

While it could not be fairly said that Oliver was the oddest of his peers, he carried with him a sort of unwelcome awkwardness not found in any of his office colleagues.

He was not as weary or disheveled as most others working the long tedious hours in the warm summer evenings of late July, and still found some novelty in his job's preoccupation with the bizarre. It was this unadulterated passion for his line of work that distanced him from several of his coworkers, and while some had stranger hobbies, it remained to some of them a terrifically irritating thing to see Oliver adore his work just as much as they, with some effort, withstood it.

Oliver was a man of short stature, dressed in khaki shorts and a striped blue shirt slightly too small for his gut, just barely drawing attention away from his poorly-shaven, roundish face towards his somewhat unsightly and lumpy figure. In the current moment, he was stood in the living room of a small, single-story flat, whose rose-covered wallpaper decor peeled slightly from the spruce planks he imagined to be rotting and soft to the touch.

A second man, sunken deeply into the leather folds of the sole chair in the room, sighed deeply, pushed himself upwards from his slouched position, and leaned forward, pointing his gaze towards Oliver.

"So what'll we tell the neighbors?"

"I guess - just the usual, I suppose." answered Oliver, rubbing his eyes. "Once we fill out our Incident Reports, it's out of our hands anyways. I say we head back and get ourselves lunch."

After a short pause, the second man blinked and propped himself up by his knees, slowly standing up into a deep stretch and yawn. He mumbled something in agreement, but it was clear to Oliver by the man's bleary eyes that he was no better rested than Oliver himself. Oliver pivoted and slowly walked out of the musty room into the flat's singular corridor, letting the man catch up to him and match his pace.

They exited the flat without speaking, unlocking the thin, pale screen door and stepping out onto the cracked, sandy concrete path overgrown from the sides with all manners of tall flowers and grasses. The man was the first to break the silence, unhurriedly pulling his arms into the sleeves of his brown overcoat as they strolled away from the house and towards the dusty road on the other side of the long, unmowed country yard.

"How long do you reckon we have? 'Till people start noticing?" asked the man. "They can't hide this forever."

Oliver sighed and shook his head.

They had made their way to the road now. The house seemed so small and unassuming underneath the rich blue sky, obscured by the tall, sleek blades of grass rippling in the strong and warm summer wind, that Oliver could nearly bring himself to forget the terrible discomfort he had felt discharging his dainty little revolver into the skull of the motionless, blurry figure still sitting up at the kitchen table indoors.

He felt as though the house was looking back at him through the grass, the dark insides of the house peering through the windows. Oliver turned away from the unpleasant thought. If I think too much about how uneasy the house makes me, I'll only get more paranoid, Oliver thought to himself.

"Does it matter? It'd still need to be done, whether by the Board's orders or by someone else's. If the general public does come to know of this... Well, I suppose panic would ensue, yes - that I'll admit - but are you really that concerned?" he replied. "People would return to simpler ways of life - We'd adapt." suggested Oliver.

The man scoffed in wry amusement as he slowed to a halt, approaching an off-colored, yellow old sedan, rummaging through his pocket for his brass-colored car keys. "You're too optimistic. This kinda stuff shouldn't be public knowledge, and we're barely even managing that. It'll all go to hell in a couple years, that's what I say."

The man was Ruther, one of Oliver's coworkers, one which enjoyed Oliver's presence. Ruther unlocked and opened the door, hunching over into the driver's seat of the cheap, simple car. Oliver had seen bigger cars before; ones where the doors had weight to them and the engine didn't rattle so much, but it had been decades since any such vehicles made their way through this region of the countryside, and he had already long grown used to the uncomfortably stiff seating and plasticky smell of the small, flat sedans which broke down all too often.

Both men remained silent as Ruther started the engine and slowly drove forward along the shaded gravel road, the deep green grass of the one story house they had just left fading behind the woods neighbouring the large expanse of grassy fields to their right. For a minute, they sat in silence as the sedan's tires crackled over the gravel path.

“Do you really think it’s that bad? I thought we were close to understanding them,” Oliver said.

Ruther sighed, keeping his eyes on the road.

“They lied, like always. No one understands them - not me, not you, not your manager. It’s all lies to keep us complacent,” replied Ruther. “And we’re not doing jack shit about it, either. Did you see it? The way it kept sitting there? We can’t kill them, because they don’t die, ‘cause they’re not alive.”

“What, you don’t think they’re living beings? They walk, they - well, they don’t talk, but you have no way of knowing they’re not alive,” said Oliver. They had driven past the wooded area and turned left onto the cracked pavement of a thin road which winded its way through fields of grass and wheat. “Also, they’re harmless. They’re like the teacups - “

“How can you be sure,” interrupted Ruther. “How can you be sure they’re harmless. Maybe they’re not like the teacups. Eventually, one of them isn’t going to be harmless, and then what?”

“Then the Board will get rid of them.”

Ruther inhaled deeply and didn’t reply immediately, both hands on the steering wheel.

“I envy your naivety.”

Oliver grimaced slightly, irked at Ruther’s comment. He knew of his coworker’s distaste for the Board, something Ruther was wise enough to keep quiet about in formal gatherings. Oliver even shared many of Ruther’s issues with their Country’s leaders, but ultimately found it impossible to believe that there was nothing the nation could do. Doesn’t Ruther understand how many people were working on this? Oliver could still remember how triumphantly the newspapers announced the first erasure of an aberration, and how first his high-school, then his village was approached for volunteers to research the physical inconsistencies appearing globally.

“What, does that make me naive? Come on, even if the Board lies, you saw how much effort they put into this. I just - There’s no way we’re helpless in this ordeal, it doesn’t make sense otherwise,” replied Oliver, after a moment’s pause.

“Well, we’ve only been seeing more and more of these things,” said Ruther.

Oliver leaned his head onto his hand, his arm propped up against the car’s window, as a small white church and variously colored houses blinked into view, no longer obscured by wheat or grass or tall hills the car struggled to climb. He didn’t answer, because he knew that what Ruther said was true, and that things were getting worse, not better. He was certain, though, unlike Ruther, that they would find something. Some researchers out there would find some way to stop this all, and the world could settle, and he would go back to working at the post station instead of driving to dilapidated residencies in the middle of nowhere to break, photograph or document the oddest things and inconsistencies. Oliver wasn’t sure whether or not he liked this thought.

He’d miss the teacups, he thought to himself. And all the trinkets and odd little things he saw. But not the figures, he noted, not the figures. Those were his least favorite aberrations. He hated how their bodies were blurred, and he hated how he felt he could sometimes make out faces or eyes in their featureless messes of absence. It made shooting them nearly terrifying, though they obviously never reacted. I’ll miss everything but the figures, he thought to himself again.

The car passed the first couple of houses along the widening road as the two drove into the heart of the palm-sized town, passing only a small handful of streets as the car slowed to a halt in front of a two-story brick building painted white, whose doors bore a neat sign reading “OFFICE OF INCONSISTENCIES”.