

Dragons Painting

By Daphne Ziegenfelder

The girl raises her hand to shade her eyes from the rising sun. It is a pale sun, a tired one. It is upset with the world, with having to pass by all the greys, the black smoke, the death, the sorrow. It misses the green, the white clouds, the colors, the laughter. When will it once again raise its head to a bright dawn, one that calls the birds to come back and sing their song, a sunrise that whispers to the land, the sky, and the stars that there is hope, that not all is lost?

Never, is the answer. For how can the birds that choke on plastic and soot be reborn?

The girl continues her way, across the flat sidewalk and the steel buildings. She pulls up her mask, protecting her face against the violent smoke that threatens to choke the vulnerable. She stares up at the sky, willing the thick, black smog that reeks of death to part, to let some of the sun's rays touch the earth once more. When will color and light once again touch her city, the city that once was the home of festivals and love?

Never, is the answer. For how can the gentle, orange glow of paper lanterns be remade when the world revolves around metal?

The girl swirls, trying to recreate the magic and the laughter, but is only met with glares and confusion from the pedestrians trying to get past. She stops spinning and shoves her hands in her pockets out of embarrassment, rushing to get to her job - which is one of the main reasons for the blue sky's disappearance. The company she works for burns trash to make space for more steel buildings, releasing deadly smoke into the air. No one cleans up their trash anymore. It is just thrown in the street or out the window. When will people be responsible and pick up their trash and dispose of it properly?

Never, is the answer. For how could people gather up the motivation to do so when the sun cannot even shine its brightest and the stars are nonexistent?

The girl is across the street from her job now. Only a crosswalk and a traffic light stand between her and adding to the cause of the greying world. The light flashes green, a futile attempt to recreate a hue that once populated the earth. But another color sparkles in the corner of her eye, like a light in the dark. It is the color of the old sky and the old sea and the old snowy leaves before disaster struck and turned the earth black and brown and muddy. It is the color of freedom and sadness and tranquility. The girl spins on her toes, rushing to where the slight twinkle of hope rests. It lies outside an alley full of darkness and hidden secrets.

More splashes of pigment are on the ground, but they vary. There is the color of flashy clothes and vibrant coral, the color of royalty and magic, the color of love and passion. They lead the girl to a steel door leaking out paint at the bottom, paint that beckons color-starved souls to open it and unleash its mysteries. She clasps her hand against the handle, pulling it towards her. Inside she is pulled to a vibrant world full of life and imagination. It is not big, nor is it never-ending. It is not like her dreams, where the world would be born again, but it *is* enough for her to smile as bright as the sun, the moon, and the stars combined. The narrow hallway is covered from top to bottom in hot pinks, sea greens, sky blues, magic purples, passionate reds, hugging oranges, and joyful yellows, as if someone took buckets of paint and threw them onto the walls. As if someone had saved all the disappearing colors from the dying world and kept them in this one room. Light beckons the girl forward into the room, to get closer to the yellow-glowing far wall. She complies, her eyes full of wonder and hope. She presses her hands against the back wall, causing it to break, and then she falls.

She falls through a sky full of snake-like dragons. They dance around her, riding the wind and painting the air with the colors of energy and intelligence, power and light. But eventually, the dragons gather up to form a large circle below her. Two separate dragons act like the hands of a clock, spinning slowly before speeding up. The dance abruptly stops as the two dragons plummet down - as if the hands of the clock sprung - before the rest follow. The girl panics when a minute passes and she still cannot find her new friends. She has lost them to the black and grey abyss. A deafening roar made up of hundreds of dragons fills her ears. Flames of color quickly follow after, blistering her face and warming her soul. The vibrant fire surrounds her, filling her heart with hope before the light shatters and the world plunges into darkness.

The girl opens her eyes to a world full of grey and black and white, but it is no longer full of death, sorrow and suffocating smoke. She notices the hints of red blaring from the cars, the yellow-green vines of weeds crawling up through the cracks in the cement. She can smell the prideful irises and the loving carnations. No longer is she in a desolate world that lost its shine. No longer is she in a helpless world that lost its way. For she can just turn around to see the sun conducting the dragons to paint the sky in a silent goodbye, urging her on to bring the world back to its rightful self, full of color, clear skies, and laughter. She nods her head in affirmation. Never is no longer the answer.