

Plastic Eyes

She stared out the window, maybe at the rooftops, maybe at nothing. Her eyes glazed over, giving the same look as her childhood stuffed animal, plastic eyes only reflecting.

“This place is gorgeous! Can I move into the guest room? Hell, I’ll take the closet if I could enjoy this view every morning.”

Teagan didn’t break her trance, giving no answer but silence. She didn’t feel that West’s statement was worth an answer, or apparently even acknowledgement. She never entertained pointless conversation, just let it bleed out on the floor between the conversers. She waited still, not changing the subject, just floating weightlessly in that empty space in her mind waiting for West to offer up another dying animal of conversation, waiting for either another mess to clean up or a new pet.

“What time does Jules work until again?”

Teagan drew in a deep breath, giving the impression that the question was insulting, almost taking too much from her to answer.

“6:00p.m.”

“Well, can I help you unpack a little or something in the meantime?”

“Yes, grab that one,” pointing to a box in the corner of the room so full of natural light there was no need for secondary lighting of any kind. She almost refused the help because the thought of other people touching her stuff made her squirm, but she knew she should take advantage of the help while it was here, regardless of the quality of conversation provided by it.

Working together but not close, they made quite a dent in the mass of boxes covering the grey hardwood floors. She grimaced every time her eyes caught a glimpse of it. It was the one downside, grey floors.

“Nothing in a house should be grey,” she had told Jules while they were hunting for the perfect apartment. Jules responded by offering solutions and Teagan’s eyes had become the same plastic orbs as they were today.

A couple hours had passed and Teagan had lost interest in unpacking, checking her phone for when Jules would be off. West had gone on a rant about parking in the city, as if Teagan knew nothing of this struggle.

“I’m so jealous of these ceilings!” West was fishing for attention, seeing that Teagan had gone plastic again, knowing his words were bouncing right off those eyes.

“They’re great, yeah, I know.”

Teagan didn’t pay attention to his answer, putting away the knives she just unpacked. She looked at each of them a few seconds, deep in thought. She ran her middle finger along the blade of the cheese knife, slowly, lightly. She stuck it against the wood block on the wall. She grabbed the Santoku knife next, staring at the blade for a couple seconds longer. She ran the same middle finger along the much larger, sharper blade, applying more pressure this time. Her skin depressed under the blade, becoming red. A drop of blood appeared from the area under the tip of the knife. She set it down slowly, plastic eyes reflecting red.

“Oh my god, did you cut yourself? You should be more careful putting those knives away, clumsy!”

West frantically grabbed a paper towel and tossed it at her. She took it because that was the normal thing to do. She suddenly became aware of her surroundings. The tinge of pain made her aware of her fingers again. She shot a quick look at West to see if he thought anything of her. West would never think anything bad of her, though. From the moment he saw those deep blue eyes, he was hopelessly obsessed. His heart was broken after a few interactions with her when

he realized she didn't have eyes for him, let alone any man. He stayed close, though. Like a puppy looking at its owner, so West looked at Teagan, doe eyes filled with admiration and love. All throughout college, his gaze remained fixed on her, however far off she looked in different directions. He couldn't let himself entertain the thought of another love interest, not with Teagan always in the forefront of his delusional mind. He held no contempt for Jules, either, as long as jealousy didn't count. He was rather fond of Jules as well and liked to see Teagan happy, imagining in his mind that that happiness was directed at him. Although he knew where he stood with her, it didn't matter to West. Teagan was his in one way or another, whether she saw it the same or not.

Jules finally arrived home and with her also came the color in Teagan's cheeks. They giggled together about their days like girls in elementary school talking about their crushes, except it was each other and they were adults. West waited for them to separate from their bubble, staring at the floor, unable to watch the scene.

They went out for drinks that night, all three of them. It was an old building, or the basement of one, rather. There was a neon sign flashing OPEN in the window. Even then, they almost passed it because the window was at ground level and the stairs were on the back side of the building. There was one little sign for the place, "The Coffeehouse Here" with an arrow pointing southwest, sitting at the landing of the black iron staircase. Exposed brick, dim lighting, and a full bar gave them relief that they had finally found the place and the satisfaction that it was a good choice. They ordered their drinks, a martini and two beers, and took seats at three vintage armchairs set in a semi-circle in the empty corner of the bar. They had three rounds, paced quite slowly. Conversation about the city and work and pets filled the space between the sips and floated up into the air, creating a dense cloud of nothingness in their little corner of the bar.

Teagan broke from the conversation, looking at the smoke, at the nothing, breathing it in, breathing it out. She studied the fissures in the brick wall next to her, running her fingers along the roughness. The cut from earlier became longer as she dragged her skin along the spikes of brick, making that spot a more vibrant red. She breathed in, breathed out, dragging her fingers along the pale mortar between the bricks, making the reds meet. She did this until she could no longer see. The smoke became too thick and she couldn't breathe. Her eyes stung. She liked the burn because she hadn't felt it in a while, but she was becoming irritated by her impaired vision and looked to her companions to share her annoyance. West made a remark about his dog, then they both took a sip on round three and looked in her direction.

"Are you feeling okay, love?" Jules leaned forward, touching her partner's knee in concern.

Teagan could feel her finger sticky with blood and put it down against her black jeans.

"My eyes are burning from the smoke," she said, exasperated.

"What smoke, Tea?"

Teagan blinked twice, staring into the bright eyes of her partner, and looked around. No smoke.

Just red bricks. Red mortar.

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West visited a little too often for Teagan's liking. Almost everyone was annoying to her after too much time together. Jules was the only one to stay interesting to her. So, naturally she didn't let her go. West, though, he was getting annoying. Even though he was Teagan's friend from college, he and Jules seemed to get along better sometimes. That always seemed to happen.

Teagan never minded much, though. Oftentimes, she liked watching the conversation happen more than actually being part of it. She had to remind herself to contribute something from time to time, a force shoving her into the dialogue every few minutes to make her seem normal,

participating in this game people like to play. West was here again, here for dinner. Teagan was in the same spot she seemed to always find herself in the apartment, staring out the one corner window that got the most sunlight, rooftops below her. She opened the window this time, closed her eyes, let the cool autumn breeze dance on her skin. When she opened her eyes, they were plastic again. West was trying to ask her something. A voice yelled at her, not West's, but her own.

"Answer the damn question," it said.

"What did you say?"

"I asked if you remembered that one party we went to freshman year that was in a place like this. Someone nearly fell out one of the windows because they were trying to feed a damn pigeon on the ledge. Do you remember that?"

"Yes," she said blankly, thinking of the pigeon. She wondered if it actually got the Dorito chip that dumbass was trying to feed it. And if so, did it even like it?

"You looked really good that night."

West's head was down, but his eyes were looking at Teagan, sheepish.

Teagan didn't think twice about his comment and said thanks absentmindedly. She paced the perimeter of the apartment, looking for something. West sighed from a lack of attention he so desperately craved from her. Her mind was always on something else. This time, she was thinking about the pigeon still. She let the memory of that night come back and flood her senses. She felt the same wave of anxiety that had flooded her veins rush back again. The music, the rapid conversation, the flashing lights, the spurting of the alcohol from its tap, red plastic cups clattering against red plastic cups, too-tight jeans compressing her thighs, cheap cologne suffocating her nose, phones ding, nails clicking, refrigerator humming, wind blowing wings

flappingwingsflappingwingsflapping. She envied the bird. It was free from that testosterone and alcohol thick air, free to sit on the other side of the window, to breathe in the outside air and feel no reservations about gripping the edge of a windowsill so high above the ground. She let everything else fall away and now only felt the wind in her hair, no longer clutching the edge, flying freely away from all of it.

Jules arrived a few minutes later and they sat down for dinner soon after. The conversation seemed to progress in the same way it always did. Her attention was on Jules, examining every dip and curve of her face, watching her lips move. She could feel his eyes on her but dismissed it like she always did. She added in a comment about the cat, then looked past her companions to the window. She blinked twice and found herself standing in front of it, plastic eyes against glass. She wondered how she got here and if she had been here forever. She wondered if this window would become her oven, if it would take her as the oven took Ms. Plath, one crazy woman after another. West left after two drinks. Two drinks too many, Teagan thought. She didn't hate him, just liked her time alone with Jules.

“Are you feeling okay?” Jules asked her later that night, as they both read books in bed.

“Yes, just a little off lately. I think it's just the season.” She gave her partner an appeasing smile, soft eyes alive when talking with her.

“Okay, I just worry about you.”

“I know, and I love you for that. But I'm okay, promise.” The last word came out with a crack Teagan hoped Jules wouldn't notice. She put her arm around Jules and pulled her in to her chest, stroking her hair, taking a deep breath, eyes wet. It wasn't that she was purposely trying to withhold her feelings from Jules, she just didn't know how to express them properly and only tears came when that was the case. She loved Jules deeply and she was the only one who had

ever made Teagan feel alive, happy. A slight smile formed on the edge of her lips as she remembered the first time she saw Jules. Teagan had just graduated from college and seeing that she would have more free time than before, she had started to explore some of her artistic hobbies that she hadn't been able to cultivate since high school. She stumbled upon a pottery class taking a wrong turn down a street she walked all the time. She was headed to her favorite coffee shop but was looking at all of the windows on the historical buildings and took a wrong turn, or right, perhaps. She saw a small shop with walls covered in art supplies and shelves of sculptures. She had stopped to look at a bust of Aphrodite when a pair of hands reached around the goddess's chest and grabbed her off the shelf. What was looking back at her was the most magnificent pair of dark chocolate eyes with a flowing canopy of shiny black curls billowing in all directions. Both of them gave a startled jump and then proceeded to laugh at themselves. The raven-haired beauty in the window display motioned for Teagan to come in and Jules gave her a free lesson.

"On the house", she said with a chuckle, "for the emotional distress."

They both laughed and laughed some more through the hour-long pottery session. Teagan had done this before but acted as if she had forgotten exactly how to throw the clay in a proper manner. Jules sat across from her, her gaze intense. She leaned forward, reached her hands out, and looked up into Teagan's eyes.

"Is this okay?" she asked in a low voice, eyes remaining fixed on hers.

Teagan said yes, matching the intensity of her pottery partner's gaze and tone. She remembered Jules' hands touching hers for the first time, fingers on top of fingers, just as they were interlocked now, in bed. Her pottery piece was a small mug they still had displayed on a kitchen shelf. It was not something Teagan would normally be proud of, but the asymmetrical shape of

the cup was due to her lack of attention to the process and rather focus on the teacher. So, she liked it and all its lopsided likeness for what it represented. She let her eyes close, finally relaxed enough to sleep thanks to the fond memories of her partner. She kissed Jules' forehead, watched her shuffle, nestling deeper into her grasp, and let herself drift off.

Later that night, the branches knocked against the windows, waiting for her to come. The knocking grew louder, and Teagan's plastic eyes shot open. She was at the window in an instant. The wind whispered in her ear. The window was open. It whistled louder and she wondered how in the world Jules was not woken by this noise. The window ledge was not wide enough for her to sit in, but she somehow made it work. The paring knife was in her hand. She looked to the kitchen, trying to remember when she was in there, why she had the knife. She lifted it up and the blade sparkled in the moonlight. She looked up at the source of the light and saw the moon in its full beauty, wide white eye staring at her wide white eyes.

The next morning, Jules pointed out that the screen in the window was broken. Teagan said that the cat must have done it. She truly thought that, too, as she sliced the strawberries for their parfaits. They ate breakfast and drank their coffee, Teagan's black and Jules's with creamer. They had quiet, intimate conversation about their plans for the weekend, careful not to wake each other up too fast. The cat rubbed its face against Teagan's and then proceeded to figure-eight between the couple's legs until the appropriate amount of attention was given to him. Jules left for work a little later. Teagan didn't go in until noon, so she made another cup of coffee and shuffled through the apartment getting ready slowly. She was at the window and saw a clean cut in the screen on the right edge about four inches long. She traced her fingers along the broken edges of the screen and slid them through the slit. Her eyes flashed and she quickly pulled them back, taking a couple steps away from the window. She shook herself and turned to go to the

bathroom. Her reflection stared at her in the mirror. She swept a brush across the apples of her cheeks. It gave her the color back that she lost when Jules left that morning. She brushed through her eyebrows and curled her lashes. She grabbed the paring knife off the counter and began to draw her eyeliner. Starting at the outer corner of her right eye, she dragged the knife upward in a slanting motion toward the end of her eyebrow. She proceeded with the left eye. Blood ran across her plastic pupils and down her blushed cheeks. She smiled and let her eyes bleed while she chose what she was going to wear for the day, jeans and a hoodie, simple and easy. She stepped back into the bathroom and wiped her face. She swept a brush across the apples of her cheeks. It gave her the color back that she lost when Jules left that morning. She brushed through her eyebrows and curled her lashes. She applied mascara, seeing that the eyeliner was already done.

On her work break, she took a walk through the downtown streets. She looked up. She looked up so much her neck was cramping. She looked at every single window that she passed, the details on the trim, the shutters or lack of shutters, the plants hanging from inside. She had stopped walking. She didn't remember how long ago that was, how long she had been standing in this one spot, staring up. Teagan's eyes were fixed on one particular window in the corner of a tall building. Plastic eyes fixed on a high window with a broken screen. She had been staring so long her eyes hurt. She was staring into the sun. If she stared any longer, it felt like maybe her plastic eyes would melt. Maybe it would feel good. She stood staring at the window until she saw someone staring back at her. Plastic eyes met plastic eyes and she realized she was looking at herself. Window her broke their plastic gaze and looked at the rooftops. The version of herself on the ground craned her neck to try to see herself better. A small blade stuck out from the screen, dragging to the bottom of the window. A hand reached through, then another. She

could feel the cool breeze on her arms from below. A loud horn rang through her ears and her burning eyes finally turned from the window. She was in the middle of the street. She stepped closer to the building to get out of the path of the vehicle. She looked back up at the window. The curtains were blowing towards the night as arms reaching out to catch her. She looked back down again and saw herself on the ground. Not startled or shocked by the contorted figure laying on the cobblestone streets, she stepped calmly towards herself. Her eyes were bleeding again. Teagan wiped the blood from both sets of their eyes, laying down slowly next to herself. She was under the window, plastic eyes looking up.