

Out of the Ordinary

I arrive at the house with the intention of being strong and staying true to my objective, but the universe plots against me like it usually does, and so when I enter that eighties song that makes me sigh is starting to play, and as I reach the lounge she's standing up and shaking her head to let her hair down, and I watch it all in slow motion, just like in the movies, and I keep staring at her totally dazed for some moments, as if a spotlight was shining down on her and everything else had blurred away and there was nothing else to fix my eyes on. After a few seconds that seem like hours, I manage to hide this and pretend that I'm a normal human being, which I sometimes find hard to do, and I keep going while she moves away from the couch she was sitting on, chatting with some friends, and goes around attending to people.

I cross the floor and go out to the back garden. It's a pleasant night, one of those near the beginning of summer, and one can bear it well in short sleeves, though most of us boys are wearing a shirt. The sky's pitch black and you can't make out any stars, I guess due to the lights all over the house and the streetlamps that shine over the sidewalks of this typical residential area with its well-kept lawn, its trees, its pools and other stereotypical American movie things. The party has summoned a lot of people and the latecomers like me still continue to arrive. Inside and outside, back here and in front of the house, there are groups of people talking about their stuff, with or without booze in their hands, acting stupid, dancing, trying to score —I'm sure there are people in the upstairs rooms already— with more or less luck, telling jokes with varying degrees of vulgarity, all of them feeling this fierce teen energy, this impression of being on top of the world and not having a single real worry. This year, after graduation, many won't see each other ever again, and they'll all have time to mature. We're not kids anymore, but nei-

ther men yet, and some adults keep treating us like we were the former while others demand us to behave like the latter. I, for one, have been doing it at my own pace, like everything else. I've never followed the majority, that's for sure.

I don't forget why I've come here tonight, but there's no trace of Álex anywhere. My eyes have looked over the scene face by face with no success. I tell myself maybe he's going to be late too, or perhaps not even come —I hope not—. And then, like a revelation, I turn around and raise my head to see that he's in the first floor balcony. He's with his usual peers. Feeling lazy, I head inside again and climb the stairs. And as I make it to the top and turn the corner, I meet her face to face —we bump into each other, actually—, and although I manage to give the hint of a smile and utter an apology like it was nothing, my heart beats so fast and hard that it seems it's gonna come out of my chest, and my whole soul is shattered only to be fully rebuilt anew. And for the millionth time temptation arises, the idea of reading her, like a little devil on my shoulder, but I've made a promise to never do it. It's one of my principles, one of the few personal rules I've never broken, and I'm not gonna do it today despite her face still being burned in my retina.

I recover and walk down the corridor. I think I've glimpsed Álex by the other end passing through with a drink in his hand. That may make things either easier or more difficult, I'll know soon enough. Meanwhile I've been practicing, reading people here and there as I walked by them, like a pervert glancing at cleavages, and I've been able to peek into their ideas, their dreams and hopes, their fears and prayers, or the most complete nothingness. It's something as natural as breathing for me, and I stopped feeling guilty about it years ago.

I reach the balcony. My target is now with his back on me. I get near and probe him, but he's distracted minding other things, nothing of my interest. Now the social engineering game, in which I try to route the talk towards the matter of my choosing, will begin. I haven't had much contact with him during high school, as his "popular guy" status pushed me away, but his father is the principal and it's vital that I find out where he lives. I've got a big unanswered question that's been tormenting me for days, but as the

classes are over there is no reasonable excuse for me to go to his office, where he hardly ever is besides. Guess I'll take the easy way and ask him about his place or something like that, so he will inevitably focus his mind on it. As I raise my arm to get his attention, an issue emerges.

A warning pricks my head: someone around me has seen something that's made him feel puzzled first, surprised second and scared last. I follow his gaze. At first I don't have a clue about what's up, but then I watch closely and notice that indeed there's movement in the sky. After some seconds I discern the gloomy outline of a DCHE aircraft. The party's racket conceals the already faint noise it makes. A very unpleasant feeling begins in my stomach and travels up to my throat. Its full-black paint and dimmed-out lights make it very difficult to see, and it's coming straight towards the house. Despite its lack of markings I've got absolutely no doubt about who they are and what they've come for. I've been fearing this for years, since I read the first stories in those web pages, those hidden forums frequented by people like me, where we somehow tried to lend support and counsel to each other. They narrated how they used to arrive taking advantage of the element of surprise, without prior notice —no lights or sirens—, encircling the area only to act at a lightning speed afterwards, clearing off with their prey before anyone could react. What happened later wasn't hard to imagine, even if no one had ever escaped to tell it.

So I was right after all. My worst nightmare has come true. These last weeks I had heard rumors about an extraordinary having been discovered in our high school. Someone had reported it and the authorities were after him. For days I've nurtured equally the fear that that one was me, and the hope that it was another. But now there's no doubt: they're here for me. On the street outside I see black vans pulling over in front of the house. Awkwardly I get back indoors, finding it hard to breathe and think, unsure of what to do. I feel alone, tired and pursued, defenseless. The others keep partying oblivious to the weight that now rests on my shoulders. If they catch me I'll wave my freedom goodbye. They'll take me to some remote location, interrogate me, run experiments on me. I'll be a guinea pig till the last day of my life, alienated by a society that'll see me as a possible threat, and will study me in

order to find a way to wipe out my brethren. My anxiety slowly gets replaced by grief while I taste the last moments of solitude.

I see her in front of me, a few steps away. An idea arises in my mind, like a tiny spark that gets progressively bigger until it becomes a fire. I devote the next instants trying to accept a resolution that makes me feel rejection, but that I've already made. Thought by thought I fool myself to the point of believing I've done everything I could to prevent it. I sense my end is near and there's a last thing I want to do. I'll break my most sacred rule, I'll do what I swore I'd never do. On the edge, before falling into the abyss, I'll jump off myself. I'll read her and finally find out what she thinks, what dwells in her precious head. I'll clear up the great doubt once and for all.

And so I do. Slowly, with some kind of shyness at first, and then with expectancy, I dive into her train of thought. And what I discover finishes me off. For a minute, all signs of life fade from within me.

Commotion spreads throughout the house. They all have realized now what's happening outside, and they make for the garden, among voices of panic and excitement. Many thoughts cloud my mind and I check that something's not right, but I can't place what. In search for answers, I get out too.

Clad in black, their faces covered, with their weapons and gear, they've taken the place already. Their nondescript appearance helps to convey a cold, dreadful image. They've formed a circle, in whose center we witness with disbelief a young boy, even more helpless and frightened than I am, looking around trying to find an escape route. His eyes seem the ones of a cornered beast. The situation is tense and nobody speaks, we're just waiting for something to happen.

One of the agents makes a movement towards him, and as a reflex action the boy reaches out his arm with an open palm. What occurs afterwards astonishes everyone, even me. An invisible shock wave throws the black shape backwards with force, several feet into the air, making him go through a large window. Everything's as sudden and violent as it is clean. The team's response doesn't take long to see, and employing non-lethal weapons and tactics rehearsed a thousand times, they manage to subdue the boy, whose previous action seems to have left exhausted, and they secure him. I take a

close look at his face. It's a guy from another class who I've never seen except from afar, and who I've never talked to, let alone read him. I could never have suspected he was another extraordinary, and from what I've seen, a telekinetic one.

The agents complete the intervention while the attendees go crazy. They don't believe what they've just witnessed, for many of them this is the first time they see action out of the movies. Several try to record the scene with their phones, only to find out that the camera isn't working. Without a doubt the authorities have locked all the devices in the area so they can act with impunity. Nervous and agitated, they chat incoherently between them discussing every detail of what they've just lived. For many weeks this'll be the sole topic of conversation. I, completely apart, try to accept everything that's happened in the last minutes, how my life has been turned upside down. My worries were baseless and I wasn't the one they were after, but I've lost control and crossed a line which there's no turning back from. And by doing so, I've died inside. Because what I've seen wasn't even remotely what I wanted.

She's in love with another.

I look around for her. She's in a circle with her dearest friends. And he's right by her side. Carlos, a classmate I got along with neither well nor badly, but that's always seemed like someone upright and exceptionally mature to me. He's soothing her, asking her if she's okay, comforting her. They embrace each other tightly while I feel an icy cold deep inside me. I read them both and confirm that they truly love each other. It's a sincere and healthy love, without any trace of bitterness, jealousy or self-interest. It's a complete, absolute, reciprocated and happy love. A love whose existence I could never even have guessed because they've kept it so low-key. I verify that they both want only the best for each other, that they'll never break up, and that their sole concern is to stop feeling it. And though my power is not second sight, it's not hard to picture them staying together in college, marrying, having kids, growing old by each other's side. And a great sorrow spreads inside me knowing that I'll never have anything like it. Unlike everybody around me,

I've managed to establish with certainty that no girl has ever felt that for me. And this realization's enough to drive me crazy.

I feel empty, with no will to fight or keep living. She was an ideal that encouraged me to carry on day by day, a goal I didn't care whether or not it was feasible as long as it kept me running. Now all that's been lost, and neither my family nor my friends —to whom I've never trusted my secret—nor the studies are incentives enough to go on. But I don't care anymore. Coldly, I make a decision. I'll finish with it all, but I'll do it my way and by my own choice, not losing control this time. I'll be the master of my fate. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, walking slowly, relaxing. I no longer feel like crying. I burn the last moments of my old existence before taking the leap and embracing the new one. The people around me become mere shadows, and afterwards I can only see the place where I'm headed, determined.

On the street, the agents are gathering everything up and getting ready to leave. The boy's already been introduced in one of the vans, sedated. By the outer police line, an agent stares into the radio he's holding in his hand while hesitating some seconds, trying to recall something. Distracted, he doesn't see me approaching him. And then, I speak.

"Today's keyword is 'Chimera'".

And life as I've always known it ends at that very moment.