

MY NAME IS SKYWALKER

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In his eyes there was an
infinite sadness.

Manu Chao,
Next Stop: Hope

1. *An Unusual Discovery*

EVER since they built a large supermarket opposite her house, Raquel has enjoyed standing at the window, watching the street. She didn't like doing this before, she soon got bored, because nothing ever happened. It was as if real life was always somewhere else. But now there is a constant stream of cars coming and going. And around the shopping centre there is always a large number of people entering and leaving through its wide doors. The traffic never stops flowing, which reminds the girl of the tireless rows of ants that attracted her attention so much the previous summer, when she discovered the anthills in her grandmother's garden.

Raquel knows what the supermarket is like. She's been there often with her mother. The inside is huge, much bigger than it looks from the outside. And there's a whole range of different shops: the fishmonger's, the fruit stall, the butcher's, the cheese counter and bakery... Though most of all there's aisle after aisle of tall shelves full of all the products you could possibly imagine.

Going with her mother on Saturday mornings is one of Raquel's favourite outings. This is the day they do their weekly shop. They take one of the larger trolleys, which the girl steers down the different aisles, avoiding the other trolleys, while her mother searches on the shelves for the milk, water, juice, lentils, eggs and other things they need. By the end the trolley is so full they have to push it between them to get it to one of the tills.

Raquel always watches the checkout girl with amazement. She can't believe the speed with which she takes everything her mother



has chosen and passes it in front of the black glass rectangle that goes “beep, beep” and shows the cost of each product on the screen. Another shop assistant then gathers together the things and places them in large cardboard boxes, which she seals with skilful, repetitive movements like those of a robot. Later, when the boxes are delivered to their home, they have great fun opening them and taking out the contents, as if they were full of unexpected surprises.

On leaving the supermarket and emerging onto the street, the girl lifts her head and glances at the windows of their flat. This is a game she invented some time ago, when she was smaller and her mother always had to tell her which windows they were. She likes to imagine she is there as well, just at that moment, like a twin sister watching her through the windows of the sitting room. “Raquel in the street and Raquel at home,” she thinks. The idea makes her smile and she always gives the imaginary girl watching her from above a conspiratorial look.

One afternoon something drew the girl's attention. It wasn't the cars coming and going, looking for somewhere to park, nor the people entering and leaving through the doors of the supermarket as hurriedly as any other day. No, what caught her attention was a novelty she'd never noticed before: a man dressed in black trousers and a bright green and brown check jacket, standing still at the exit, amongst all that constant movement.

From where she was, Raquel could only see his back. But from time to time the man would twist his body to follow someone with his gaze and then she would briefly catch sight of his face. She saw he was holding a small box in his right hand. He must have been elderly because he didn't have much hair and it was starting to turn white.

What was so special about this man? To begin with, Raquel thought it was the way he

didn't move. He looked like a statue, standing still, surrounded by so much bustle. But, having watched him for some time, the girl realized there was another, stranger reason for her amazement.

It wasn't just the man who caught her attention, despite the loud jacket he was wearing. It had more to do with the people walking by. They went past as if this being didn't exist, as if he wasn't there, taking up room. This was what really surprised her: not a look or word or gesture. All the men and women walking past seemed to see right through him.

"He must be invisible," thought Raquel. She stood still for a moment, her eyes wide open, pondering the words that had just occurred to her. Then she took a closer look. Nothing! Nobody paid him the slightest bit of attention, not even a quick glance. There was no doubt about it, this man had to be invisible!

Excited by her sudden discovery, she impatiently called out for her mother.

“What is it, my dear? What’s all this noise about?” her mother asked as she came over to the window.

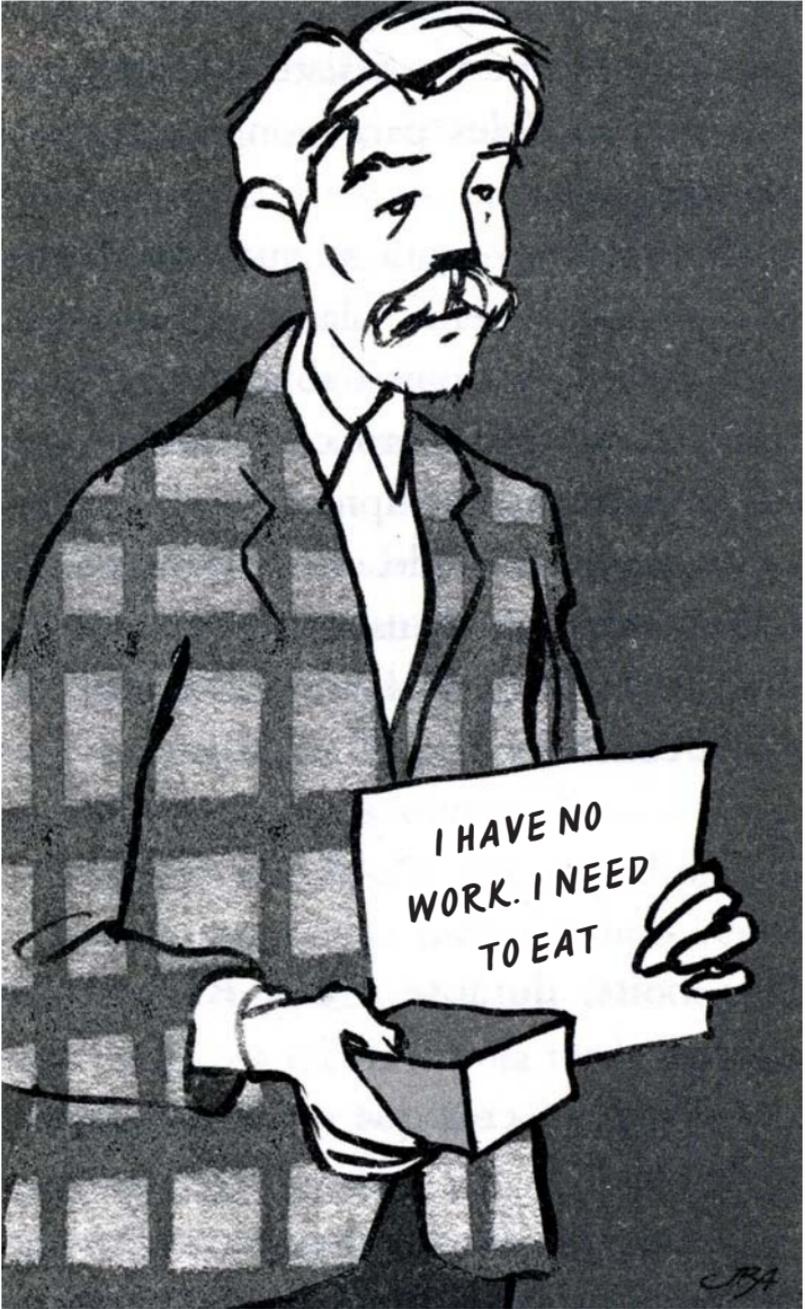
“Look, Mummy, look!” exclaimed Raquel. “Can you see that man standing there, on the pavement, next to the supermarket exit?”

“What man do you mean?” answered her mother, having glanced in that direction. “There are lots of people today, it’s obviously Monday.”

“The one in the green and brown check jacket, the one with white hair and his back to us. Can’t you see him?”

“White hair? What’s this then? A new game? No, no, I can’t see anybody with white hair,” her mother replied with a distracted look. “Please let me finish getting ready. I have to go out and do some shopping.”

Her mother couldn’t see him either! It must be true he was invisible, it couldn’t be a coincidence! Even so, just to be sure, Raquel carried on watching events down below: the motionless man, the crowds passing by indifferently. Only



a few small children stopped to look or turned their heads, overcoming the resistance of their parents, who pulled them along.

“He’s invisible, I’m sure of it,” thought the girl. Though obviously he wasn’t entirely invisible, there were other children who could see him. But, since they passed by so quickly, she felt her secret was safe. All things considered, it was lucky only the grown-ups couldn’t see him. “Otherwise I would never have discovered him myself,” thought Raquel with an air of triumph.

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In the evening, while they were having dinner, Raquel asked her father:

“Daddy, do you believe invisible people exist?”

Her father was somewhat taken aback. He placed his cutlery on the plate and looked from Raquel to his wife. Then, in a pleasant voice, he replied:

“What makes you say that? Have you been watching some film on TV?”

“No, I haven’t. I just wondered if you knew,” answered the girl.

“No, they don’t exist, or they exist only in books and films. How could they?” Her father fixed her with a stare and added, “Do you think Superman really flies? Or Spiderman jumps from skyscraper to skyscraper, albeit holding onto those strange threads of his? You really shouldn’t believe everything you see on television, I’ve told you before most of it’s made up.”

Then, addressing Raquel’s mother, he went on:

“It seems to me this girl’s watching too much television. She can’t stay sitting down all day, at school in the morning, at home in the afternoon. It’s not good for her. You should take her out to the park, let her play more.”

“But she has all the toys she needs! And I always let her go and play with the other girls in the patio each afternoon,” her mother defended

herself, annoyed at the rebuke. “It’s just she has an active imagination. Aren’t you the one stuffing her head full of fantasies, with all the stories you read?”

As on other occasions, her parents began to argue about whether they were raising their child in the right way or not. But this time Raquel paid little attention to what they were saying. She was now in possession of a very important secret, a secret no one else knew. All she had to do was go up to that man and make sure the discovery she’d made that afternoon was real.