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Unfriendly Man

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Introduction

Every town has its secrets, its whispered stories and legends, its cast of characters drifting between the familiar streets and gathering places. Among them, there is always one figure who stands just outside the periphery: the neighbor who never speaks, the patron who always sits alone, the silhouette glimpsed behind drawn curtains. “Unfriendly Man” is a novel about such an outsider—a testament to the enigmatic roles we assign to others, and the tangled truths lying beneath.

Set in the heart of a small town that could be anywhere, this story follows the life of a man who arrives suddenly, disrupting routines simply by refusing to fit in. He neither smiles nor waves; his conversations are sparse, his expressions unreadable. In a community built on polite exchanges and unspoken understandings, his reserved presence is both a threat and a curiosity.

But there is always more to the story than what neighbors see. Each chapter peels back the layers of stillness, revealing memories that cling like dust, grief that lingers behind unshared words, and the delicate balance between solitude and longing. Through awkward encounters, accidental kindnesses, and unsolicited suspicion, the unfriendly man’s past and present begin to quietly collide.

This book is not only the story of one man's journey through isolation and connection, but also of the people whose lives brush up against his own. It is about the masks we wear, the judgments we make without knowing, and the tiny acts of grace that challenge our first impressions. Sometimes, all it takes is a single day or a single gesture to see a familiar stranger in an entirely new light.

“Unfriendly Man” is, at its heart, a meditation on human complexity—on how we misunderstand, mislabel, or misread those around us, and how even the most unlikely person might one day become an unwitting part of our own story. In these pages, solitude isn’t just absence; it is also a space for becoming. The man who keeps to himself might be hiding not darkness, but a fragile hope.

CHAPTER ONE: The Arrival

The dusty blue sedan, an antique that looked as though it had swallowed a lifetime of potholes and spat out half its hubcaps, rumbled into Oakhaven at precisely 3:17 PM on a Tuesday. Not that anyone was timing it, but Mrs. Henderson, whose kitchen window overlooked Main Street, had just set her teacup down and glanced at the grandfather clock perched precariously on her mantelpiece. She'd been expecting the delivery truck for her new garden gnomes, not a stranger.

Oakhaven wasn't a town where strangers arrived unannounced. People moved *out* of Oakhaven, usually to find a Starbucks or a reliable internet connection, but rarely *in*. The population sign, perpetually stuck at 'Est. Pop. 1,247,' hadn't changed in over a decade. So, a new car, particularly one laden with a suspiciously high pile of cardboard boxes visible through the rear window, was an event.

The sedan coughed its last breath, or so it seemed, in front of the old Miller place on Elm Street. The Miller place had been vacant for three years, ever since old Mr. Miller had moved into the assisted living facility after attempting to grow prize-winning pumpkins in his bathtub. It was a perfectly respectable two-story house with a perpetually peeling porch, a sprawling oak tree in the front yard that shed leaves like a nervous cat, and a garden that had long since surrendered to an enthusiastic army of weeds.

A man unfolded himself from the driver's seat. He wasn't particularly tall, nor short, nor broad, nor slender. He was, to Oakhaven's collective initial impression, profoundly average. His clothes, however, were not. A dark, uncreased suit jacket over a plain white shirt, and trousers that looked like they'd never known the indignity of a wrinkle. This was not the attire of someone moving into the Miller place. This was the attire of someone attending a very somber, slightly overheated, indoor funeral.

He walked around to the trunk, stiffly, as if each joint was a rusted hinge. With a grunt, he pulled out a suitcase, a rather battered leather one that seemed incongruous with his pristine suit. He set it down on the cracked driveway, then went back for another box. His movements were precise, almost mechanical. He didn't glance at the neighboring houses, didn't nod to Mrs. Henderson's perpetually waving curtains, didn't even acknowledge the persistent chirping of the cicadas.

He was oblivious, or perhaps indifferent, to the silent scrutiny he was already under. From Mrs. Henderson's kitchen, to Mr. Abernathy's front porch (where he'd been pretending to read the newspaper for the last fifteen minutes), to the twins, Daisy and Lily, who were currently pressed against the glass of their living room window next

door to the Miller place, a collective, unspoken question hung in the humid afternoon air: *Who was this man?*

He disappeared inside the house, leaving the car door ajar and the pile of boxes unattended on the driveway. A minute later, the front door creaked open again, and he reappeared, this time with a large, heavy-looking tool kit. He marched directly to the front door, knelt, and began to work on the lock. The faint metallic scraping sound carried across the quiet street.

It wasn't that Oakhaven was nosy. It was simply... interconnected. Everyone knew everyone. If someone had a new recipe for apple pie, the whole town knew by supper. If young Billy Thompson scraped his knee, Mrs. Gable down the street would be offering a plaster before his mother even heard about it. A new face, especially one dismantling a lock in broad daylight without a single word of greeting, was a puzzle demanding to be solved.

"Well, I never," Mrs. Henderson muttered to her cat, Bartholomew, who blinked slowly at her from the countertop, entirely uninterested in human drama. "He didn't even look up."

Mr. Abernathy, meanwhile, lowered his newspaper just enough to peer over the top. He'd lived in Oakhaven for seventy-odd years, and in all that time, he'd seen exactly three new people move in: the pastor's family, the new schoolteacher who lasted one semester, and a couple who bought the old bakery and turned it into an antique shop, which promptly failed. This man was different. He didn't have the eager, slightly overwhelmed look of a newcomer. He looked like he was on a mission.

After what felt like an eternity, the lock clicked. The man stood up, brushed imaginary dust from his trousers, and re-entered the house. This time, the front door closed behind him with a decisive thud, leaving the blue sedan, the scattered boxes, and the lingering question marks hanging heavy in the summer air.

The rest of the afternoon passed in a series of muted thumps and scrapes from inside the Miller place. Boxes were dragged, furniture shifted, and at one point, a very loud bang echoed through the neighborhood, causing Mrs. Henderson to jump and Bartholomew to bolt under the sofa. There was no music, no friendly shouts, no sounds of unpacking that suggested a sense of settling in. Just the functional noises of someone methodically placing their belongings.

As dusk began to paint the sky in shades of orange and purple, a single light flickered on in the front room of the Miller place. It was a stark, almost clinical light, unlike the warm, inviting glows that usually spilled from Oakhaven's windows. The silhouette of the man could be seen moving past the window, a dark, indistinct shape against the artificial glow. He moved with the same economical efficiency he had displayed earlier.

Later, much later, when the streetlights hummed to life and the crickets began their nightly chorus, the man emerged again. He wasn't carrying anything this time. He simply walked to his car, retrieved a single, small duffel bag from the back seat, and then, without a glance left or right, entered the house for the final time that day. The front door closed, softly this time, and the light in the front room went out.

Oakhaven settled into its nightly rhythm, but something had shifted. A ripple had disturbed the calm surface of the small town. A man had arrived, and with him, a quiet, unsettling sense of the unknown. He hadn't introduced himself, hadn't offered a polite wave, hadn't even so much as acknowledged the existence of his new neighbors. He was simply *there*. And in Oakhaven, "simply there" was a concept utterly alien to their understanding of community. The unfriendly man had arrived.

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