

Whitening Strips (Draft 1)

written by

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Characters

Sara - 29, any race. A solitary person, who lives a fairly routine life of school and work. She dreams of being a part of a large political or societal movement. Luke's girlfriend.

Luke - 28, any race. Works part time at a bar. He wants to go to school, but can't find the energy to complete his FAFSA. Still getting over the death of his mother. Sara's boyfriend.

SETTING

Sara's bedroom.

TIME

9 PM on a Tuesday night.

NOTES

The only things on stage should be the two chairs, the desk, and a laptop

The // symbol indicates dialogue being cut off by another character.

-WHITENING STRIPS

ACT 1

SCENE 1

Sara is sitting next to Luke in front of a computer.

SARA

Dude, you're crazy. Why the hell did you do that?

LUKE

I don't know what's the big deal. Like, what's your problem?

Sara throws her hands in the air.

SARA

Do you know how much information you're giving them? Fuck, your whole DNA is just sitting on a server somewhere.

LUKE

Who cares?

Sara shakes her head.

SARA

I care. You should care. You know how I am about this shit.

LUKE

You're paranoid.

Sara let's out a sigh.

SARA

I'm not paranoid. I just don't like any of this.

LUKE

No, you're paranoid. You just can't admit it to yourself. One day, you get an ad for something... I don't even know what it was //

SARA

// Whitening strips.

Luke nods, agitated.

LUKE

Yeah, those. And now you're all weird.

SARA

I had talked about getting them earlier in the day, and an ad suddenly appears in my feed. How the hell does that not bother you?

LUKE

Because you're paranoid. And you probably looked them up or something. You really think they're listening to you... right now.

SARA

I didn't search it up. At all. I was talking about them with Kelly, and then they're in my timeline.

LUKE

You probably forgot. It's like that thing. You don't notice something until it's important to you... I can't remember what it's called. Bias something.

SARA

Conformation bias. It's not that.

Luke nods.

LUKE

Besides, even if they are listening, why the hell does it matter? We're already here. Everything we do is online.

SARA

It does matter.

LUKE

You know what? You've already given me the runaround on this.

SARA

Why do you even want to take a DNA test, anyway? Like, how does that help you?

LUKE

I don't know. I don't know anything about my family. You already know. And then my mom... I just want to see who I'm related to. What they're like.

A long pause.

SARA

And? How does that help you?

LUKE

What if I have a brother. A sister? What if they're out there, and they're asking those same questions?

SARA

If they exist, they're living their own lives. What you're looking for, it's not out there.

LUKE

What are you even talking about? How can you possibly know that?

SARA

You're just throwing your DNA out there to some random company for a shot in the dark that maybe, maybe you have a relative out there who's looking for answers?

LUKE

It's not some random company. It's 23andMe. Everyone uses them.

SARA

I'm saying that they shouldn't. They have no idea what they're doing with all that info. You don't have any idea.

LUKE

You don't either.

Sara stands up out of her chair.

SARA

It's in their terms of service! They have the rights to your DNA the moment they get their hands on it.

Luke stares at Sara.

LUKE

You remember when you went on that vegan diet?

SARA

What the fuck does that have to do with anything?

Luke holds up his hands.

LUKE

You watched that thing on Netflix about animal cruelty, and for a whole month, you ranted about the meat industry, going on and on about how terrible it is and all those poor cows.

SARA

What's your point?

LUKE

You get on these trends, out of nowhere, and resent everyone around you who doesn't drop everything just to fall in line. What did we eat, earlier?

Sara pauses.

SARA

I don't know, what?

LUKE

A fucking burger. You ate a burger with me. You go on these crusades, burn yourself out, and go right back. You're//

SARA

// Dude, do you know how hard it is to//

LUKE

// frustrating. It's like, what are you going to focus on next? Your last thing was Hong Kong.

SARA

So, I'm frustrating, now?

Luke stares at Sara. He doesn't respond.

SARA (CONT'D)

Hong Kong is what led me to this. I've showed you those videos. The protests. How the police are treating those people. Fucking tear gassing them. If we're not careful, we'll end up like them.

SARA (CONT'D)

And you know what? If I'm paranoid that some faceless company has free access to my information, then I'm fine with that. I'm so fucking tired of all of it. I'm tired of being the product for people who make more money than I ever will.

(Beat)

They treat us like cows, dude. Fucking cows. We're just standing there and their milking us for all we got. We're letting it happen, and it needs to stop.

LUKE

So what are you going to do? You going to take them all down? You going to show them?

Sara squints at Luke

SARA

When did you become so condescending?

LUKE

Well, all you're doing is yelling at me for something that neither of us can change. Problems, but no solutions. Big tech is coming for our information. China is suppressing their people, cows and antibiotics. But what can you do about it? You have no solutions.

Sara leans forward and gestures to Luke's laptop.

SARA

I do have a solution. We stop using these systems. We all just stop giving them what they wa//

LUKE

// No one's going to do that. We're hooked. Everyone's on here. Millions of users. You think we're all just going to up and stop using them?

SARA

So you're saying I'm right. You know what they're doing is wrong.

LUKE

No, I'm saying nothing's going to change. People like having their whole family tree. People like posting on Instagram and Twitter. Nothing will change.

SARA

You are saying I'm right, then.

Luke rubs his face.

LUKE

Fuck, you're impossible.

SARA

How am I impossible when you just admitted that I'm right?

LUKE

Because you have to be. You can't ever be wrong. Every argument we have, you're the one who has to be right. You get on your high horse, and that's it. It's over. I don't even know why I even try.

Sara crosses her arms. A moment passes.

SARA

I don't know if I can be with someone who isn't with me on this. Who cares about this.

Luke closes his laptop hard. Too hard. Luke opens his laptop and sees that the screen is broken.

LUKE

You've got to be fucking kidding me.

SARA

Did you really just break your shit?

Luke stands up, his chair makes a loud noise as it slides across the floor.

Sara takes a step back.

LUKE

YOU KNOW WHAT? I'VE BEEN THERE FOR YOU THROUGH ALL YOUR SHIT. EVERYTHING. YOU BARELY EVEN ACKNOWLEDGED IT.

SARA

Calm down.

LUKE

YOU'RE COMING AT ME LIKE YOU WANT TO BREAK UP, AND YOU WANT ME TO CALM DOWN?

SARA

Calm. Down.

Luke takes a deep breath. Lowering his voice.

LUKE

My fucking screen's broken.

SARA

Because you lost your temper. Just like you said your dad did.

Luke fumes for a moment. Lower's his voice to just above a whisper.

LUKE

Don't you dare bring up my dad.

SARA

You have an anger proble//

LUKE

HOW DO YOU EXPECT ME TO REACT?

Come on. Tell me.

SARA

I don't know. Like this, I guess. I don't know.

Luke sighs.

LUKE

You have to see where I'm coming from, yeah? Like, what you said.

Sara is silent. Luke put's his head in his hands and sits down.

LUKE (CONT'D)

You're doing that thing. You're shutting down.

SARA

I'm not shutting down.

LUKE

You always do this.

SARA

I have no idea what you're talking about.

LUKE

You and your sister do the exact same thing. It's like talking to a wall.

Moments pass. The two of them are motionless, afraid that doing anything will make it worse. Luke drops his hands, staring at the floor. A few more moments and he looks up at Sara.

LUKE (CONT'D)

You really want to have kids?

A long pause.

We've never talked about kids before.

SARA

Well, I mean, I've always wanted them, I think.

LUKE

You've never mentioned that.

Sara lowers her head.

SARA

It's been on my mind... recently. More recently, I think. I mean, we're getting older. I'm going to be thirty next year, and... I don't know. There's only so much time.

LUKE

We've only been together for a year.

SARA

Yeah, a year...

LUKE

I didn't think you liked me that much.

SARA

What do you mean?

Luke shrugs.

LUKE

I mean I didn't think you were thinking about us long term. You're always so distant. I don't know what you're doing half the time.

SARA

You know where I am. It's either work, home, or school. I don't ever do anything, unless it's with you.

LUKE

Sometimes, I wonder if you're seeing someone else. Umm. You're always at work. And, uhh, I don't know. I guess I just get jealous.

SARA

You never told me this.

LUKE

Because what's the point? What good will worrying do? Keep you from cheating on me?

Sara frowns.

SARA

You really think I'm cheating on you?

Luke drops his head.

LUKE

Not really... No. No. I don't think that at all. I just get weird, you know?

SARA

I get the same. //

LUKE

// And like, I know when I get like that. I know it's stupid. But sometimes, I can't help but think...

Sara shifts slightly.

SARA

I think the same thing about you, sometimes.

Luke looks up.

LUKE

You know I would never. Like, my mom. I could never do that

Sara raises her hands.

SARA

I know. It's stupid. Maybe I am paranoid.

Luke shakes his head

LUKE

No, you're not. That's not paranoia. We just don't talk. Not really.

(Beat)

Fuck, I blew up, didn't I?

Sara nods.

LUKE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

SARA

I'm sorry I said we should break up. I didn't mean it. It's just... I poke. Provoke. I don't even know why I do it. It just happens.

LUKE

You do do that sometimes.

SARA

I don't even realize when it's happening.

LUKE

I'm not good at this whole communication thing.

SARA

Neither am I.

Luke nods.

LUKE

Okay. Then ask me.

Sara frowns.

SARA

Ask you what?

LUKE

Ask me if I've been cheating on you.

Sara crosses her arms.

SARA

Why? I already know the answer.

Luke shakes his head.

LUKE

It doesn't matter. Ask me.

Sara takes a few moments. Eventually uncrosses her arms.

SARA

Okay. Have you been cheating on me?

LUKE

No.

SARA

Okay.

LUKE
Have you been cheating on me?

SARA
No.

Luke nods. Sara walks over to her chair and sits down. She reaches out and takes Luke's hand in hers. They sit in silence.

LUKE
Why the hell were you worried about your teeth, anyway? You have great teeth.

Sara laughs.

LUKE (CONT'D)
There're those pearly whites.

Sara laughs harder. She covers her mouth with her free hand.

SARA
I don't know. PTSD from braces, I guess.

Luke leans over and kisses Sara. He pulls back slowly and stares at her.

LUKE
Hmmm, maybe you have been drinking too much coffee.

Sara pulls her hand away.

SARA
That's so mean.

Luke raises his hands.

LUKE
I'm just joking!

Sara giggles. Luke looks at his computer.

LUKE (CONT'D)
I guess I need to get a new screen.

SARA
Maybe next time we have an argument, it won't be so expensive.

LUKE
That sounds like a plan.

(Blackout)