Colour Blind

Peter peers through the curtains. The maples gleam autumn life, and their leaves play along the road. Below the window, his car is still blue, and next door’s house remains brick-red. But, up ahead, fifty yards from his driveway, everything is grey.

‘How is it?’ Beth asks from the sofa.

The curtains fall shut. ‘It’s nearly here.’

There are no tears, but a quiet acceptance. The warning came weeks ago. Peter can still remember the panic in the office when the news broke. People tearing outside, dropping their lives to get home, perhaps to execute a feeble attempt to outrun an unknown horror. Most of his colleagues have children who deserve to see spring after winter, New Year fireworks, and the rainbow colours of ice cream melting in a bowl. He, like them, seldom paused to study the world. There was always something more pressing to do.

Now, the colours of the world are fading, and they can’t look anymore.

Beth takes his hand, drawing him away from the window. He stares at her, struck by the beauty of her twin ocean-blue eyes. A colour so enchanting, he felt seasick when they first met on a boat bound for Naples.

‘It doesn’t hurt, does it?’

She means the colours, he suspects. He shakes his head. ‘I think it’s like falling asleep.’

‘Like falling asleep.’

They stay close, staring at the blank TV. Their reflection mirrors a monochromatic afterlife.

Beth groans and turns her head away. Understanding her despair, Peter removes an orange blanket from behind the sofa, and drapes it over the screen. It’s frayed at the corners where the cat used to play with it.

‘What about now?’ she asks.

He forks two fingers through the curtains. ‘Max and Hannah’s house is gone.’

Still no tears, but it hurts. Worse, he knows he can’t protect her. His list of contingencies all proved worthless. Taking shelter in the basement sounded like the most promising escape, but it led to another horror. Having enough food and water. How to dispose rubbish? How to exist? They were human, and humans needed colour.

Beth squeezes his hand. The twin oceans shining sadness. ‘Can we go upstairs?’

Peter nods, and leads her up, turning the lights off. He’s about to flick the bedroom light on when Beth lowers his hand.

‘This is our last time,’ she says. ‘I don’t want to see them change.’

They are gentle, and this time Peter does cry. Silently, and every soft kiss feels more heart-breaking than the last. He imagines a cabin far in the north, where the pines reach for God. Beth is there, and everything is wonderful.

A hand slips into his, breaking the illusion. ‘Peter?’

‘Yes?’

‘How is it now?’

He looks at her, and then peeks outside.

‘What is it?’

‘The maple’s gone,’ he says.

There is a pause, and then a weary breath.

‘And the car?’

He doesn’t need to answer.

A banner of weak sunlight shines her face, and Peter sees her tears. He takes her in his arms, and weeps. He can’t help it.

‘I love you, Peter,’ she says.

‘I love you, Beth.’

They stay like this for a minute, but he’s wishing for an eternity. Take everything if you have to. Wipe everything, but leave us be. Just a little longer.

‘Beth?’

No answer.

He holds her tighter. ‘Beth?’

He’s about to ask again when his nerves freeze, like a switch has been turned.

Beth’s eyes are grey.

End.