

Cyber Grooming

A Short Story by Alex Fulgado Casanova

Someone stole my online identity and my entire school hated me for something I hadn't done.

A few days ago, I was scrolling down through my Instagram, when I noticed that someone had uploaded a story about a young girl from my school who was receiving weird messages from a boy who, apparently, was at our school as well. I had never talked to that girl before, so I started to feel worried but not quite much.

Next day at school, when I stepped into the hall, I noticed that kids from lower grades were looking at me really bad, but I decided to ignore them because you never know what those kids were capable of doing, so, at break, we talked about the girl, and thought about how gross it was to manipulate a young girl like that, because having a relationship with someone for many years apart is not a bad thing bad if it's all you want, but a 14 years old girl isn't capable of knowing what she is doing is wrong. So, when school day finished, I went home and scrolled down through my social media again, when I noticed that I had approximately 50 notifications on my Instagram, I opened it up and when I looked at it, I got stoned. I had tons of comments on my photos saying things like "u'r bullshit", "why did u that u are gross", "hope u die".

So, when this happened, I got extremely confused and I decided to tell everything to my friends, just so I could know what was happening, but when I tried to contact them, I found lots of messages like the previous ones, except for one of my closest friends, Jean, who asked me if I was ok, and also he offered any kind of help, because he could not believe I had done that, and firmly said that, he won't believe on anything that is said about him.

Even though I'd just received a support message, my mind couldn't really understand what was everything about, so, after reading that, I left my phone on the bed, and I started to get overwhelmed due to the whole situation, I couldn't believe what I had just seen. Everyone thought I was the one who had groomed that poor girl, I started sweating and panicking. I asked Jean if he could come home to help me, he accepted, and once he had arrived, he helped me to calm down a little bit, at the moment, I had nobody else who could've helped me except him, so I really appreciated how he managed the whole situation with me.

He suggested to me that, first of all, the ones who we had to convince that I had done nothing with that girl were my group of friends, but before doing that, we tried with a little research on who could've done that to me, we were looking up for an entire hour and finally found nothing at all, but an account whose name was similar to mine, but private, was being followed by some people from my school and also, by the girl who was supposedly being groomed. Luckily, we got something to start with.

Next day at school, I saw even more looks of contempt, but I just ignored them and, at break, I decided to approach my group of friends who kept looking me in a little bit weird way, but ignoring those looks, I talked to them, and thanks god, they understood me and, even though I didn't feel as I always feel with Jean, they stopped their looks of disgust on me. But after that, I spotted a group of guys from a different class who were coming to me, and there he was with them, the groomed girl's brother with his friends, over there, his name was Jesse, he was really intimidating, he was very tall and quite strong, so I felt really scared of what could happen.

When we were face to face me, he firmly said "You son of a bitch, don't you dare approach to my sister again", as soon as I tried to say a word, he punched my face and I felt to the ground, the only thing I could feel was anger, there was nothing for me to do to help this situation but holding myself...

When leaving school, I went to Jean's instead of going home as I didn't want anyone from my family to know what had happened to me, they would be upset on me although I hadn't done anything wrong, and since Jean was living alone with just his sister, I could go to his house.

Thoughts of despair were running through my head, I felt things that I'd never felt before, "I'm not a bad guy, why had someone done that to me?", was one of the things I was always thinking about, but leaving those apart, I entered Jean's home.

While we were having lunch, Jean thought about something. He remembered that, the affected girl and his sister were friends, so what would happen if both of the affected joined and tried to solve this problem together?

So, after lunch, we called Robin, Jean's sister, and told her to come down to the living room, but, as soon as she saw me there, she rushed to her bedroom and locked the door. So, after an hour or so of talking through a door as if we were a pair of maniacs, she finally opened the door for me and accepted to bring me to that girl's house, whose name was Skyler. We talked about a lot of things while walking our way, she told me countless things that the guy who was grooming her had told her to do, which were horrifying, and, while she was telling me that, I felt a little bit calmed, because I thought that, I wasn't the only one who was living in hell at the time.

Once we got the house, we knocked at the door and I was feeling really frightened, as I was afraid of facing the brother opening the door. And approximately 5 seconds after knocking, someone opened that door, who was just Skyler's mom. We explained her that we could help her daughter and end up this whole situation, as she had already been informed of, and she immediately let us in.

We went upstairs to her room, and when we opened the door, Skyler started trembling and screaming, but her mom immediately explained her everything while we waited outside in the corridor. Five minutes later, Skyler timidly opened her door, while still trembling, and let us inside. We both noticed that she wanted to cry really hard, she really thought I was the one who talked with her for hours and tried to do things that she didn't want to do. I calmed her down and I made sure that she knew we were there for helping not only ourselves but her too while I gently grabbed her hands to make sure she was calmed.

So, after that, Jean thought of a plan for finally discovering who this guy was. The plan was very simple, first of all we grabbed Skyler's phone and used it as if we were her, then we went into her Instagram account, and told him that "I" was very sorry for all the things I had said on story, and asked him, if he could join a video call so she could show him her new dress or something else, and when we answered it, we should tell him to put on his camera first than us, all of this while our screen was recording everything, so we had proof of who the guy who made us suffer through all this pain. was. So, when we had gotten down to work, surprisingly fast, we achieved what we wanted, he was calling us, so now, it was Skyler's turn to talk. She manipulated him by saying things like "I'm so angry at you, you never show me your face, you must be handsome, your voice is so attractive, if you want to see me then I have to see you, it's not fair!", while she was saying that, the guy's voice reminded me of someone, but I couldn't remember who it was exactly, and after a long talk, when he turned on his camera, I couldn't believe what I saw.

The guy who groomed Skyler was my older cousin Jeff. As soon as I had seen his face, I knew why I had recognized the voice, Skyler had finished the call without showing anything, and I the one crying there. I couldn't believe that a family member of mine had done that to me, it just didn't make sense, when we were young, I remember how much we used to play football together, and how many things we talked about together, and now my Jeff had turned into this.

Skyler's mom was really grateful for what I did, and after everything, we became friends not only with Skyler, but with Jesse as well, he apologized for what he had done, and at the end of the day, he was really nice with me. He even invited me to join his group of friends, who also apologized on me. After all, I couldn't feel anything but anger, even though everything was over, that nightmare had ended up the way it was never expected to end.