

To a Stranger

By

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INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HALLWAY. DAY. 1

MARK - a man in his late 30s who, on the surface, is entirely unremarkable - is waiting on a bench in the hallway of the hospital. His brother is in surgery. Mark is miserably, weightily weary. He is seated alone, looking straight ahead. The world around is moving in fast-forward; Mark is living in slow-motion.

A NURSE knocks into a small table beside the bench. The nurse catches a vase of flowers, puts it down, and goes on her way. A double-headed hydrangea blossom has fallen out onto the floor. Mark picks up the flower and contemplates it.

BENJAMIN - dressed in surgery greens and an impeccably pressed lab coat - comes to stand in front of Mark. His back is to the camera. He waits for Mark to look up. Mark takes his time raising his eyes to meet Benjamin's, afraid of the surgery report. He sets aside the hydrangea.

BENJAMIN  
Mark Farthing?

MARK  
Yes.

He reaches out - offering a business card. Mark takes it.

BENJAMIN  
I'm Dr. Benjamin Cummings. I'm--

MARK  
I know. James?

A beat. We finally see all of Benjamin: he is in his mid-30s with great hair, and an intelligent and attractive face. Benjamin is annoyed Mark has interrupted his spiel.

BENJAMIN  
Your brother has been moved into a recovery room.

MARK  
And the surgery? Did you... did you get it all?

Another long moment of silence. Benjamin doesn't answer.

MARK (CONT'D)  
(distressed)  
I... I see. Ah. Thank you. Doctor.

Mark stands up to shake Benjamin's hand. Benjamin does not take it. Mark drops his hand and jams it into his pocket.

Benjamin resumes his previously aborted spiel:

BENJAMIN  
The surgery was, as far as I am allowed to say, a complete success. The cancerous tumors were removed via laparoscopic surgery. While

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

this form of cancer can metastasize, I am confident that Mr. Farthing will fully recover and have a complete remission. That said, I would like to consult with his MD-Team and schedule a follow up appointment to discuss a course of targeted chemotherapy to prevent recurrence.

MARK

(paleaxed)

I... all right. I can... I can schedule an... an appointment.

BENJAMIN

See that you do. The hospital will recommend a psychiatrist when your brother has been discharged. Once Mr. Farthing is awake we will be moving him into a private room. You will be taking him home in two days.

MARK

I will?

BENJAMIN

The incision was under his left armpit, so as his caregiver you must ensure that he wears loose clothing and does not rotate or lift his arm extensively for at least one week. This includes no video games, no driving, and no reaching or lifting.

MARK

But, the lump... I mean, you can't give someone with no--

Benjamin offers Mark a scathing look.

BENJAMIN

Consult with his physiotherapist for a recovery regime.

MARK

But the... the tissue...

BENJAMIN

Mr. Farthing. With all due respect, there is a reason that I am head of the oncological surgery team here.

MARK

Ah. Yes. I just... I read--

BENJAMIN

On the internet, I presume?

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (2)

MARK

Well, yes. James wanted me to ask about--

BENJAMIN

Then your brother may ask me at his follow-up appointment. Now, if you'll excuse me, Mr. Farthing, this has been a very long day and I should like to check up on your brother and then end it.

MARK

Wha...? Yes. Of... of course. Thank you. Can I go in to see--

Mark raises his hand to shake again, but Benjamin doesn't even wait for him to finish his sentence before turning on his heel and walking off.

MARK (CONT'D)

Asshole.

Mark jams the business card in his wallet, and walks to the nurse's station to find out where they took his brother.

2 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - JAMES' ROOM. DAY. 2

JAMES is asleep. The camera lingers on his face and, surprise, James and Mark are identical twins. James, however, is much more fit, his face less weary and more tanned.

Mark lets himself into James' room quietly. He sits in the chair by the bed, watching James' face intently.

Mark reaches out and places his hand on James' chest, just feeling him breathe.

3 EST. CONDO BUILDING. NIGHT. 3

A condominium near downtown, overlooking the harbour.

4 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES' CONDO. NIGHT. 4

Mark walks towards James' condo, juggling grocery bags, a garment bag, and a wheelee suitcase. He fumbles with the keys.

A neighbor comes up the hall behind him. From the back of his head, it is clear that it is Benjamin, but Mark cannot see that.

MARK

Hey, sorry, could you help me figure out which--

The neighbor utterly ignores him and lets himself into his own condo and shuts the door.

MARK (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Asshole!

5 INT. JAMES' CONDO. NIGHT. 5

On the entry is a narrow table with a bowl for bric-a-brac. The entry way opens nearly immediately onto an open-plan living room/dining room/kitchen. This is clearly the home of a bachelor - all flat-pack furniture, dust, sporting memorabilia, liquor-bottles-as-decor, and leather. There are framed photos on the wall of James' police academy graduation, his certificate, and a goofy photo of Mark wearing James' dress uniform hat at a bar.

Mark lets himself in and drops everything. James' cat HIGHTOWER greets Mark at the door.

MARK  
Hello, you menace.

Mark scratches Hightower, then hauls his bag to the spare room. On his way back out, Mark pauses in the door of his brother's room.

6 INT. JAMES' CONDO - JAMES' BEDROOM. DAY. 6

This is clearly a bachelor's bedroom; everything in here is designed to seduce.

The closet is open, and Mark moves to close it. He pauses, and looks up at the safe resting on the top shelf above James' uniforms. He reaches up. Hesitates. He very tentatively tugs the handle. The safe doesn't budge. He tugs harder. It doesn't open.

Mark sighs and closes the closet door.

7 EST. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE. DAY. 7

Corner of Murray St. and Orde St.

8 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - JAMES' ROOM. DAY. 8

Mark is sitting by James' bedside, reading through a stack of medical pamphlets and printouts from the internet. He is fidgety. James is watching TV, doped up to the gills.

The show is a cop procedural. James snorts at some antic onscreen, grimaces, and puts his hand on his left shoulder.

JAMES  
Fuck, ow.

MARK  
(without looking up)  
Don't move it.

JAMES  
I didn't move it. I laughed.

MARK  
Then don't laugh.

JAMES  
They got the Miranda Rights wrong.

(CONTINUED)

Mark sighs, long suffering, and finally looks up.

MARK  
James...

JAMES  
Yeah, yeah.

MARK  
Does it...? Does it hurt more? I  
can call a nurse...

Mark moves toward the door, but stops when James says:

JAMES  
Fuck's sake, Mark. I'm fine.

MARK  
I'm just trying to--

JAMES  
I know.

MARK  
Well it's not like you'd ever speak  
up.

JAMES  
(dismissive)  
Yeah, okay.

MARK  
So you gotta work with me, punk,  
you gotta--

JAMES  
I know! Fuck, okay Mark? I know!  
Fuck... owww.

MARK  
See, this is exactly what I'm  
talking about! You never... you  
never let me help.

JAMES  
I'm a grown ass man, and I don't  
need your--

MARK  
You do! Shut up, James, you do!

JAMES  
Aww, shut up. Jesus, I'm not dying.

MARK  
(furious outburst)  
Not anymore!

James is surprised by the force of Mark's anger.

MARK (CONT'D)  
 Jesus, James, do you have any idea  
 what this has been... what I've  
 been... goddammit.

Mark covers his face, barely holding it together, but not willing to let his macho brother see it.

MARK (CONT'D)  
 Fuck.

James, uncomfortable by this display of emotion, resumes watching TV. Mark takes a moment to get himself together.

MARK (CONT'D)  
 You want a coffee?

JAMES  
 (snide)  
 Do your pamphlets say I'm allowed?

MARK  
 (angry again)  
 I'm just trying to make sure that  
 you-- aww, fuck. Who cares what  
 they say? Do you want a coffee?

JAMES  
 Yeah.

MARK  
 Yeah. Fine. Yeah.

Mark leaves the room.

9 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HALLWAY. DAY. 9

Mark leans against the wall, taking a moment to breathe and calm down. Then he heads towards the cafeteria.

The double-headed hydrangea is still in the vase by the sofa. He plucks it out and chucks it in the garbage.

10 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - CAFETERIA. DAY. 10

Benjamin is at the end of the coffee line. Mark hesitates when he realizes it's him, then nuts up and gets in line.

There is a curl at the back of Benjamin's neck and Mark becomes transfixed with it. When Benjamin has paid and turns to go, Mark moves to say hello. Benjamin doesn't notice him, and walks right by.

Mark deflates. Then he steps up, and orders two coffees.

11 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY. 11

Hightower is waiting patiently at the door when Mark and James enter. Mark's hands are full with James' overnight bag, and a large pizza box. James beelines for the sofa.

11 CONTINUED:

MARK

Gimmie a sec and I'll help you--

James lowers himself gingerly down.

MARK (CONT'D)

Or not.

Mark sets the pizza on the coffee table within reach and leaves the room to put away James' bag. Hightower jumps up onto James' lap. James uses his good arm to pet the cat.

JAMES

Hello, you menace.

James opens the box, pulls out a slice, and picks off the pepperoni. He holds it out for Hightower. The cat eats with relish. James, however, takes a bite of his pizza and doesn't look too thrilled about it.

12 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BEN'S OFFICE. DAY. 12

Benjamin has a corner office overlooking the busy University street. Benjamin is clearly a Very Important Doctor at the hospital. On a light box behind Benjamin is an MRI of James' chest.

Mark and James are sitting on one side of the desk, Benjamin on the other, like a king holding court.

There are hydrangeas in the vase on the corner of Benjamin's desk, and Mark can't tear his eyes away from them. Anything is better than looking at the scans.

BENJAMIN

I am quite confident that we caught every tumor, Mr. Farthing. That you will be entering a course of chemotherapy is, obviously, nonnegotiable. But at this point it is more of a safety procedure than a necessity.

MARK

There's no question of that.

JAMES

(to Mark)

Dude, you could let me--

MARK

Sorry. Of course.

Benjamin watches the byplay with stony indifference.

BENJAMIN

I've sent a chemotherapy requisition to the department, so you should be receiving a phone call regarding your first appointment within the week.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES  
Thanks, man.

Benjamin clearly does not like being called "man."

BENJAMIN  
You will attend.

JAMES  
Yeah, sure.

Benjamin looks to Mark for confirmation, but Mark is too chastised and resentful to comment. Benjamin stands and gathers up his notes.

BENJAMIN  
Good day, Mr. Farthing. And welcome to remission.

JAMES  
Yeah, man! Thanks! Feels awesome.

James sticks out a hand to shake. Benjamin does not take it.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Right, right. Sorry. Thanks doc.

BENJAMIN  
You're welcome. I'm sure.

Mark stands now. The brothers leave the office. Benjamin stares after them, his expression unreadable. His eyes drop down on the Farthing twin's bodies for a moment, then jump back up. He shakes his head, annoyed with himself.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)  
(to himself; snide)  
Ah yes, very professional, doctor.

Benjamin closes the door of his office.

13 EST. A LOW-RISE OFFICE BUILDING. DAY. 13

A red-brick office building that has seen better days.

14 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY. 14

Mark is one of two partners in a small family law firm. His office is cramped, but clean. His windows, shaded by cheap vertical blinds, open on an alley way. Mark is on speaker phone with James. He is distracted, shuffling through papers looking for something.

As this conversation progresses the camera cuts back and forth between the brothers.

MARK  
No, James, in fact I don't think it's a good idea.

15 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY. 15

James is seated on his sofa and, contrary to orders, is playing a video game. He's got a Bluetooth headset on.

JAMES  
The precinct is playing the 107th  
and I--

16 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY. 16

Mark points his pen at the phone, scolding.

MARK  
Cannot bowl.

17 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY. 17

JAMES  
Jesus, mom, it's been a week.

He throws down his controller.

18 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY. 18

MARK  
Your first chemo is tomorrow.

19 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY. 19

JAMES  
(frustrated)  
Stop micromanaging. I'm a big boy,  
man. I can lift a--

20 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY. 20

MARK  
You absolutely cannot. If you  
promised me that you'd just sit and  
watch, I would have no problems  
with it, but I know you. You'll  
have a few beers, get it into your  
head that you're invincible, then  
rip open your incisions--

JAMES (OVERLAPPING)(O.S)  
I don't think I'm invincible, Mark  
I-

MARK  
(angry)  
Yes, you do. That's half the reason  
we're in this situation in the  
first place! You never go to your  
annual checkups, you never listened--  
-

20 CONTINUED:

JAMES (O.S.)  
Jesus, Mark!

MARK (CONT'D)  
--to what your own goddamn  
body was trying to tell you  
for eight goddamn months--

21 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY.

21

JAMES  
Mark!

MARK(O.S.)  
-- and all you care about is  
your goddamn macho pride and  
what your buddies will think  
of you! Well, guess what,  
we're not nineteen any more--

22 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY.

22

JAMES  
Mark!

MARK  
--and if you can't handle  
yourself like the gun-  
wielding, badge-wearing adult  
that you're supposed to be  
then you can just damn well  
put up with your faggot  
brother micromanaging your  
social life!

There is stunned silence on the other end of the line. Mark  
blows out a groan, regretting what he's said instantly.

JAMES (O.S.)  
Hey, fuck you, man. I haven't  
called you a faggot in literally a  
decade.

MARK  
I'm sorry.

JAMES (O.S.)  
Fuck your 'sorry'. That was low.

Another long silence. Mark is angry still, but it's ebbing.

23 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY.

23

JAMES  
Fine. I won't go.

MARK (O.S.)  
Thank you.

James sits back, stung and pretending like he's not.

JAMES  
(falsely nonchalant)  
What would I say to the guys,  
anyway?

A pause.

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

MARK (O.S.)  
You could tell them the truth.

James shifts on the sofa. He doesn't like that idea at all.

MARK (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
There's nothing shameful in a man  
with bre--

JAMES  
(sharp)  
No, man.

24 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY.

24

Mark is startled with how vehement James is.

MARK  
Okay. Right. Okay.

A beat.

JAMES (O.S.)  
Feel like Thai tonight?

MARK  
Yeah. Yeah, sure. I'm leaving work  
soon. Uh, as soon as I get this  
damn case file in order.

JAMES (O.S.)  
So, around midnight then?

Mark laughs, relieved and genuine.

MARK  
Yeah. Yeah. I'll be home soon. Call  
ahead - I'll pick it up on my way.

JAMES (O.S.)  
'kay.

Mark hangs up.

25 INT. THE THAI PLACE. NIGHT.

25

The restaurant is little more than a battered counter, an ancient cash register, and a blackboard with hand-written specials.

Mark, rumped and carrying a large accordion file enters and queues up. There are about four CUSTOMERS ahead of him.

The CASHIER behind the counter sees him and makes a gesture to him that his order is nearly ready. Obviously, James comes here a lot.

Benjamin is ahead of him in line again, though it takes Mark a moment of fatigued staring to realize it. That little curl on the nape of Benjamin's neck is way too appealing in Mark's tired state.

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

When Benjamin receives his order and turns to leave, Mark tries to say hello again, and again is ignored. Mark snatches his order off the counter, throws down his money, and chases Benjamin out the door.

26 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THAI PLACE. NIGHT. 26

The Thai place is just a few doors down from the Condo. Mark stomps after Benjamin.

MARK  
What the hell is wrong with you?

Not expecting to be accosted, Benjamin freezes. Mark catches up and circles around Benjamin to get in his face.

BENJAMIN  
Well, I'm not the one yelling at strangers in the street, for one.

MARK  
Strangers! God, you can't even--  
No. No, of course not.

Mark deflates.

MARK (CONT'D)  
Right. You must see a hundred patients a day. And most of them are dying so you probably don't bother to--

BENJAMIN  
Oh, no. I do remember the dying ones. Always.

MARK  
What? Why?

BENJAMIN  
Because they were the failures. They were the mistakes I will not allow myself to make again.

MARK  
Well that's... cold.

BENJAMIN  
It is efficient. My job is cut cancer out of people, Mr. Farthing. Not to be a bleeding heart. Good evening.

Benjamin swings away and enters James' condo building. He clearly also lives there. Mark watches him go, and then the fact that Benjamin used his last name clicks, and he scrambles to catch up.

27 INT. LOBBY OF JAMES' CONDO BUILDING. NIGHT. 27

Mark follows Benjamin to the elevator.

(CONTINUED)

MARK

You *do* know me.

Benjamin sighs, put out.

BENJAMIN

Yes, I remember who you are, Mr. Farthing. Twin brother of a male breast cancer patient. It is singular enough to stick out.

MARK

So why did you--?

The elevator arrives. They enter. Mark pushes the button for James' floor. Benjamin does not push a button.

BENJAMIN

Would you be interested in making small talk with the man who shouted at you in the street?

MARK

No, I guess not.

BENJAMIN

Then you guess correctly.

The elevator stops on their floor. Benjamin exits.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Good evening, Mr. Farthing.

MARK

I, uh. Good evening, Dr. Cummings.

Mark exits the elevator, and watches as Benjamin lets himself into an condo a few doors down from James'.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES' CONDO. DAY.

The next morning. Mark is looking put together, like the lawyer he is, and he is holding two takeaway cups of coffee. He is standing in front of Benjamin's condo door. He takes a moment to collect himself, then knocks.

Benjamin, clearly on his way out to work, opens the door whilst tying his tie.

BENJAMIN

Yes? What?

MARK

I, um, I wanted to apologize for--

BENJAMIN

Oh, for god's sake.

MARK

What?

BENJAMIN

No.

MARK

That's it? Just no?

BENJAMIN

No, I will not accept bribes to help your brother get better care. He already has the best.

MARK

(spluttering)

I didn't... that's not why I...

BENJAMIN

Or is it that your mother always encouraged you to snare a doctor? I wasn't certain you played for my team, but who can tell?

MARK

No! I'm a lawyer, I don't need a doctor to be my sugar da--

BENJAMIN

You haven't really come to apologize for shouting at me last night.

MARK

Yes! Actually, I have!

BENJAMIN

Why?

MARK

Because that's what people do!

BENJAMIN

Not in my experience.

MARK

Then you've been hanging around the wrong people. Look, here. Take it. I'm sorry.

Benjamin doesn't take it.

BENJAMIN

I don't drink coffee.

He closes the door in Mark's face.

MARK

God, you are a prick!

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BEN'S OFFICE. DAY. 29

It is several days later. The brothers are back in Benjamin's office. Mark is glaring out the window. Benjamin is focused

(CONTINUED)

entirely on James, and James is oblivious to the tension in the room. James looks sick and wane, but he is smiling.

JAMES  
Naw, man, I'm holding up.

BENJAMIN  
I'm pleased to see no extra unexpected side effects related to the chemotherapy, so we'll continue with the entire course of treatment. Is that acceptable to you, Mr. Farthing?

JAMES  
Sure, man.

BENJAMIN  
That's an affirmative, then?

JAMES  
Yeah. Yes.

BENJAMIN  
Excellent. Sign here. This form just acknowledges that I've informed you of the risks and you've given your permission to continue with the treatment.

He pushes a form across the desk, and James signs.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)  
You as well, please, Mr. Farthing.

Mark, startled out of his glare, whips around.

MARK  
What? Why me?

BENJAMIN  
As his primary caregiver, you also need to be informed of the risks of chemotherapy. As a lawyer, Mr. Farthing, I thought you'd be aware of the necessity of your signature.

Low blow. Mark snatches the form, reads it quickly and signs. James becomes aware of the tension for the first time.

JAMES  
Am I missing something?

MARK  
Nothing.

Benjamin stands, dismissing them.

BENJAMIN  
If there's anything else you gentlemen need. Related to Mr. Farthing's case, that is...

(CONTINUED)

MARK  
Right, I get it. It was a gesture,  
okay? Sorry. I promise I won't try  
to be nice to you again. Prick.

Mark storms out of the room. James trails after him, bemused.  
Benjamin watches them go from behind the desk. One side of  
his mouth curls up into an involuntary grin.

30 EXT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTER - PARKING GARAGE. DAY 30

Mark stomps to his car, James trailing in his wake, amused.

JAMES  
I'm just saying that if I was into  
dudes, I'd have a crush on him,  
too.

MARK  
I don't have a crush. I'm a grown-  
ass man. Grown-ass men don't have  
crushes.

JAMES  
Says you.

MARK  
Says me. And me says -- I mean, I  
say that I don't have a crush.

JAMES  
Methinks the lady doth protest--

Mark whirls around on his brother, middle finger up.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Sorry. You still protest too much.

MARK  
He's an asshole, okay? Just... it  
won't endanger your care, I  
promise. But maybe I should stop  
coming to your meetings.

JAMES  
What, and deprive me of the  
opportunity to watch you pulling  
the doc's pigtails?

MARK  
(giving into the humor of  
the image)  
Aw, shut up. Get in the damned car.

JAMES  
Yessir.

With careful maneuvering, James gets into the damned car.

31 INT. MARK'S CAR. DAY.

31

Mark starts the engine, then pauses, thoughtful.

(CONTINUED)

MARK  
His hair is pretty luxurious.

JAMES  
(laughing)  
Aw, now you shut up. Drive.

MARK  
Home first? Or pizza?

JAMES  
Nah, I'm good.

Mark stares at James. He's never declined pizza before.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Chill, man. I'm good. Just not  
hungry, okay? It's not like I'm  
dying.

MARK  
No. No, not any more.

JAMES  
See? Not any more.  
(a beat)  
Thanks to Doctor McHottieHair.

MARK  
(groans)  
Oh, god, stop it.

James laughs, then winces, cupping his left shoulder.

32 INT. JAMES' CONDO - JAMES' BEDROOM. DAY.

32

James stares at his exposed chest in the mirror. The bandages  
are gone, but there is a bruise around his armpit.

47 He winces, raises his arm, and inspects the surgery site. It  
is red, and angry, but the wounds are closed. He spreads his  
right palm across his left pectoral, searching, kneading.  
Worried.