

A man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is looking thoughtfully to the side. His hand is near his chest. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting with warm lighting.

THE NEW NEIGHBOR
Short Story

Chance
ENCOUNTER

RYE COX

CHANCE ENCOUNTER

THE NEW NEIGHBOR SHORT STORY PREQUEL

RYE COX

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ABOUT CHANCE ENCOUNTER

Chance Encounter is a 3,000 word short story prequel that takes place five years before the start of [*The New Neighbor*](#). The short story, as well as the full-length novel can be read as a standalone, but it will be more enjoyable read together.

Get [*The New Neighbor*](#) today!

ONE
ZACK

5 years ago

"I'm telling you, something's up," I said to Eric. He sat on the worn-out bean bag chair, tossing a tiny ball in the air. He threw the ball up again and caught it before turning to me.

"Maybe he's just busy?" he guessed, and threw the ball at me. I stopped pacing, caught the ball, and picked at the loose threads that held the blue fabric together.

"I don't know...Something in my gut is telling me otherwise. He used to text me a billion times a day, and now, he's not even answering my calls." I didn't expect to have constant communication with Brad, but it had been hours since I had last called and texted him and there was still no reply. I gripped the ball one last time before throwing it back to Eric, who easily caught it and continued tossing it into the air. With nothing to distract my hands, I started pacing again.

I had been dating Brad for six months at this point. We met one night at the club and had started hooking up. He was the casual fling turned boyfriend—at his insistence—and I went along with it because I liked him well enough, even though I had no hopes of having a successful relationship.

They never worked out for me. My boyfriends were always enthusiastic at the start of the relationship, but weeks later, things would fizzle out and a break-up was bound to happen. I had my doubts, but I thought it would be different with Brad. We shared the same hobbies and had amazing chemistry in bed, but things had been strange these past few weeks.

Eric stood and placed a firm grip on my shoulder. "Chill out. Didn't you say he's usually at home on Friday nights? Why don't you go over and check if he's okay? Maybe he's preoccupied."

I nodded in reply. Eric was clearly the only one with a sane brain right now. Brad lived a ten-minute walk from our apartment. I could head over and confirm that everything was okay. Confirm that he wasn't immobilized on the floor from a bad fall or something.

More worry crept through my body as cold sweat trickled down my back. "I'll be back later," I said as I grabbed my phone and keys. I walked as fast as possible without making it seem like I was running for my life, even though that was what it felt like. My brain demanded I marathoned to Brad's place because something terrible had happened and it was paramount that I got there as humanly as possible.

I stood before the dark building, preparing to enter like a hero braving the unknown to unveil the evil mysteries of the villain who always seemed to live in the creepiest places. I braced myself and entered, wincing as the glaring LED lights in the lobby blinded me as my eyes adjusted to the sudden change of brightness.

Overcoming the first challenge of this quest, I took a tentative step up the staircase. My heart pounded louder in my ears with each ascending step until I finally arrived at

Brad's floor. I brought up a clammy hand and knocked. No answer. I knocked again, and this time, the door pushed open from my action. Maybe a burglar had broken in and left the door ajar? My heart stopped and images of Brad lying on his kitchen floor, motionless and vulnerable, flashed through my mind. I grabbed my phone from my pocket and punched in the emergency number just in case, and took calming breaths to prepare myself for whatever waited for me inside.

Brad's apartment looked the same as it always did; clothes piled high on his green couch and toppled over to litter the floor. His kitchen was pristine from lack of use, and the trashcan by the bar counter was crammed full of takeout containers.

On a normal Friday night, Brad usually lounged on the couch binge-watching one TV series or another, but tonight, his living room was eerily quiet. I silently crept through his living room, still unsure whether a burglar had broken in or not, and stopped outside his bedroom door. It was firmly shut, and my mind conjured up the worst-case scenarios. The thief probably dragged Brad into the room furthest from the entrance to hinder his escape. I pressed my ear to the door and heard loud moaning. The thief must be torturing Brad to disclose all his hidden money stashes or for their own sadist enjoyment.

I stumbled back to the kitchen and opened the drawers closest to me. A thread of survival instinct screamed at me to not be a fool by facing the sadist robber without a weapon. Unfortunately, since Brad didn't cook, the sharpest thing I could find was a paring knife, but it was better than nothing.

I held my fruit-peeling weapon in front of me and flung the bedroom door open. "Don't move!" I bounded into the

room, taking a fighting stance with my legs shoulder length apart in case an attack came.

Two bodies froze on the bed, and a piercing scream rang through the room when they turned to me.

“What the hell, Zack!” Brad screeched as he pulled the sheets up to cover himself. “Why are you holding a knife!”

Brad lay next to a bronzed-skin hunk, the two of them naked and sweaty. My hands dropped, and I gripped the handle of the knife tighter. “Wha...What is this?” I pushed the question out, my brain refusing to believe the sight before me.

“What does it look like?” Brad rolled his eyes. The dude next to him shifted awkwardly on the bed and pulled the sheets up to cover his pierced nipples.

“I...I thought you said you wanted to be boyfriends?” my body asked on autopilot as I stared at the sheets that now covered the other dude’s nipples. When I turned down Brad’s request to have my body pierced, that wasn’t permission for him to find someone who had them.

“Yeah, so?” Brad said with irritation. “What does that have to do with anything? Now, can you get out? We were obviously in the middle of something.” He shot me another glare that had me turning away from them and walking out of the apartment of the man I had wasted six months of my life with.

I made my way back to my apartment in a daze. Eric glanced up from his seat on the couch, a look of concern pasted on his face. “Hey, how’d it go? And uh, can I ask why you’re holding a knife?”

I looked down at my hand that was turning white from the death grip I had on the paring knife. I loosened the grip so

blood could start circulating in my hand again. “He, uh... Well, he was definitely preoccupied, alright. It’s over,” I said, plopping down onto the couch next to Eric and tossing the knife onto the coffee table. He shot me a weary glance, but I slung my head back so that I could watch the ceiling that was sure to fall down around me.

A notification ping from my phone brought me back to reality, and I peeked at it to find a text from Brad.

Brad: I want my knife back.

The urge to throw the phone shot through me. The only thing that stopped me was the thought of having to buy a new one, which would have been another win to Brad, so I blocked his number instead.

This was the reason why I didn’t do relationships. They never meant the same thing to the other person as they did to me. All the effort I put into a relationship was always thrown back into my face like it was all one big joke that I wasn’t aware of.

Eric swung an arm around me and pulled me close. “As they say, the best way to get over an old relationship is to start a new one. Should we hit the club?”

“Sure.” I shrugged. I wasn’t in the mood to start anything new with anyone, but getting out of the house would do me some good. A couple of drinks, dancing, and hanging out with my best friend was exactly the distraction I needed right now.

TWO CALEB

Ian dragged me to the front of the line, where the huge bouncer held out his hand, appraising me. I stared back, unsure of what he wanted.

“ID,” he grunted, a trace of impatience in his voice as he lifted his other hand to signal to the crowd behind me to stop pushing.

“Right, ah, here.” I handed my driver’s license along with Ian’s. He studied mine, then refocused his gaze on me. I shrank under his scrutiny. Despite today being my twenty-first birthday, what if the bouncer denied me access to the club because he thought my ID was a fake? I was a pile of nerves and I was sure to regurgitate the burger Ian had forced me to eat earlier so that I didn’t get blackout drunk tonight.

I held my breath, praying that I didn’t make a huge fool out of myself on my birthday night, and thankfully, the bouncer handed us back our IDs and granted us access to the dark building.

Ian pulled me to the bar and motioned to the bartender. “We need some shots for the birthday boy!”

“Ian! Don’t announce it to the world!” I tugged on his see-through tank, and lowered my head in embarrassment.

Ian ignored me and paid for the two shots the bartender placed on the bar before us. He picked them up and turned around to hand one to me. “Welcome to adulthood, sweetcakes.”

I clinked my shot glass to his and downed the clear liquid. The burn down my throat caused me to cough violently. Ian chuckled while giving me a pat on my back. “You’ll get used to it. Let’s do one more, then we’re hitting the dance floor. We’re gonna have a blast tonight!”

I nodded even though Ian had already turned back towards the bar. Tonight would be amazing because I had a secret goal that not even my best friend knew about. I would get my first kiss tonight. Although I’ve known I was attracted to guys since high school, I had never acted on it. School and work kept me so busy that I never committed myself to developing a deeper relationship with anyone, and at this point, I wasn’t sure if I’d ever have that. Relationships were terrifying, and I was too rigid and awkward to get close enough to anyone, much less kiss them.

However, if I didn’t take the first step, I’d end up alone. I would dance, let the alcohol loosen me up, and find a smokin’ hawt man to take my kiss virginity. Easy peasy.

After our second shot, Ian pulled me through the crowded dance floor until we found a spot with enough room to stand straight without being stuck to the person beside us. It was dark and the flashing lights made it hard to distinguish faces, but the anonymity of it was exactly what I wanted. I glanced around and saw men in different states of dress gyrating against each other. Some couples were making out while swaying their hips to the music, their hands roaming intimately on each other.

Ian placed his hands on my hips and guided me to sway in tune with the music. "We're not leaving tonight until you're all danced out," he teased with a flirtatious grin. I laughed and looped my arms around his shoulders, swaying my body on instinct, since I knew my best friend wouldn't care about my lack of dance skills.

We laughed and danced a couple of songs before returning to the bar. I ordered us another round of shots.

"Happy birthday to my best friend!" Ian shouted, bringing the shot glass to his lips as I did the same.

"Did I hear you say it's your birthday?" The man next to us turned and waved an unsteady hand to the bartender. "Next round's on me. Bartender, four shots!"

"Is that really a good idea, Zack? You've had like six already," the man next to him said, placing a large hand on the first man's shoulder to steady him.

Zack waved him off and distributed the shots. "To new friends." He clinked our glasses before tilting his head up and tossing the liquor back. It was too dark to see his features clearly, but I had an unobstructed view of his angular face and plump lips. He licked the remaining liquid off his lips and I followed the path of his tongue. Heat burned under my skin, either from the shots I had earlier or this primitive arousal that shot through me at the sight of this guy.

"Hey, you're cute. Wanna dance?" Zack asked. Ian was chatting with Zack's friend, so he must have been talking to me. I pointed to myself to make sure that my desires hadn't gone so out of control that I was hallucinating. "Yes, you, cutie." He reached out to push away a chunk of hair that had fallen on my glasses. Heat traveled to my face, and I

quickly nodded before tilting my head down just in case he saw the blush.

Zack grabbed my hand and led me to the dance floor. I turned to Ian, catching his eye, and he gave me a thumbs up before returning to his conversation. I was on my own.

Zack weaved us through the crowd, stopping at the middle of the dance floor. He looped his hands around my waist and I froze, unsure of what to do. He chuckled and guided my hands around his neck before returning his own to the small of my waist. "Relax and feel the music."

And so I did. I'd probably listen to anything that mesmerizing voice instructed me to. I closed my eyes and felt the vibrations of the beat pulsate through me. Everything else disappeared except for the blaring music and the warm hands that tethered me to the present. The shots I'd consumed earlier warmed my blood and loosened my overactive brain. The fears and what if scenarios my brain usually tormented me with were replaced with sweet silence, allowing me to enjoy the moment.

I awkwardly swayed my hips in time with the music, making bolder moves as the alcohol flowed to my head and dulled my ability to give a fuck. I was wild and free and didn't give a shit what others thought.

Strong hands tightened around my hips, and I opened my eyes to find piercing green eyes on me. Zack pulled me close until my body was flush against his. The world stopped around us and everything turned foggy. All I could focus on were those bright green eyes.

He nibbled on his lower lip, and my eyes tracked the movement. He released his lip and his mouth formed into a cheeky smirk. I glanced back up to his eyes and realized he had caught me staring. I turned away, already feeling the

heat rising to my face. He used his hand to force my attention back to him. His warm hand caressed the back of my neck as he pulled me down to him.

This was it! My first kiss! I closed my eyes in anticipation as my face inched closer to his. My heart thumped so loudly that I was sure everyone in the club could hear it despite the blaring music. I opened my eyes, just a crack, only to see Zack's face a breath's away from mine, and his green eyes still staring at me. Startled, I quickly squeezed my eyes shut again as I felt the pressure of his soft lips crash against mine.

All the blood that had flowed to my face earlier was now rushing downwards. I gasped at his warmth, and he used the opportunity to slip his tongue past my lips, exploring all the sensitive areas that I hadn't known I possessed. He retreated and nibbled my bottom lips before attacking my mouth with his tongue again. Tiny whimpers escaped my throat as he played me with his talented tongue, turning me into putty. Lust blazed under my hot skin, and my hardening cock protested, demanding more friction. I leaned my full weight against his solid body, loving how safe I felt in his arms. It was ridiculous since he was a complete stranger, but my gut screamed that this was right. This was where I belonged.

His hand roamed lower until they landed on my ass. He gave my sensitive butt cheeks a hard squeeze, and I moaned into his mouth, my cock throbbing against its restraints. I was pretty sure precum soaked my briefs, and I had no cares to give. I'd go home in wet briefs if it meant keeping his lips on mine.

Zack gyrated against me, and I smiled to find that I wasn't the only one affected by this kiss. I felt his hard member press against my own. We had entirely too much clothes on,

and I prayed to any and all deities to teleport us somewhere private enough so that I could undress the beautiful man before me and explore every inch of his skin. No gods heard my prayers.

He pulled away from me, and my eyes flicked open at the loss of contact. "You're so..." Zack staggered against me, causing me to lose my balance as well.

"Whoa, there. Are you guys all right?" Zack's friend rushed towards us to steady our fall. "I think it's time to call it a night, buddy," he said to Zack, then turned to give me an apologetic look. He supported Zack's weight as they wobbled to the entrance.

Ian threw his arm around my shoulder as I watched them go. "That was hot, sweetcakes. It's a shame you didn't get his number."

Stunned by how fast everything happened, all I could do was nod at Ian's statement. Dazed, I brought a finger to my swollen lips, missing the warmth that the handsome stranger left behind. Even though I couldn't clearly see his features, I knew those bright green eyes would be carved into my soul. I shivered at the memory of his piercing gaze, and a sense of loss overcame me at the thought of never seeing him again.

What a shame indeed.

Thank you for reading this short story prequel! If you want to read Zack and Caleb's happily ever after, check out [*The New Neighbor!*](#)

THE NEW NEIGHBOR

What would you do with an irresistible neighbor you didn't account for in your life?

Caleb had big dreams of opening a bakery when he was young, but they were shattered when tragedy struck, making him the man of the house. His Mom and younger brother depended on him to be strong and support them, even if it meant sacrificing himself. He was resigned to being a cog in the wheel in a job he hated, until his new neighbor moved in and challenged everything.

Zack didn't do relationships. After his family cut ties with him, he vowed to stick to friendships in the future. However, when his blushing neighbor overheard him mention erectile dysfunction and balls, he couldn't let the cute man leave thinking he had issues with his lower parts.

The New Neighbor is the first book of the Corio Heights series about well, the new neighbor. Join Caleb and Zack's story as they discover that they can have more than what they resigned themselves to. This is an M/M romance that features a regal cat, hurt/comfort themes, slow burn, and lots of blushing.

Read [here](#).

ALSO BY RYE COX

[The New Neighbor](#)

[The Flirty Neighbor](#)

The Forever Neighbor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rye is an M/M Romance author who is a romantic at heart. She believes that love conquers all, and that's why her stories are guaranteed to always have an HEA. When she's not writing, she escapes to the world of books or daydreams about becoming a future cat lady.

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