

## Dimitri

It was the first day of the new school year, at a new school, in a new town, a brand new me. I was finally away from *him* and everything that had conspired in my life within the past 4 years would be over. Life would once again be quiet, peaceful, and maybe even normal for the first time in over 10 years. I was born and raised in a small, isolated town in the suburbs of Maine, raised by my loving parents, Dad was a desirably handsome dentist and Mom was a strong and dedicated OB/GYN. I grew up in an upper-middle-class neighborhood, in a lovely 4-bedroom home that included an in-ground pool in the backyard. My two brothers and I attended the local public schools, my youngest brother, William, and I led rather modest and brilliant lives, whereas my oldest brother, Jackson, was the destined wild child. Although Jackson was suspended a few times throughout high school, he graduated top 50 of his class and had moved away to attend a smaller university in Michigan on a full-ride scholarship, in a town reminding him of our small hometown. I prefer not to think about what happened to William, it was truly tragic. He was killed by a drunk driver while driving home from work one late night at only 19 years old. He had decided to take a gap year to save up because he wanted to travel abroad in college. Everyone knew William was going to be the famous one, but unfortunately, he would never see fame in his lifetime. Nonetheless, I went on to graduate from the University of Southern Maine with my bachelor's degree in education.

I had met *him* during my senior year in college, our eyes locked across the room at a frat party, very cliché. Nonetheless, I had fallen for him, his charm, and all he let me believe he was. After only 7 short months of knowing him, I allowed him to attack me the first time, and it only got worse after that. I had loved the man, and I knew he had his own problems, and I tried to use that to justify his actions, but they were unjustifiable. After I'd had enough, I found myself a

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great domestic violence lawyer and was able to get a restraining order against the scariest individual I had ever met in my life. Once I had started getting my life turned around, I kept going. I decided to pack up and move across the country to the sunny and busy shores of L.A. It was an instantaneous decision, perhaps one I still don't know how I feel about quite yet. I found a cute little apartment right on the beach and a vacant teaching position in an elementary school only 2 miles down the road. Everything was changing for the better, and I was going to tackle my life the way I had planned.

*RING DING DING. RING DING DING.* The sound of the school bell pulled me out of my lapse in memory. It was officially time to meet my students, in my new school, which was part of my new life. Just as I began logging into my computer to pull up my first-day slideshow, the heavy wooden door of my classroom swung open with a loud *BANG*. Noisily, my new students began to pour into the classroom three by three, shoving their way past one another through the narrow doorway. "Good morning class, my name is Miss Mohanagan, and I will be your teacher for this school year. Who's ready to tackle second grade?" I look vibrantly out at the slowly settling crowd, "Hi Miss Monaghan", approximately two-thirds of the class exclaimed in unison. Good start, I think. I looked around the class once more to get a feel of the students who hadn't been as welcoming, giving me a headstart with the more troublesome children.

Although I may be a nervous wreck, I remind myself once again that I have been a school teacher for years, and an extraordinary and widely loved one at that. I needed to continue with the icebreakers if I was going to be able to move along to real schoolwork by the end of the week. "Alrighty, so we're going to go around the room and say our name, if you could have one superpower, what would it be and why, and what is one goal you hope to achieve this school

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year? I'll go first, my name is Miss Mohanagan, if I could have any superpower in the world it would be invisibility, because I could sneak into the library in the middle of the night, and my biggest goal for the year is to see all of you move on to third grade next year. Ok, so who would like to go next?" I gave a five-second pause to allow enough time for anyone who had wanted to volunteer, to do so. The students slowly looked around at their pupils to see if anyone had raised a hand to volunteer, but unfortunately, no one had. "Well, luckily for you all, I prepared for your arrival". It was true, I had spent all summer in and out of craft stores, dollar stores, and various resale shops finding the perfect furniture, and decor, and getting my classroom to be as comfortable as possible. One of the activities on my list of preparatory tasks included labeling 28 wooden popsicle sticks with the names of each student in my class. I turned to the left corner of my desk, closest to the students, and held it up for everyone to see. "Whenever I ask the class a question, or everyone must share something, I will always ask for volunteers first. Once we have gone through any volunteers, or in a situation like this one, nobody volunteers, I will pull a stick from the cup. Each stick has the name of one of you in this room, if I pull your stick and call on you, you must answer the question asked to the best of your ability, or share your answer.

I received various nods from around the classroom in acknowledgment and then plunged my hand into the cup. My heart skipped a beat as I read the name, it was a common name, but it was the one that had belonged to *him*. I had fought the memories so many sleepless nights, nevertheless, I never allowed the letters of his name to form together, neither aloud nor mentally. I hadn't prepared this stick because surely I would have remembered, meaning Jackson had written the name when helping me get everything around for the new classroom and neglected to tell me I had a student by that name. It was a name I had grown to fear, a name I had grown to accept a miserable fate when heard. However, that was all behind me now, and it was just a

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helpless little second grader in my class. Surely saying his name, nearly 3000 miles away, couldn't provoke his presence, could it? "Who was it, Miss Mohanagan?". My thoughts were interrupted by a curious student. I open my eyes again to my trembling hands holding the wooden stick, "Dimitri."

A small boy with dark features arose from his chair in the very back, right corner of the class, furthest from the door. He had been one of the students who decided not to show a welcoming effort along with the majority of the class. As he looked up, his piercing green eyes met my own, and I felt transported into a world in which he was in control. His jet-black hair and strong cheekbones scarily resembled *him* and I wasn't quite sure what to take of this little boy. He emitted a specific aura, completely unrecognizable. I was damn terrified of an 8-year-old child. I slammed closed my eyelids to shake away the memories of *him* and began trying to interrupt the positive of this situation. Within a moment, I opened my eyes once more to find a completely different child standing in the same place as the eerie boy from before. This boy had radiant, blonde hair, with deep and compassionate brown eyes. His demeanor was more light and bouncy, a complete 180-degree swivel from the previous occupant of the back right corner. Nonetheless, the boy spoke, "Hello, my name is Dimitri." A shiver ran down my spine as the syllabus rolled off his lips. "If I got to have any superpower in the whole wide world, it would be the ability to be myself, and my goal for this year is to learn everyone's greatest fears." Being yourself isn't a superpower, is it? Nevertheless, why would he want to know everyone's biggest fears? Creepy. Just as I began to contemplate his rather peculiar commentary, he continued, "Miss Mohanagan's biggest fear is incredibly handsome, but that was Jamie's husband, wasn't it."

My stomach dropped to the floor in an instant, I felt the same amount of fear travel through my veins as I did the first evening he beat me unconscious. I felt immediately sick to my stomach and reached for the bottle at the edge of my desk to grab my water. I took a slow chug and decided to seal my fate. I needed to speak to Dimitri, alone, after school. For this, I decided to disregard his devious comment, which a random 8-year-old boy shouldn't know, nevertheless, I continued with the icebreaker exercise until the dismissal bell.

*RING DING DING. RING DING DING.* "Dimitri, may I speak to you for a few minutes?" I needed to know how this boy changed his entire appearance in an instant as well as knew extremely secretive information about my past. "Of course, I'm assuming you want to know what I meant, and I'm sorry I scared you so bad. Mom tells me not to use my 'gift' but I just thought he was so handsome, I wanted to try it on." I gave a brief puzzled expression, and he continued without a beat, "You see, I can look at a person, see their biggest fear, and then visually project that fear to just them using my own body. Whoever I reminded you of, your biggest fear was both him and the idea of you guys having a baby together. So, you saw what your guys' child together would look like." Strangely, it was almost as if his explanation made perfect sense, logically everything he said fit into place, and his odd remarks were supported by said explanation. Within almost an instant, I knew someone had to help this boy ensure he didn't lose his way. A capability of this magnitude could one day be labeled as criminal, if not properly raised and nurtured. "Dimitri, what do you do with your talent?" I inquired rather unintentionally and passive-aggressively. "It just sits, I could use it against people who I know are doing bad things, but Mommy says never to use it anywhere unless it's the only thing to save my life", he exclaimed rather matter-of-factly.

I explained to him that I believed with proper practice and control, he could maybe use his ability to stop bad guys and bullies, by showing them their own worst fears. I made sure it was incredibly clear that I would never support him using his ability to harm an innocent individual, but he shouldn't just hide away such a unique capability.

Over the next few months I grew extremely close to Dimitri, and his mother too. I joined them once a week for dinner, and Dimitri and I practiced going through situations he could safely and productively use his ability. We were able to make a small compromise, with him pretending my fear is clowns, to practice without me having to see *him*. It was nearing the end of the school year, and I hadn't given much thought to what would happen when Dimitri left my class. This school year he had already stopped two bullies from picking on a much smaller boy from a class down the hall and told me how he stopped a mean woman from yelling at a young girl at the gas station near his house. I was so proud of how much he had grown specifically, as well as my class entirely.

It was already hot in the classroom on this sunny June morning leaving me with no choice but to open the windows before 7 am. I was both exhilarated and saddened for my last day with this batch of second graders. As a teacher, it was part of the job. The children become your own for a full nine out of twelve months in a calendar year, and then you must pass them along to someone else, in a different hallway, and one day they'll go to an entirely new school. It would be especially hard to say goodbye to Dimitri, I had thought of him as somewhat of a nephew and loved him like family. I wanted to have the privilege of watching him grow and mature and see all that he will one day be capable of, both with and without his powers in consideration. Dimitri's mother, Rosita, had been my first friend in this new city, and I was more

than pleased to have the privilege of joining Taco Tuesday for the past 5 months. Nonetheless, I doubted our friendship would last if I wasn't his teacher any longer.

*RING DING DING. RING DING DING.* I immediately fought back the urge for tears as my kiddos began pouring into my room for the last time. "Good Morning ladies and gentlemen. I'm so excited to see all of your bright little faces today, although I'm also a bit sad that this will be our last time being together like this." I intended to make only a shy frown, to show them I wasn't happy about it, but my face fell in true sadness and they all could tell I meant it from the heart. "Don't worry Miss Mohanagan, we'll come see you on our way to lunch!" "And on our way to the bus!" "And before the bell rings in the morning!" "And I'll tell my teacher I'm going to the bathroom, and sneak down here to see you." I knew without needing to look which student had made the last comment, "Dimitri, you are never allowed to lie to any teacher, because I will not only snitch you out, I'll lock you out of my classroom." I chuckled at the end, knowing he would be more upset with being locked out than being ratted out. The class followed, erupting with laughter as well, Dimitri too.

*"LOCKDOWN, LOCKDOWN, LOCKDOWN! THIS IS NOT A DRILL. LOCKDOWN, LOCKDOWN, LOCKDOWN! SHOOTER IN THE BUILDING"* It was the very moment every teacher feared the most, coming to life inside their very own school. *BANG.* Before I even had the chance to begin the lockdown procedure my classroom door was kicked off the hinges, flying into the room and slamming into my body. I crashed to the ground in an instant, covered in shards of glass from the window of the door breaking on me. Seamlessly and without hesitation Dimitri arose from his desk and started toward the intruder, eyes locked onto his target. The assailant lifted his weapon, and pointed it towards Dimitri, "NOOOO! DIMITRI MOVE!" I was

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now floating in and out of consciousness. *BANG*. That was gunfire. I opened my eyes to find the mystery gunman lying lifelessly on the classroom floor, weapon in hand. Slowly I began to process what had happened, whatever Dimitri showed him, whatever his biggest fear was, made him kill himself. Not a single child in that school was harmed, and not a single teacher other than myself. I felt a final moment of proudness in my young hero and then allowed my injuries to take my consciousness.



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