said handing her phone back. “I saw you hanging out by yourself and thought you could use some company.”

“Well, thanks for being so considerate.” She smiled.

“Well, I could go back to hanging out with my boys over there, if you want to be all cold shouldered.”

“No, no, no…I’m sorry. I mean, I’m sorry for being sarcastic.”

“Not for hurting my feelings?”

“I didn’t hurt your feelings.”

“How do you know that? We just met, you don’t know if you’ve upset me or not.”

She laughed at the old memory but now she sat at her husband’s bedside and begged to see his blue eyes one last time. He was always such an out-going, charismatic person that it started bugging her after ten years of marriage, but she would give anything to hear his dumb jokes right about now. She never realized how much she loved him until she couldn’t speak
those three words to him. What had been the last thing she had said to him before he left the house?

“So what do you do when you’re not looking so sad on this lovely couch?” he asked. She could tell he was getting comfortable now and that eased her anxiety a little. He leaned back and stared at her as if she were the only one in the room. She couldn’t wrap her mind around why he was so interested in her. All throughout high school she could never catch the interest of one of the many crushes she had, and now this handsome, baby faced, blue-eyed gentleman had basically landed in her lap.

There was a time that her best friend would pressure guys to talk to her and that left her a little untrusting of others. Maybe this was one of those times. This guy wasn’t really into her, he was just doing his buddy a favor. She took this into consideration. “I’m not sad…just bored.” She answered. He nodded his head in understanding.

“Well, these parties are usually the best thing in town. I think you’re just hanging out with the wrong people. By the way, where are your friends?”

“I came here with my best friend and she ditched me, like always.” She sighed.

“She sounds like a shitty friend, if you ask me.”

“I didn’t.”

“Sorry, I guess that is against the “girl code”?”

“What are you talking about?” She laughed. He smiled at her. All she could think now, was about the taste of his lips. She was glad that he had been pressured to talk to her. He did his job so well. He must do it all the time and probably had a girlfriend waiting for him somewhere.

Back in the hospital room, the nurse came around to do her hourly rounding. “How is our patient doing today? Any improvements?” the nurse asked wrapping the blood pressure cuff
around his lifeless arm. She covered her mouth as she watched the nurse do her assessment, trying to hold back tears she thought would never stop.

“Uh, no…none since Monday.” She finally had the courage to speak. Her heart ached seeing him in bed, resting. His strong arms weren’t there to comfort her when she needed him most. His face was pale and she started forgetting his smile or the way he laughed.

She was having a hard time remembering his walk or the way he placed his hat on his head so they covered his eyes. She missed the way he greeted her when he came home from work of how he would stick his cold feet on her and make her angry. She wished she’d never gotten angry at him. How could she be so mean to him at times? She would never forgive herself for every fight she ever had with him. She hated herself for all the silent treatment she gave him. What if he never woke up?

“Don’t all girls have this ‘girl code’ that they follow?” He asked.

“What, like never leaving your friend? You see how well that is working for me.” She told him as she pointed to the imaginary friend sitting next to her.

“Can I show you something?” he asked sitting up. He offered his hand.

“I don’t even know your name.”

“You don’t need to know my name, where were going.” he said grabbing her hand. He pulled her up and led her to through the kitchen and into the backyard.

It was dark outside except for the porch light. She could make out a grill, some outdoor furniture, and a large trampoline housed in the back.

“I think this will make you smile.” He told her as he walked her to the trampoline.
“I’m smiling.” She tried to convince him but it was too late, he was already climbing up the trampoline. He jumped a few times then stopped when he realized she wasn’t following him.

“What are you, a scaredy cat? I promise I won’t make a move on you. Get up here with me!”

Gathering all her courage, she finally joined him on the trampoline. They jumped so high and laughed so hard it made her stomach hurt. He was amazing. He made her feel like there was nothing more important in the world than what the two of them were doing at that moment.

“I knew the cat had claws, but she can have a good time too.” He told her once they stopped jumping. They sat on top of the trampoline and dangled their legs over the edge.

“I can’t believe you called me a scaredy cat.” She huffed. He laughed to himself then looked over at her.

“You seem so timid. You don’t have to be afraid of me.”

“Did you do this because you’re friends put you up to it?”

“What?”

“Don’t pretend like you don’t know.”

“I don’t know you are talking about.”

“Come on.” She smiled as she gave him a playful nudge.

“I’m serious.” He told her as he looked at her with those bright blue eyes.

“I thought my best friend put you up to this.” she confessed.

“I honestly don’t know what she looks like…why would you think that? I think I’m capable of making my own decisions, don’t you?”

It was late at night when she heard someone choking. It startled her out of her makeshift hospital bed. She looked around the room and realized the sounds came from her husband. He was shaking violently as he continued to choke. She slammed her hand on the nurse’s call light
and held his hand as she watched on helpless. She didn’t know what was happening but she knew that he was in distress. She saw his blue eyes for a brief moment before he closed them again and the nurses rushed in.

“He opened his eyes.” She kept repeating as the nurses rushed her out the room. “He opened his eyes.” She found a chair close by his room and started to cry. Where were things going? What was happening in there? A nurse rushed out of his room and sat at her desk. She picked up a nearby phone and dialed. Two more nurses quietly walked into his room and shut the door behind them. It didn’t seem like he was choking anymore, she wiped her tears away.

“Why do you think a guy just can’t walk up to you and start a conversation?” he asked. She shrugged her shoulders, feeling a chill go through her. The summer night was starting to cool off. She hugged herself to keep warm.

“I don’t know.” Was her answer.

“I think you’re beautiful.” He confessed. Her heart fell in the depths of her empty stomach.

“What?” the words came out of her mouth before she had a chance to think.

“I came over to talk to you because I think you’re beautiful.” She couldn’t think of any words to say.

“Ma’am,” the nurse had a grim look on her face as she came from the hospital room. There were no further words that needed to be said, she already knew.