

Strange Impulses

The clinic's office is located in a building with red mirrors. In the main lounge, some shops and an art exposition with drawings of masculine bodies and vibrant colors. A woman with blond hair in a leather chair gives information out. Carlos, her husband, seems interested.

"Don't forget to mention your headaches," Marieta says.

"There's nothing wrong with me," he replies with tension.

"Still, you need to tell him," she insists.

"I've seen these sessions on TV."

"Really?"

"I just need to talk about my parents."

“Don’t patronize it. We already discussed it.”

“I still don’t know what I am doing here.”

“You’re too nervous, Carlos.”

In fact, it is an accumulation of factors. In the last few months, he has been losing control over small issues, long lineups, noise, garbage, and especially his relationship with his wife. The most recent case had been with Jefferson, Marieta’s new friend. Carlos doesn’t feel at ease in his presence, and because of that, picks on him, making unfriendly jokes about his sexuality. Concerned, his wife calls her sister-in-law, who recommends a psychologist.

Unwilling, and after a lot of convincing, Carlos accepts the suggestion. Anxious for the past weeks, he decides to take advantage of the situation and get a prescription to reduce his symptoms. The number of people waiting near the elevator is large, and a fluffy carpet in the hallway makes Carlos sneezes. He tries not to be irritated with the dust or the noise. The ceilings are high, and the lights appear small, distant. He loosens his tie. The circumstances make him lack air and have a fainting sensation. He doesn’t want his wife to notice his agony. Since his father’s passing, he’s been very vulnerable, not exercising, eating irregularly, and gratuitously aggressive.

“Who’s it?” Carlos asks, when he notices her typing on the cell.

“It’s Jefferson. He wants to know if everything is ok.”

Under Marieta’s gaze, Jefferson is harmless. Young and full of muscles, he goes to the same university as her, and from the beginning they become very close. Every time they go out, Carlos feels inferior, without a place.

“He doesn’t give up, does he?” Carlos asks, spiteful.

“Don’t start,” she answers, trying to appease the situation.

“You’re clung to this guy.”

“He’s gay, Carlos. What is the problem?”

“So? He’s still a man.”

“Do you want me to go in with you?”

“I’m going to talk about my parents,” he repeats, still in the lineup.

Carlos walks in the elevator and unexpectedly feels his body going upwards, almost thirty floors in less than ten seconds. He breathes relieved when it arrives at the top so rapidly. There are many rooms in an impersonal corridor. At the end of the hallway there is a sign on a door with the name César Campbell, psychologist. It is wood and creaks a bit when opened. A divider separates the small waiting room, with two chairs and a magazine holder in the middle. Behind a closed door, a murmur of inaudible voices, possibly in an ongoing session.

Carlos recalls the last time he had gone to the doctor, the ample room, glass doors and leather chairs, the same hospital where his father had died, from kidney failure. It was an annual check-up and he had to fill a form, for the first time marking a box indicating that his father had died because of organ complications. They needed information about the family genetics.

The first thing Marieta notices when she enters the office is a poster about Freud and the unconscious, and some paintings from the exposition on the walls. Masculine and feminine bodies exposed and deformed.

“What?” Carlos asks, when he notices Marieta’s expression.

“I don’t know, these paintings bother me,” she says, uncomfortable.

“Strange impulses,” he affirms.

“What do you mean?” She asks.

“The name of the paintings,” he says, putting his glasses on.

Maybe she is nervous. Marieta realizes she wouldn’t have the courage to confess her problems to a stranger, even if she needed. She’s very extroverted but hates to talk about herself. She brushes the thoughts away, afraid that he might notice. Suddenly the door opens.

A young woman, with orange high heels and blazer, very attractive and with Latin appearance, exits the small door, greeting the man with a handshake. He is bald and thin, white skin and black hair on his arms.

“See you Monday,” he says.

The psychologist turns. They exchange looks, but don’t say anything.

“Carlos?” He asks.

“That’s me,” Carlos answers, without moving.

“Pleasure to meet you. César. Let’s go in?”

Carlos get up with a jump and throws the magazine in the basket, as though caught by surprise. He looks back, looking for something he can’t find.

“Hi, I’m his wife, Marieta.”

“Hello,” the man says, indifferent. “Please.”

Carlos walks in with the hands in his pocket. Marieta, standing back, remains sitting. Inside the room, a yellow notepad with some writing, a bookshelf, a large window, a divan, and a few chairs. The ambient is half lit and the drapes are closed.

“I don’t know how to begin,” Carlos affirms.

He dries his face with a napkin he takes from a small box on the table in front of him.

Actually, it was my wife who insisted I come.”

The table, covered by a thick transparent glass, has piled folders on one side, and gives a professional look to the space. A calendar with flowers has some dates marked. The man pulls a chair and sits beside him.

“Do you have a lot of clients?” Carlos asks.

“Is that important?” César replies, interested.

Afraid of being judged, Carlos prefers not to answer. All his patients must be like the woman that left, young and beautiful.

“I’m not supposed to be here,” Carlos affirms, hesitating.

“And why is that?” César asks, giving him a form.

“Excuse me?” Carlos asks, nervous.

“I only need your information and a consent saying that you’re coming here out of free will,” he explains.

Carlos looks around, searching for clues that might indicate what to do, then simply fills the data and gives it back to him.

“It is because I’m very jealous,” he affirms, with interlaced hands.

In the waiting room, Marieta feels a sudden coldness in her body. The images on the wall, the body muscles, makes her think about the walks she takes with Jefferson in the Vancouver trails, his athletic torso in front of her, keeping her safe. Does Carlos have secrets?

“It is just for short minutes, but I’m this close to hitting Marieta’s friend,” Carlos explains. Aggression is the last resource, but his impulses are strong.

The man nods.

“Are you used to this?” Carlos asks, a bit lost.

Like his mother did with his father, Carlos is afraid of being betrayed.

“I’ve been with Marieta for five years now. She wants to be a mother, but I’m afraid I might be sterile,” Carlos admits.

“Have you been tested?” César asks.

“Yes, I have,” Carlos lies.

“You have?” César repeats. “Say whatever comes to your mind.”

“What do you mean?” Carlos asks, unsure.

“Free-associate. Don’t be so worried,” he explains.

On the other side, Marieta tries to hear the words inside the office but it is pointless. The walls are soundproof. Perhaps she doesn't really want to know what they are talking about.

"I already told I am infertile," Carlos insists, with anger.

"Ok," the doctor says.

"Can't you help me change?" Carlos asks.

"Do you want to change?" Cesar replies.

That's when Marieta opens the door, afflicted. She doesn't know how long it has been but infers that they must have talked enough. The doctor gathers the papers. Carlos smiles when he sees her.

"I don't like to spend all this time waiting," Marieta affirms.

"We've finished," César affirms, shaking Carlos' hands.

Inside the elevator, Carlos tries to embrace her, but she avoids him. In the reception, the blond woman is still reading a book near the art exposition. “Do you need help?” She asks, approaching.

Minutes later, she wraps the painting, similar to the one in his therapist’s.

“I like incomplete bodies,” he says.

“Did you like the session?” Marieta asks.

“It is different. He listens,” he affirms.

When Carlos hangs the painting, he feels a sudden panic, as though the unknown parts of his being were exposed. He takes a deep breath. On the wall, the incomplete torso is perfect.

On that afternoon, Marieta finishes reading a book about the patriarchy system in South America, theme of her PhD thesis, and goes out for a walk with her dog, a small poodle. She meets Jefferson in the Laundromat and asks him about his weekend.

“This is Rubens,” Jefferson says, all smiles.

Besides him, an older man with wrinkled pants and sunglasses.

“Pleased to meet you,” she says, perplexed.

“Is everything ok at home?” He asks, taking his clothes from the dryer.

“All is well,” she affirms, resigned.

The two men leave arm in arm, laughing a lot. She thinks about calling her husband, asking him how his day was. At home, the apartment feels smaller than she recalled. Outside, the snow falls and the parking lot of the hospital on the other side of the street is gradually covered in white. The sun hasn't showed up.

“What did you do today?” Carlos asks, when he enters the kitchen.

“I met Jefferson, he has a new date, and I also tried to write a chapter about the masculine domination in Brazil,” she affirms, holding his arm.

He pauses and looks at her, nearby.

“You went to the gym today,” she says, noticing his wet hair.

“The session motivated me,” he affirms, self-conscious.

She leans against the chair, hesitates before the next phrase.

“I thought you didn’t like talking,” she says.

“I think I am jealous of your friends,” he confesses.

“And why?”

“I still don’t know.”

The evening ends with the two talking about the possibility of moving to a bigger apartment. Maybe they could get a mortgage, or perhaps Marieta would talk to her parents.

Carlos recalls the anxiety, moments before entering the therapist's office, to talk about himself. He closes his eyes and thinks about Marieta's friend. He wonders if love has any meaning. He doesn't know the answer but is ok in being that way for now.