

Oversaturation

The colors started visiting me again. They came first as shadows, faint glimmers pooling under doors, the suggestion of movement in the corner of my eye. Then they grew bold. At night I'd wake to feel Red sitting on the edge of my bed, knocking its heels against the frame like a restless child. Blue drifted lazily across the ceiling, leaving wet footprints of light. Yellow hummed under my pillow as if keeping watch. They didn't speak, but I understood their taunts. I had been clean too long, and they wanted me back.

Once, months ago, I had almost reached a place where the colors settled naturally, closer to where they were before I started using, where they didn't flash or pulse or crowd me. The world then had a soft, steady palette — the gentle green of streetlights through rain, the burnt gold of toast in the morning, the unremarkable pink inside my own palms. Recovery had felt a bit like learning to see again: slow, unhurried, ordinary. My world was muted, watered down in comparison to the bright and loud of the colors I had gotten addicted to. But slowly, the gray of my life had begun to brighten on its own. I was working my way back to a normal, healthy hue, one that didn't vibrate or cling, one that didn't need fixing or numbing or feeding. I almost made it. Almost. Because patience is a fragile muscle, and mine had begun to rip. I needed more.

The night I relapsed, I didn't choose the colors; they chose me. Red leaned in close, pressing its warm forehead to mine until my vision blurred. Yellow crawled up my spine, whispering brightness against my neck. Blue wrapped its arms around my ribs in a slow squeeze that felt like mercy. And then the gray fell away beneath me like a damp sheet sliding off a bed. The first hit of color was always ecstasy. Dreamlike. Impossible. The world burst open. My veins glowed. My thoughts turned liquid and brilliant. Red dripped from the lampshade, pooling on the floor in syrupy puddles I was tempted to taste. Blue coiled around my wrists like ribbons. Yellow

danced circles around my head so fast I could feel the heat of it, buzzing like a trapped sun. Every emotion sharpened. Every sound glittered. I felt alive in ways the gray had made me forget were possible. Color was intoxicating because it didn't ask me to wait for anything. It didn't ask me to heal. It gave everything at once. I loved it. For a little while, I loved it more than I loved myself. But oversaturation crept in, and I was drowning in the colors.

After hours, or days, or seconds, time was no longer linear. Blue began to pace. Its footsteps made the walls pulse in and out like lungs, causing my body to shake. Red sank beneath the floorboards, dragging half my thoughts with it, leaving gaps in my memory. Yellow grew too bright to look at directly. Its grip around my spine tightened, leaving me immobile on my bed. The colors turned restless, then angry. They bled into each other. They smeared across my vision. They screamed in frequencies my bones could feel. My emotions started slipping out of sync. My body forgot how to stay still. Panic came in waves of violet static. Shadows stretched long and thin, whispering things I didn't want to understand. I realized then what I always realize too late: these colors were never meant to stay. Their love burns. Their brightness blinds. Their warmth devours. And the more I clung to them, the more I disappeared inside them.

I thought of the gray then, the heavy, honest quiet of sobriety. How stable it had begun to feel. How gently it had been gathering its own muted colors for me. How close I had been to the normal hue of life: not too bright, not too dull, a palette I could actually live in. I missed it enough to cry. But missing isn't choosing.

Eventually, the colors thinned. Not out of mercy, but exhaustion. They peeled away from me in strips, leaving me shaking, half-dreaming, half-dying. When they receded, the world dimmed into a chalky half-light — not quite gray, not quite color, a liminal hallway of the mind.

I found myself standing at its center. To my left: the gray — quiet, demanding, slow. The path where real color returns inch by inch, patient and calm. The only place recovery lives. To my right: the colors — vivid, immediate, merciless. The place where I feel everything all at once, even if it kills me slowly.

The two sides breathed in unison, waiting. My body hurt for the gray. My mind ached for the color. And my soul — if I still had one — trembled between them.