

grey and **Red**.

Through the window should have shown the smiling city lights: scintillating and silver, like starlight. The captivating sight, however, was concealed by heavy drapes, leaving the apartment drowning in darkness.

Formerly colored in brilliant hues of crimson, the now frigid apartment was bleak, at best. Opening the door with a sigh, a woman sluggishly scuffled to turn on the light, removing gleaming, new black stilettos from dull, worn feet. The woman's satin hair and porcelain skin contrasted with her tired, glazed eyes.

She mindlessly prepared a flavorless meal of cold vegetables and soup. The smell of the half-thawed fat that rose to the top of her soup didn't seem to affect her. She didn't flinch as the insipid, oily vegetables slid down her throat. Instead of succumbing to her decades-old habit of avoiding the dishes, she got up from dinner and started on them without hesitation. The last few years, she found it more cumbersome to avoid the task than to simply do it, never mind what she thought about it.

She prepared for bed in the same absent fashion: she prudently took care of her appearance and physical state, yet mentally, she drew a blank. She went to sleep at the same time every night and woke up at the same time every morning as if denying change its chance to touch her. Each day was far too similar to the last to cause her any stress or pain, yet the monotonous routine that shielded her from suffering also shielded her from any chance at joy.

Her impassioned reasons to wake up every morning, struggling not to silence the alarm had at some point disintegrated, leaving confused emptiness in their wake. She woke up without both struggle and intention. She had no personal feelings regarding the matter, she simply fell into habit.

Moreover, for some strange reason, in the past few years, the vivid city she had loved so dearly felt like washed-out white noise to her. All the vibrancy melded together like mud in her eyes.

Then there was the job she fought tooth and nail for. The one for which she endured, agonized, anguished, anticipated, and waited. For what did she fight so desperately anyway? Lately, all she could notice was how much sitting all day made her back hurt. And Ibuprofen didn't seem to do anything for the stubborn headaches that she got

from the fluorescent office lights. They were too bright, but working without them was too dark. It was hard to focus, but her head was empty.

On an overcast evening, she stepped out from her office building, only to be greeted by a face full of wind and rain. Her wet hair adamantly clung to her skin—despite her efforts to clear it from her eyes—leaving her uncomfortable and irritated. She internally scolded herself for not bringing an umbrella. Despite her mental chiding, she begrudgingly stepped out into the rain. The cold rain. Why hadn't she checked the weather that morning?

She made her way down the street, slippery and wet. Distracted, she unintentionally stepped on a drainage grate. The heel of her shoe skidded into one of the holes in the device, and she let out a surprised gasp as her body shifted downward suddenly.

She steeled herself and attempted to pull her foot out of the grate, only to break her foot out of the shoe, ripping her ankle strap and leaving the shoe firmly stuck in place. She greeted the sight with a blank stare, and reluctantly stooped to pick up her defiant shoe. Turning to continue walking, she stopped, having caught a glimpse of something in the corner of her eye: her reflection.

She surveyed her image in the pools of rainwater on the street. Weary and weak, her likeness stared back at her, as clearly as if through a looking glass. A strange feeling rushed over her. All at once, she felt hypnotized. The tired eyes in her reflection shifted in her mind to the more vivacious ones that would have stared at her ten years ago.

She recalled all the warmth she had felt then. Homecooked dinners in place of unappealing leftovers, encouraging hugs from her grandmother, and friendships she had taken for granted. It felt like she stood there forever, trapped in time. When she finally pulled herself out of the trance, she was already home. She couldn't remember walking back, much less typing her passcode.

Something about looking, truly, scrutinizing herself had ignited a long-forgotten feeling: disappointment. Of course, she was disappointed in things, but it was always in muted tones. It had been years since she felt such awful, aching disappointment. The kind that comes in deep shades of cold magenta: red and blue muddled together, distorted and angry.

She spent hours just sitting on the floor—like she hadn't done in years—thinking. As the nostalgia slowly washed away, her thoughts became clear. She rushed to throw the

drapes open, and once again let herself be enchanted by the beautiful city; the view that she kept shut closed, and the lights she had tried to put out.

She could finally put her feelings into words; she was regretful. She wondered how many skies she had missed, how many things she could've, but hadn't experienced.

Now, she too had time to look up at the sky, to talk to a stranger in the park, to catch up with a friend, and to buy flowers on her way home from work.

So when she woke up the next morning, it was to a new sound. On her way to work, she made sure to notice the city's striking pigments swirling together in the rain like watercolor. She heard the sound of chattering on the streets instead of dismissing it as something similar to TV static. She looked at people's faces and learned their names. She ate dinner over animated conversation. Her dull, rigid world returned to one soaked in saturated tones, and full of vigor.

Oh, and she had started to avoid the dishes again.