

Painting the Sky

When she was very young, she skimmed her finger through the wet paint, swirling and blending and mixing the hues, simply with the point of her fingers. How easily the paint parted to make way for each of her strokes, and how the paint streamed past her finger, in waves of pinks and blues and a multitude of others. The colours of the world, and her finger flew past them as easily as a knife through water.

And *she* flew through time as easily as a knife in water. With a blink of an eye, she was being reprimanded for drawing in class, the braids down her back accidentally tipped with blue pigment. Take a breath, and she was dreaming upside down on the grass, staring at the clouds and the stars at the same time. Glance at your watch, and she was slashing at a piece of paper with a brush, the medium mixing with her tears as she recreated her first heartbreak into a language she understood. Whenever the time, whatever the emotion, she was present, constant, vibrant. Always the artist, whether she sang songs of pain or cried tears of joy.

Then something happened. Maybe it was just the wrong stroke, or the wrong colour, on the wrong canvas, Whatever happened, she was drained, the colours dripping away until her life became a monochrome mess. She'd given up her brush for a monthly rectangle of paper. That too, was a mix of tints and shades, and gray, gray, gray.

The hands that once skimmed were still upon a cold stone counter. The eyes that once were bright were dark as storm clouds. The mind that once dreamed was silently screaming for the colours to save her.

Does art imitate life, or does life imitate art?

It was her memories that saved her. Countless hours spent watching the world outside her window had left her feeling as if the universe was a person too. One whose tears and

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laughter and screams were as public as a newspaper, yet barely anyone dared to listen, making it quite personal as well.

She remembered lying sick in her bed at her old home, too weak to pick up her faithful pencil, watching through the window beside her as a dark and violent storm raged all around her outside, the persecuted raindrops splattering against the panes. The rain siphoned, then quieted, its erratic arrhythmia slowing to the soft heartbeat of a fading life. The sky shone pale gold.

The raindrops slowly dropped to ground, as they were meant to.

While lying sleeplessly in bed, she once had rested her burning head against the cool glass. The window was badly grouted, and little shafts of cool air blew over her hair, like a motherly caress telling her she'd be well again soon. She couldn't see the air, but if she had to guess, she would have thought it was silvery white, like fairy snow.

She remembered sneaking out of her house at five in the morning, not to visit her boyfriend's house or go on some unsolicited and most likely illegal adventure that some other girls her age would have done, but oh no. She -the rebellious, disobedient, and hormonal teenager she was- snuck out to her backyard to watch the sky.

At first she felt hopeless. The sky was as black as the bottom of the sea, the amaranthine darkness poked with pinpricks of light. Everything was dark, and she realized that without the sun, this was the natural state of the universe. Dark, gaping, and infinite. It could swallow her whole and still be hungry for breakfast, lunch and dinner. To this universe she was nothing, just a single letter in the thickest book you can imagine.

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Then came the sun.

It came gradually, like a smile on a depressed face. It stained the sky dark purple, then navy blue, while the east horizon gleamed pale gold, blood red, bright orange, colouring the clouds the colour of cotton candy and the sky brighter with each minute. The sun didn't ride in on chariots of fire, or fly to its rightful position after it defeated the moon in an epic battle; it walked regally onto the sky as an actress does on stage, glad the moon had fought its battle and eager to take over observing the world. She realized, gazing up as day clashed with the night, stars clashed with the clouds, that the sun was also a star, one of the numerous and countless lights filling up the dark sky she had seen minutes before. And yet so much relies upon the existence of this star. Even if was as insignificant to the universe as a single star, she could be the sun of her own universe. If she could guess the colour of her star, her sun, she would say ice blue.

She remembered, how after she and her first boyfriend had broken up, she was devastated, broken, completely torn. She thought her first breakup would be like the movies, sobbing and stuffing ice cream in her face while bingeing on rom-coms and reality shows.

It was not like the movies.

She'd wake up on the first few days of summer, and simply lie in bed. That is all. Lie in bed and think and think and overthink, until the lines dividing what was real and what wasn't and what

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could've and what should've became blurred and she found herself breathless from sheer regret and her teeth grinding in searing rage.

She'd smashed a glass, and instead of sweeping it up, she tried putting it back together before realizing some of the pieces had turned to dust, and the cuts her fingers would start to sting, she'd notice them then. She'd realize it was hopeless to try in the first place, and she had just hurt herself trying to fix what couldn't be fixed.

Her friends had had enough. They had convinced her increasingly worried parent to let them take her to the seaside for a few days. She'll be perfectly safe, they said. She'll come back better than ever. Besides, she was almost eighteen, she can take care of herself. She needs reason. Comfort. Celebration.

For the first day, she was quiet and brooding, simply staring out the train window and watching the greenery blur past while her friends chatted amiably, occasionally glancing at her to make sure she wasn't crying.

When they finally arrived at the hotel, they had surprised her with a seaview room. Her face turned as bright as the broken sunlight reaching through the clouds on that day. Exhausted from the journey, no one felt like doing much, so they stayed in the lounge in the lobby. Not her. She sat and stared out at the sun setting over the sea. She could see the better parts of the world now, a stark contrast to the world her boyfriend had left her in. This better world she was in right now was entirely her own, the pinks and oranges and blues reflected back in an ethereal, watery copy. The best of both worlds. She didn't get up from that spot by the window, until she had shown her friends the first thing she had drawn in a month that wasn't slathered

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in red: a spitting image of the sunset outside. She had enjoyed the rest of her vacation. If she had to guess the colour of the sunset against the sea, she would have said deep gold.

The girl woke up in her urban apartment. Her sleepless eyes wandered the cracks on her wall. And wouldn't you like to know what she did.

She thought. And she thought of the most beautiful thoughts she had thought of since she was young.

There was still colour left in the world. And even if there wasn't, there was still gray. It just needed a bit of a chance.

She rose from her bed, got on her knees, and reached under it. She pulled out a large can of standard gray paint, and two small cans of white and black paint respectively.

She would give her gray a chance.

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She invited her friends and mother over for dinner. The first thing they saw was a mural on the back wall, of a gray storm, a gray sun, and a gray sea crowding to be seen. She had accented them with flecks of silvery white, ice blue, and deep gold.