

Red

by Rachel Arcadi

Thursday, December 17th, 2015

It was late autumn by the time the snow came. Spiralling down from the periwinkle sky, it coated the world in a cold, white ash.

5:26 am. I was calm, fighting against the tiresome thoughts of an insomniac brain. I hadn't slept in three days. I hadn't had adequate sleep in three months. On that particular night, however, I had taken to watching the snow. It was light, illuminated by the streetlamp that had yet to turn off in the early morning gloom.

This is my punishment, I thought. This is what I get in return.

Shifting under the weight of my duvet, now suffocatingly heavy, I turned my back on the snow and forced myself to look at the chaos I had caused, the act for which I was being punished. In the dark they resembled rag-dolls: limbs bent at unnatural angles, lifeless, glassy eyes staring at nothing. This was my creation. I stifled a laugh. The final string had been cut, and I was too busy unravelling to care.

Monday, October 5th, 2015

Our apartment was composed of cashmere and candyfloss; a palate of pastels not even a thunderstorm could dampen. It was Monday morning. I slept in our queen-sized bed, arms and legs sprawled starfish, taking up most of the space. To my left, the city stirred. The hum of taxicabs and disgruntled commuters grew louder with each passing minute. And then there was coffee. The bittersweet scent curled its way beneath the covers, and although I was only half awake, I sighed happily to myself.

“Gooooood morning, America! This is Cole Redmond broadcasting to you live from New York!” When I opened my eyes, Cole was sitting cross-legged on the bed in front of me. His dusty brown hair fell lopsided over his face, and he flashed me one of his signature cool-guy grins. In one hand he held a mug of coffee.

“Funny, I don’t remember changing my name to America. I must’ve been pretty wasted last night,” I said. I sat up on my forearms and took the mug from him.

“Come on Elle, get dressed. I can’t be late today.”

“I thought my name was America?” I laughed. Cole rolled his eyes.

In forty-five minutes we were running to the subway station, hands woven together, inseparable. Half a bagel flopped from my mouth as I struggled to tuck my blouse into my skirt. I was a whirlwind in a trench coat.

“I can’t believe you still haven’t perfected warp-speed breakfast eating,” Cole nudged. We were running down the stairs now, nearly tripping on our own feet as we made a mad dash for the turnstiles. Perhaps luck was on our side that day, for both our trains arrived at the same time. He went north, I went south.

Just as I turned to face my side of the platform, he slid an arm around my waist and pulled me to him.

“You weren’t even gonna say goodbye?” His eyes were heavy, tormenting. He brushed back a strand of my hair and tilted my head so that my lips would meet his. I dropped the piece of bagel I was holding in favour of his shirt. Word of advice: if you’re going to make out on a subway platform at eight in the morning, you might as well do it properly.

Thursday, December 17th, 2015

At 7:15am, I rolled out of bed. I didn’t flinch when my bare feet touched the blood-drenched carpet, nor when I was forced to step over the two lifeless bodies that made their home on my apartment floor... my apartment. Not our apartment. Not anymore.

Throwing on a sweater, I tracked red footprints into the bathroom. I wore the same outfit as the night before: salt and pepper sweatpants and a blue flannel button-up that belonged to Cole. Blood splatter dried brown, staining the fabric permanently. I clenched my jaw and closed my eyes. If I can’t see it, it isn’t there.

After taking a long, hot shower, I changed into different clothes; clothes that didn’t feel like death or look like him. And as hard as I tried to ignore it, I couldn’t help but catch my reflection in the vanity mirror. My hair was short and choppy now. I had cut it myself after Cole and I had our last fight. It fell messily over my forehead, each red strand weighed down with water. My face was pale, and the hollows of my cheeks were more prominent than ever. I tore myself away.

I moved into the kitchen and began making coffee. Only, this time I couldn’t take it anymore. I couldn’t take the silence. I couldn’t take that goddamn awful smell clinging to every particle of my being. I couldn’t take what I had become. Tears began forming in my eyes as I grabbed a marble rolling pin, swung my arm back, and slammed it into the glass coffee pot still heating on the element. Shards flew in every direction. I shattered like the glass.

Friday November 6th, 2015

He must’ve thought I was stupid. Just another dumb bitch for him to screw when he wasn’t too busy screwing her. Of course I knew. All the signs were there. He began working late nights and going out for ‘drinks’ with his ‘friends’. He would forget to make me coffee, insist

that I pull my weight in the morning instead of lounging around in bed making him late. He stopped holding my hand.

To anyone else, this would seem like insufficient proof. Tons of married couples fall out of the honeymoon phase after a few years of marriage, but not us. Not Cole. For two years straight he woke me up with a coffee and a smile, and I loved him for it. I loved him for everything other men weren't. Perhaps that's why it hit me so hard.

The sky was pitch black when Cole pushed his way into our apartment, dropping his messenger bag at the door. His hair was ruffled, and his shirt was no longer tucked into his pants. He looked like a frat boy.

"It's almost 2 am Ellie, why are you still up?" he asked, stripping off his jacket. "Are you feeling okay? Do you want me to make you something to drink?" Looking at him like that, it was hard to believe he was nearly twenty-eight. For a moment, I thought that maybe I was wrong. Maybe this was the same Cole who wrote me love songs when we were freshmen in college, the same Cole who punched Henry Marcel for calling me a 'feminist whore'. And then Cole turned around.

A deep red lipstick stain curled over his shirt collar and onto the back of his neck. It was barely smudged. The woman who put it there wasn't afraid of me. In fact, she was sending me a message.

Wednesday December 16th, 2015

It was my best friend's birthday. She was turning thirty and I decided, quite last minute, to fly down to Chicago to surprise her. Cole and I weren't exactly poor, but money wasn't something we could afford to throw around. As a result, I hadn't seen her in three years. And, to be entirely honest, her birthday wasn't the only reason I needed to go. Cole was cheating on me. His eyes lit up when I told him I was going to Chicago, when I told him he would have the apartment to himself for a good week and a half. His eyes lit up. I wanted to hurt him.

I've never been a saint, but this was a different feeling. This was a violence I didn't know existed within me. It scared me. I needed to get away, but by the time my flight was due to take off, snow fell heavy on the runway, blurring vision, grounding planes. I had no choice but to go back home. I went to the parking lot to get my car.

Driving against the snowstorm, I remembered something. I remembered the gun. It was Cole's idea. There had been a spike in crime around our neighbourhood a few months ago, and he thought I needed protection. That was our first huge argument. I hated guns. After watching *Bowling for Columbine*, I spent hours on the phone advocating for stricter gun laws in our state.

Leaning over to the glove compartment, I clicked it open and reached inside. Eyes still on the road, my fist closed around the metallic barrel. Don't, I thought.

But when I got home, the voice in my head could not be as easily silenced. I sat in my car for what felt like hours but was likely only a matter minutes. The snow-hushed street looked beautiful under a pastel pink sky. I wanted to paint it. I wanted to hold on to it, to Cole, to me.

I unlocked our apartment door and walked inside. And suddenly, there was everything. There was black lingerie, and a woman, bare breasted and pressed against my husband. There was the gun in my hand, and a smile on my lips. There were panicked eyes, pleading apologies, words I didn't care enough to hear.

Perhaps they were too inexperienced in the realm of playing dirty-rotten-no-good-cheating spouses to leave each other without so much as a parting kiss. Perhaps they would still be alive had they done any number of things differently. Perhaps not.

BAM!

The gunshot rung out like a- well, like a gunshot. And all of sudden there was red. Red carpets and red sheets and red walls where once there had been only pastel shades of blue and pink. And there was laughter. Maniacal laughter. The kind you'd expect to hear within the confines of a 19th century asylum, not a place as peaceful in design as this. It took me a moment to realize that I was the one laughing.

"That felt magnificent," I rolled my eyes back in feigned bliss to place emphasis on the 'magnificent.' I needed him to know what I was capable of.

In a second it was over. The woman lay crumpled on the floor, blonde hair staining red, as Cole stood above her lifeless body. Fear and confusion fought for dominance in his expression.

"You didn't have to kill her," he said each word slowly, tears welling in his eyes.

"Yeah... well, you didn't have to fuck her."

I pulled the trigger, and the world went black.