

Chloe McGregor
Change of Heart

They are beyond help.

Deemed to be personified nothings, lacking in humanity and need of empathy, it is assumed that they are only menacing shadows that smoke menacingly behind the school with non-existent eyes full of menace.

Exaggeration on the menace part in particular.

As such, they are ignored- as our shadows generally are- and left to their own devices. Mostly, they keep to their designated areas and we keep to ours. However (and increasingly often) there comes a time where these shadows come into the light, revealing the shocking reality that they too share the human form. We blink. We ponder what this could mean, that maybe we were wrong somewhere along the line- but we never reach a conclusion.

We turn a blind eye. We move on.

This then encourages other shadows to emerge from their 'natural' habitat, stepping forward to shred their invisibility yet still go unnoticed by us. They blend in almost seamlessly, slowly growing in numbers. Forming a pack strong enough to hunt.

Now, they wait. Despite having strength in numbers, they lack power in our perfect world of light; they must wait for one minor slip up, one careless act, which will thrust easy prey into the open.

They do not need to wait for long, for soon there is a boy. It could have been anyone, really, but he was unfortunate enough to be cast aside at that particular time.

We remain blissfully unaware as he is surrounded by the former shadows, due to the simple fact that the boy is beyond help.

We do not see his pain.

We do not hear his cries.

We do not feel empathy.

It was this, I assume, that brought him here- still in his school uniform with a bloody lip amongst his bruises. His eyes are emptier than mine, his unmarked skin paler. Coming closer, I see that he is not a boy but not yet a man. At least, he is older than I was. Perhaps by a year or two. I tell myself that this is why he is not scared, unlike how I was. I had been terrified, a sobbing mess that barely managed to step over the line. Maybe he had had it worse, but I decide not to think of that. What mattered now was what he was about to do. And what I was about to do.

He puts his bag down, readying himself. It slumps forward, crushing into plastic wrapping. The noise catches his attention, making him turn to see what its origin was.

The fact that he sees me surprises us both, with him stumbling backwards onto the ground. The whites of his eyes glisten in contrast to the dullness of our surroundings, making my previous judgement of them being empty null; in actuality, the amount of life they hold is startling. Even on the point of a self-inflicted death, when he himself has given up, it is almost laughable that life refuses to let him go. After all he has been through, with his wounds as an open testament to his pain, he is still trapped within its clutches- sentenced to a lifetime of experiences, relationships and ageing.

I let that go.

I couldn't bear the weight that it carried, but ironically enough once that weight was lifted I was overwhelmed by something far greater. Regret.

A moment does not pass without a thought of what could have been, or what I should have done. I am forever haunted by my last few seconds, my last few steps, enveloped in the sound of a blaring horn and the blinding glow of oncoming headlights. Days, months- years, perhaps- have passed with me, sitting above this shrine of flowers as my own testament to my own pain. I have been spectator to countless others who also chose to have a premature exit, an occasional bouquet of cheap flowers on the side of the road following soon after in tribute. No matter what I do, nothing will change- it would continue as long as the shadows, our demons, continue to torment us.

And yet, I still *need* to do something. Anything. 'Why?' you may ask. I'm not quite sure myself. I can only say regret is deadly, especially to those who have 'passed on'; and though I am no longer amongst the living I still long for the blood running through my veins, the sound of a steady heartbeat and the ever-present will to live on.

I am beyond help.

My time has gone, / am gone- yet that does not mean that my life will amount to nothing. That his will amount to nothing. The idea that yet another family, baring various objects of their grief, will drift up to the roadside, staring emptily into the oncoming traffic whilst hating themselves for not even knowing where their child died makes me feel like a worm crawling from a bird. The outcome is inevitable- even if it is escaped, it will always happen again. Yet, effortlessly, I step from my post amongst the flowers towards the boy.

Never would I be able to save every person, but with otherwise eternal isolation ahead of me there is no-one who can argue that I cannot at least try. The boy is not beyond my help.

And now I need to say something... oh god I haven't talked to anyone in forever- what is an acceptable greeting these days? No, I don't want to mess this up so let's leave obligatory stuff to the side for now. I need to say something that will leave a good impact... well, a different sort of impact from the experience of seeing me. Wow, he's a white as a sheet, almost like he's... oh yeah, that's perfect!

"What's wrong? It looks like you've just seen a ghost..."