

The nightmare always begins like this.

My heart pounded as I checked the address again. It couldn't be far now, just the last door on this corridor. The destination looked exactly like the other doors, save for a trail of empty bottles and food packages leading up to it. I had similarly discarded my garbage the same way, since there was no one left to scold me otherwise. This 'ultrad2011' is just like me and I am so grateful to finally see them.

I told myself that it is perfectly normal to be excited. I'm meeting a new person, the first person that I've seen in almost a year. Being grateful is also perfectly normal. Grandma always told me to be more thankful about being the 'last generation to see Earth'. I still don't see how that applies, but however I can fool myself into not panicking helps.

I grimaced at my phone and tucked it briefly away in order to wipe my sweaty palms against my jeans. Next, I stopped to fix up my appearance. First impression must still means something here, right? But what if, this ultrad guy takes one look at my dolled up face and thinks I'm useless? And at the same time, I don't want to throw all the social concepts of cleanliness and appearance out of the window. Just because I live in the apocalypse doesn't mean I have to turn into an animal. Realizing that I've been fiddling with my hair for the past few minutes, I shoved my trembling hands into my pockets.

It is too dangerous to label this feeling of apprehension as hope. Hope is a seductive poison in my veins, the ticking time bomb with a fuse that grows shorter with every step that I take. Despite the constant buzzing and other noise from surrounding electronics, I was hyper aware of how my footsteps echo down the corridor. I would like to say that ultrad2011 has no idea that I am on my way to meet them, since they haven't replied on their message board since I last checked. Without prompting, my mind wandered off into a tangent. Perhaps this ultrad person saw my post and is making a welcome party. Granted, it would be a party of two, but I could already see it. It would take place in the apartment next door, since the place is likely to be still clean. There would be some sort of cake involved. Since I'm not the best cook, I'm hoping this ultrad2011 would help me figure it out. We can survive the journey to Mexico together.

Together. That is such a beautiful word. What's another beautiful word?

Central America Global Union Space Station. Technically still part of North America, but in terms of location, it oddly fits.

Beautiful phrase. I meant beautiful phrase.

Feeling my breath catch, I hastily plugged my headphones on and turned on the music. I couldn't afford to have another panic attack. Not when I was so close. I checked my phone

again. It is definitely the right address. Before I knew it, my legs moved slower and slower until I came to a stop in front of the door.

The music wasn't helping. My heart rate accelerated to match the drum part of the song. I turned off the music from my phone and checked the address again. With every step, my chest feels like it would explode. I wondered if I'm going to get a heart attack.

I'm too young for a heart attack.

The white door, the same appearance as every other door, it taunted me. I'm not sure what the etiquette was here. Do I knock? Do I just open the door? Do I call out that I'm pizza delivery and hope the other person is going to respond?

Finally, I reached out. There was no sense in hesitating any longer. The suspense was getting ridiculous. One way or another, I'm going to meet this person or be-

annoyed. Not disappointed, just annoyed that I wasted my time. Yes, that is the wording that I am sticking with.

I turned the doorknob, surprised that it was unlocked. I don't know what that means. No matter how long I have journeyed, I have always locked the door behind me when I decide to stop for the night. It's habit. I don't know what the unlocked door means. I rarely encounter unlocked doors when finding somewhere to stay for the night. The door swung open to reveal a messy entryway.

This is the part where my nightmares always begin.

Not a single light is on in the apartment, though judging by how the empty food packaging haven't began to grow mould yet, someone was there recently. A strange mixture of copper, rotting food and unwashed body odour permeated through the living space. I fight the urge to throw up. Was I sick from this stench or was it from a wave of feelings that I don't know how to name?

I probably don't smell too good either. At this point in my journey, I have long stopped paying attention to trivial things such as appearance. Dismissing the repulsive odour as laziness and garbage, my shaking legs stagger towards the living area of the apartment. My heart beats so loudly that it drowned out the noise coming from the corridor. Looking back in retrospect, I should have known something is wrong. What kind of person leaves all the lights out and doors unlocked?

"Hello?" I call as loudly as I could. Due to the long period of disuse, my voice came out as a whisper. Sometimes because the apartment was so silent, I think that my whisper echoed loudly into the still space. I'm not sure it was because of weird fumes in the apartment or my

emotions that my body began shaking. The details of the room grows faint, but I am determined to find out what happened to the other.

The apartment is dimly lit in a weird shade of reddish orange. I'm guessing that the curtains must have open as I don't recall turning on the light. I pick my way through the tiny clean trail in the messy apartment and stumbled over piles of forgotten, dirty clothes. It is unnaturally silent for someone who lived here alone. It is hard not to gag as the smell gets stronger the further into the apartment. I always wonder why I don't wake up from the smell alone.

The noise from outside quickly fades as I step into the apartment. It's amazing the kind of soundproofing that people get in the city. My family should have taken some of these empty apartments instead of staying in our old house in the suburbs.

Stop thinking about the past and just focus. I can do this.

I shiver, but the air condition isn't even on. It takes me a few moments to realize the unnatural silence is because nothing was plugged in. Holographic projectors are all off; the little bar fridge by the sofa, unplugged. The sound of my clothing rustling and movement is never more noticeable. Loneliness is a powerful thing, and that is why I did not turn around and leave.

That is why I searched the apartment until I found the mannequin.

This is where my memory gets fuzzy. You would think that the entire apartment would be seared into my memories from that experience, right down to the location of every single empty beer can. Not exactly. I don't recall what the apartment looked like. I just revisit it a lot in my nightmares. Every time it always starts the same, the shortest, but most ominous hallway that I walk through and right up until I find the mannequin.

The details are usually different, but the mannequin is always there. Sometimes, it is headless, sprawled between the couch and the coffee table. A fallen gun glinted beside empty alcohol bottles. Other times, I can see it in the kitchen, dangling from the ceiling fan; chair knocked over. And yet, there are times where I managed to stagger my way into the bathroom or the bedroom. If it's the bedroom, the bulk of the garbage is opened packaging, bearing names I cannot pronounce. Pills scattered on the blankets and artfully around the mannequin, looking just like a scene from drug campaign. If it's the bathroom, the steam from the mirrors are long gone and the mannequin is draped over the bathtub in tepid, foul-smelling water.

Sometimes, I wake up laughing even though it wasn't funny at all. Other times, I wake up screaming because the scene was so lifelike and it could have been a real body.

This Ultrad2011 is such a troll. The incident totally gave me issues about mannequins. What I think had actually happened is that I rummaged around the area until I found a life-sized

doll dressed in dirty clothes and splattered with dried pasta sauce. When I realized the other person was long gone, I just left and tried to forget the prank.

That is the story and I am sticking with it. Ultrad2011 had clearly gotten onto the spaceship a long time ago and this was a prank by someone long gone.

Now that my mind is clearer, I realized that so many things could have gone wrong. I was so focused on Ultrad2011 being my saviour that I didn't think about who was behind the username. For all I know, this person could have been a criminal.

I correct myself again. Focus. I can't spend more time thinking about what could have been.

The other person is not my saviour. My saviour is the person staring back at me in the mirror. And it will also be in the form of a spaceship when I make it to Mexico. This is why I am recording this right now. I'm training my voice to speak louder because sometimes, I wonder about my nightmare. If I had been able to call louder, if I didn't take so long deliberating if Ultrad2011 is real, would the two of us be travelling together by now?

And on a darker note, if I made it to the space station and rescue already came and left, this recording, to be sent over an eternity of light years and galaxies, is closure to my family. In hindsight, I should have started this from the beginning of my journey, the day I found out that I am the last person on Earth.