

Following her Steps

The renovation of the house is in full motion. Shane steps on the shards of glass and hears the pieces being broken under his feet. The work continues despite being a holiday. The fence has spears selected personally by him at the Home Depot. He is the handyman in charge and likes using his hands. There are still a lot of things to be done in the future years. Now he was having problems with the tile's distributor. It seems like the brand he had chosen was no longer in the market. He wanted it because he remembered it from his childhood. His parent's house had a grey finish roof. It was a lot of material to be ordered for a four room's house.

After placing the artificial grass on the lawn, laying it there to settle, he goes into the house and takes a beer from the fridge. There are only three left inside and a carton of pizza from the previous weekend resting in one of the shelves. When he had decided to rehearse and anticipate the moving day. Now he only had one month remaining in his rental apartment. He definitely needed more space. The beer has a vanilla taste, sweet, his favorite. He doesn't mind the solitude. With that kind of job, it is very hard to meet people. He is always in someone's house, working, on his own.

In the neighborhood where he bought the house, most of the people have families and play soccer in the yard. He finishes his drink with a few gulps, takes off his boots, and goes up to the second floor to take a shower. It would be nice to have a woman there, overseeing things. But he knows it is a fantasy. He would never allow anyone to make decisions for him. He thinks about Celia, her jovial beauty, artificially red hair and modern cut, and suddenly feels anxious.

He had met her at the gym, but it was only later, in the supermarket, that he realized the impact she had on him. The water is cold. He still hadn't fixed the thermostat. He puts a red polo shirt he's packed in his backpack and looks forward to moving in the next month. The rooms are all ready, with new hardwood floors and cupboards. He had bought this house in very bad shape, and little by little he was renovating the rooms, the roof, and also the pool. But he had to work on his nerves. He wanted everything to be ready at once and that was impossible. As he puts the towel around his torso, and touches his head, he feels the gaps in his hair. It is stress, but he is also getting older.

On the streets, the protests against the rise of the bus fares and corruption startle him. There are long traffic jams. The day before, when he arrived at the gym, things were smoother. The orange deco in the cafeteria brightened his mood and the blond waitress with very white face was circulating in between the sections. He knew her for a long time. She was married to a Russian and they had immigrated to Brazil a few years ago. They barely spoke Portuguese, and every time she saw him, she wanted to practice the language.

"Olá Shane," she said, giving him the menu even though he always ordered the usual. They talked of silly subjects while he waited. His drink before workout was a protein shake with banana. It helped him burn the fats and accelerate the metabolism. He liked having muscles, and the work as a contractor made him even tougher. During the week away from his house he spent hours as a handyman fixing up other people's houses, coming back home in the weekends and holidays to renovate his own. Still, he never skipped the gym. It was his way of keeping sane.

He asked the waitress how her Portuguese classes were going and she explained how the language had too many tenses and it was hard to memorize them all. Yells were coming from the streets. “Things are messy outside,” he said, to which she replied, “life’s unpredictable.” It is when he saw Celia for the first time. She was spending time in the stretching area, bent down. He liked to watch her from the cafeteria. She recognized the attention, because she stared back at him through the mirror. Her favorite drill was the exercise ball and the work in her abs. She repeated it five times. He was not the only one looking at her. She had long brown hair and fake eye lashes, wearing an outfit that outlined all the muscles in her body. It was a kind of overall, but tight. The colors were bright pink and green. Other men paraded around her, chatting occasionally. An old man wanted to use the ball.

“Do you need this?” He asked. “No rush,” he continued, as she took her time to move away. By then, Shane had already gone to the washroom, changed his clothes, and was working out near her. He was staring at her tattoos, names written in her arms. “I’ve never seen this before,” he said. “It is pretty common where I come from,” she said. “I just moved here.” It was a friendly environment, people talked to each other, but that didn’t mean anything. He wished he could ask her out. Perhaps show her where he lived. As he was considering this option, Celia left without giving Shane the chance to say anything else.

He forgot about it, finished his series, and stopped in the organic supermarket. The apartment he was living now was filled with boxes. He just didn’t want to face another night eating pizza, so he decided to cook himself some dinner. He was standing in the line up with a fresh piece of salmon, some broccoli, and potatoes, flipping through the gossip magazines while waiting for his turn. She appeared behind him holding milk powder in her hands.

“It is you again,” she said, as if they had left the conversation in the middle. He imagined her holding his child and standing besides him as his wife. She explained she was out of milk, as if he were interested in knowing. He paid his bill and took his time going back to the car. From a distance, he wasn’t really following her but it felt like he was. He drove behind her, as if they were going to the same direction. After twenty minutes, she stopped near a house in a very suburban area. There was an SUV in the garage, and a few chairs on the porch. As she parked, a man walked out and kissed her, as she gave him the supermarket bag. The light inside of Shane’s car, as he sat near the curb, made his eyelids palpitate. He didn’t feel sadness or hurt, just a sense of amplitude.

“Good evening, sir, can I help you?” The man asked, showing him an ID.

It had been almost half an hour since he had been sitting in the car. The man was a security guard, and did rounds in the private condominium. Shane explained he had just drop by someone and was making some calls. The other apologized and explained it was just a routine check. Now, going back home, after a day working in the house, he wonders if he will see Celia again in the gym on Monday. He notices the manifestations in the streets are losing power. A depredated lamppost, a bank agency covered in black tar, a garbage can burned, and waste on the sidewalks are some of the damage in the city. The images on the television show a revolted country. He hasn’t seen anything like that since the military coup. As he gets home and goes up the elevator, he thinks about the construction of the house, the delayed tiles, and his thinning hair. He wonders if Celia also feels insecure about her future.