

# **Virtual Strangers**

Screenplay by  
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MAP OF AMERICA

One by one, all the states light up.

The map shape-shifts into a computer monitor. The words **VERTUEL STRAINGURS** are typed. A spell check is run - the text corrects.

### **VIRTUAL STRANGERS**

The monitor is wiped away, replaced by...

EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - AFTERNOON

A plane flies over the terminal.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - AFTERNOON

A hostess greets a couple as they step into a hotel's table service restaurant. She leads them into the dining area as a man in a dress shirt and slacks remains seated in the waiting area. At first we only see the back of his balding head but it's JACK, 50. Then, in reverse angle, he glances up at the ticking clock. Checks his messages. Finally, through a frosted glass partition, HE TURNS HIS HEAD AND SEES

THE LOBBY'S SLIDING DOORS OPEN, a confident woman billowing through, seemingly in slow motion. She's MARISSA, 50, an online addict who runs several fan websites for sci-fi TV shows. In her early life, she harbored resentment towards being deemed an outsider. As a young adult, she decided her intellect made her better than everyone else and now harbors arrogance in the form of a superiority complex. Today she is wearing her favorite red dress and although the plan was to meet Jack straight from the airport, she has taken the time to curl her long, dark hair and apply makeup first. She wheels her luggage behind her as she surveys the passersby, who dart every which way, to and from the reception desk.

Grinning, Marissa self-assuredly continues forward, trying to portray herself attractively, knowing she is going to be recognized at any moment. Her eyes catch a TALL BALDING MAN. She smiles. He continues on. Another TALL BALDING MAN stops nearby. Is it Jack? No. His wife catches up and they venture off.

A feeling of concern seeps over Marissa. Has she made him wait too long? Now worried, she continues to hunt for Jack, oblivious to the fact that standing behind her is a man

HER HEIGHT.

She turns. Her smile instantaneously fades.

JACK  
(excitedly)  
Hi!

MARISSA  
 (contemptuously)  
 Hi.

A moment of awkwardness and then he leans in to give her a hug. She reciprocates, reluctantly. Stares at him. He grins back at her. Waits. Conversation will not ignite.

JACK  
 JackRabbit5!

MARISSA  
 Right.  
 (then, annoyed)  
 Of course.

JACK  
 I got us a great table. Follow me,  
 Miss Aberdene.

He leads her to the hotel's nearby restaurant, waves at the hostess. She takes a moment and then recognizes him from the conversation they had an hour ago. She smiles at Marissa as the two pass by.

As they cross through the dining room, making their way to a separate, empty area in the back, Jack speaks to Marissa, who is sauntering moodily behind him.

JACK  
 I've been here two hours so now the entire staff knows about today. They never do this but we're getting seated in, what they call, "the exclusive area." I guess they know we are VIPs. Ha. But this is perfect because now we'll always remember how special our first meeting was.

MARISSA  
 (coldly)  
 Okay.

Jack is unnerved for a bit but recovers.

JACK  
 If you want to sit in the regular section, we can.

MARISSA  
 It's *fine!*

Jack thinks. A little joke will be a great ice-breaker.

JACK  
 Not only do they have great reviews but they've got an "A" from the Health Department. So that's got to count for something, right?

He looks behind him, waits for her to respond to something, anything. She just looks down at her feet.

They have reached their table. Jack pulls her chair out but Marissa quickly darts to another chair and seats herself. She turns away, to avoid eye contact. He sits.

JACK  
Was your flight a nightmare?

MARISSA  
No.

Jack thinks for a moment. Tries to understand.

JACK  
Don't worry about the delay. We've already waited three years. What's an extra hour and a half?

MARISSA  
Yeah.

JACK  
Are you okay?

MARISSA  
Yes!

JACK  
You seem irritated.

MARISSA  
I'm not.

Jack leans forward, grabbing her hands.

JACK  
Sepia, it's me! You can tell me anything.

Marissa looks up at him. She gives him a weak smile.

The sunny waitress comes over with menus.

WAITRESS  
Sooo... your guest finally arrived.

JACK  
Yes. She just got off a nightmare flight. So we need some food A.S.A.P.

WAITRESS  
Well, I can start you off with something to drink but if you're ready to order now...

Marissa glances at the woman's name tag, annoyed.

MARISSA  
Tricia, I've only been here five  
seconds. But I'll take a Diet  
Pepsi to drink.

WAITRESS  
We have Coke here. Is that okay?

Marissa crumbles, her disappointment accumulating, her  
frustration now aimed at the waitress.

MARISSA  
No.

She takes a beat, fights back tears, then...

MARISSA  
Forget it! I'll just have water.

WAITRESS  
You sure? We have iced tea.

MARISSA  
Nooo.... *Water.*

Marissa begins to pout, angled away, clearly upset. The  
waitress turns to Jack, unnerved. He tries to save the day.

JACK  
They've got Shirley Temples here.

Marissa glares at him from across the table. Says nothing.  
Jack turns to the waitress.

JACK  
She doesn't drink alcohol.

WAITRESS  
Oh..... Cool.

Marissa becomes more and more frustrated as Jack continues.

JACK  
I do... but I can't resist a great  
Shirley Temple.

He turns to Marissa.

JACK  
Should we get two or just one with  
two straws?

Marissa looks up at the waitress.

MARISSA  
Excuse me. What did I just ask you  
for?

Marissa stares fervently, demanding. The waitress is taken  
aback. Awkwardly, she looks down at her pad.

WAITRESS  
(reluctantly)  
Water.

MARISSA  
Yeeesssss.

She shoots Jack the evil eye. The waitress is uncomfortable. She does not want to be in the middle of a confrontation.

WAITRESS  
(hurriedly)  
Okay, so one Shirley Temple, one water. I'll be right back to take your order, guys.

The waitress smiles but avoids eye contact; she scurries off. As soon as she's out of earshot, Marissa leans over to Jack.

MARISSA  
If I tell someone what I want, you can trust it's what I want!

JACK  
Why are you so upset?

MARISSA  
I'm not! This is ME! I'm sorry you didn't know that. Maybe if you knew me better.

JACK  
Know you better? We talk every night!

MARISSA  
*Online!* It's not the same thing!

JACK  
But you're one of the funniest people I know and you've yet to crack a joke!

Marissa continues fuming but says nothing.

JACK  
Did something happen on your flight?

MARISSA  
(sardonically)  
Yes, Jack! I had a bad flight!

AWKWARD SILENCE. Marissa is intensely focused on a spot in the table. Jack is looking down as well.

Finally...

JACK  
(gingerly)  
Bad in-flight movie?

Marissa glances upward at him. Remembering all their late night chats. She stares for a long moment before responding.

MARISSA

No.

Marissa takes a deep breath. The wheels in her head start turning again. She's coming off of visceral response and back into calculated politeness.

MARISSA

No, I'm just... you're reminding me of Daniel all over again.

JACK

How?

MARISSA

Just the Shirley Temple thing.  
(slight beat)  
And also how you were telling the waitress that we met online.

JACK

No, I didn't tell the waitress. It was the hostess!

MARISSA

Well, whatever. Why would you volunteer that information without my approval? Like I want people to think I'm some loser who makes friends online.

JACK

No one thinks that!

MARISSA

How do you know what other people think?

JACK

Because I can read people well. Remember? We both can!

MARISSA

Okay, okay. Look, I just got off a six-hour flight. I need to wash my hands. Where's the restroom?

Jack points. Marissa stands up and exits frame.

Jack sits expressionless, thinking. Once again, he is fixated on a point at the table.

After A LONG WHILE, a woman and her daughter enter from the right of the frame. On the opposite side, two more women run in, one with a rollaway suitcase, the other with a large wrapped present. Jack barely glances over as the women squeal upon greeting each other. They exchange gifts, say hello. The woman with the daughter leads them to their table in another room. Jack is alone again.

Jack turns back to the table, his head down. He sits for a few moments of self-reflection.

The waitress returns with two drinks.

WAITRESS  
(setting them down)  
Here's the water... and your  
Shirley Temple.

JACK  
Thank you.

WAITRESS  
Do you know what she'd like or...

JACK  
No. She hasn't even opened the  
menu.

WAITRESS  
That's all right. I'll give you  
some more time.

The waitress exits. Jack picks up his menu and begins to flip through it. A few moments later, Marissa returns, in high spirits. She picks up her menu, casually reviews it.

JACK  
I thought you had left.

MARISSA  
I'm sorry, Jack. I know I'm coming  
off rude. It takes me a long time  
to warm up to people. Maybe I'm  
testing them to see if they can  
handle me.

JACK  
Oh. I was so worried. I thought  
you didn't like me.

Marissa shakes her head 'no' in response. Looks down at the menu and begins reading. Jack settles in, relieved.

JACK  
In the old days, I would be  
suspicious that you called your  
friend to page you. So five  
minutes later, you get a page, you  
call them back, "Oh, no, I got to  
go." Then you get out of the date.

Marissa looks up at him. Smiles politely.

MARISSA  
This isn't a date.

Jack is sideswiped by the comment. He tries to cover.



JACK  
 No... I know. I'm just saying,  
 that thought crossed my mind when  
 you were gone so long. But lucky  
 for me, people don't use pagers  
 anymore. Heh.

Marissa is still fixated on the menu.

MARISSA  
 Just a reminder... If you order  
 anything with meat, I'm leaving  
 right now!

Jack unknowingly breaks into a smile. Finally, a joke.

JACK  
 Of course. I already promised you  
 I would respect your animal ethics.  
 I don't care what I eat. I'm just  
 glad to have you here, finally.  
 Whatever you get, I'll get the  
 same. And I'm buying, of course,  
 so get whatever you want.

She is still buried in the menu but something in his comment  
 derails her focus.

MARISSA  
 You know what, I actually bought  
 one of those cheese and nuts things  
 on the plane. So I'm not even  
 hungry.

JACK  
 You're not getting ANYTHING? We've  
 been planning this lunch for  
 months.

MARISSA  
 I can't help it if I have no  
 appetite. I'm a finicky woman,  
 Jack. Get used to it.

Her charm relieves him. He stares at her, enamored.

JACK  
 You seem to be in good spirits now.

Even though she's not ordering, Marissa continues looking  
 through the menu, only peeking up at Jack occasionally.

MARISSA  
 It dawned on me while I was washing  
 up -- I'm in L.A. This is where  
 "Henry Adams" is filmed. All the  
 actors live within a 15-mile  
 radius.

JACK  
 Are you going to try to get on set  
 while you're here?

MARISSA

I saw Jonathan Buford online two weeks ago and I told him I was coming to town but he didn't extend any invitation. He just said, "Cool. Have fun."

JACK

Oh, that sucks.

MARISSA

Ugh. But I didn't want him to think I was only friends with him because he writes for the show. So what could I do? I couldn't outright ask him.

JACK

I know a girl who works at Alton Lewis Productions. But I don't know if she could get you on set. Maybe inside the production company.

MARISSA

But no one famous is there! I'm not one of those fans that thinks just because someone works on a show, they're a celebrity. I mean, they're just people with jobs. It's not like they're the actors whose beauty and talent made them worthy of all the attention.

JACK

Yeah. They're bringing Riley back for next season.

MARISSA

I never had a problem with Riley. In my Creative Writing class, they reinforced the concept of establishing conflict. And he's a good conflict.

JACK

But Graham can't act.

MARISSA

Yes, he can. I mean, he's not a Shakespeare actor kind of guy. But can you do any better?

JACK

Well, I'm not an actor.

MARISSA

But he *is!* That's what I'm saying.

The waitress steps up to the table.

JACK  
 But just wanting to pursue acting  
 doesn't mean you're... ~~any good at~~  
~~it.~~

Jack notices the waitress. She is smiling, relieved that the tension has dissipated.

WAITRESS  
 Sorry to interrupt.

MARISSA  
 That's okay.

WAITRESS  
 Are you guys ready to order?

JACK  
 Oh.

Jack looks down at his menu and begins to furiously look through it.

MARISSA  
 I'm fine with just water. I  
 actually ate on the plane.

Jack continues to skim the menu.

JACK  
 Yes, my lovely companion here is on  
 a hunger strike.

Marissa smiles at him.

JACK  
 And I am hopelessly seeking a  
 vegetarian dish in her honor.

Marissa cell phone begins to vibrate in her pocket. She leans over and pulls it out as Jack and the waitress continue.

JACK  
 Any recommendations?

WAITRESS  
 We have a veggie burger. That's a  
 good choice. And any of our  
 pastas, you can get without meat.

Marissa reads a text message, then looks up at Jack and the waitress. She is dramatically shocked.

MARISSA  
 Oh, not now.  
 (to Jack)  
 It's my travel companion. She says  
 she needs me.

She looks genuinely apologetic.

Jack turns to the waitress.

JACK  
I'll take the prime rib.