

He's a businessman. Anonymous. Faceless. He hates his job, loathes it with passionless resentment, but goes to work everyday, commuting on crowded expressways full of men and women who resemble each other. They all look and act alike. No one seems to want to be different from the person in the cubicle or car next to him. His closet, spacious and well lit, is full of beautifully tailored black suits and black silk ties. He doesn't want to stand out, separate from the pack. He carefully hides his vulnerabilities, avoids them like he avoids color.

He married her because they had been sweethearts in high school. They had their picture taken for the yearbook once, her smiling blankly into the camera. He married her because everyone said they should, because it was time for him to get married. He had begun to loathe her as much as he loathed his job. She didn't understand him, only *more*. She wants more rooms and more furniture and more cars. She wants to own more and have it cost more than her neighbors and friends. They don't use all the rooms in the house. They couldn't possibly sit in all the chairs or switch on and off all the lamps. They have three times as many cars living in the garage as people living in the house. They don't drive them all. They couldn't possibly.

"I can see a clearing in the darkness," he says one day after fighting traffic for several hours to arrive at the empty house. "It wasn't always this dark, and it doesn't have to be. I know that now."

"What darkness?" she responds. He can already tell she doesn't care, and he's right. Her blouse matched the custom paint on the walls. Her arms are perfectly and artificially tanned in the sleeveless top.

"I saw a patch of blue sky today. For the first time in a long time, I remembered that blue existed, that there's color in the world. I think I can reach it, make it there, before it's too late."

"For what?"

"Before I stop feeling. Before I lose myself to all this. I think I'm buried under here, alive but slowly suffocating. So slowly I haven't noticed. But this isn't the life I wanted. This isn't what I dreamed of and wished for as a child."

She looks away from him and walks over to the couch and collapses beautifully in the expensive upholstery. She stares intently at the walls of the room, as if they hold a secret she might discover if she looks hard enough.

"I think I should have this room repainted," is her reply.

He looks at her, draped exquisitely on the couch, her shirt mating the walls she wants to repaint. Outside, the sky becomes a little darker. The patch of blue moves further toward the horizon, away from him and his house and his wife who matched the walls. He walks to the liquor cabinet and pours scotch into a crystal glass. The glass is heavy and old and expensive. The scotch has been aged 25 years. He leaves with his expensive glass full of expensive scotch and walks sedately to the linen drawer in the butler's pantry.

The scotch goes down in one smooth swallow. He doesn't flinch or grimace as he purposefully drops the glass to the floor. It crashes to the hand-painted Spanish tiles, tinkling a sweet melody as it shatters. The song continues as shreds of expensive glass, droplets of expensive scotch still clinging to them, fly into the air and hit the walls.

His feet, shod in expensive Italian leather shoes, crunch as he removes too white linen tablecloths from the drawer. Hand woven by indigenous people in some country they had visited. He vaguely thinks of child-slaves losing fingers in looms as he stumbles back to his wife, who hasn't moved. She isn't concerned by the noise of shattering crystal or interested in the odd look of his face or the children dying in a country far away.

Is he mistaken, or has more black taken over the sky, the blue strip even further away? Impossible to reach?

He steps up to her, wraps one cloth tightly around her face, cover her blank, uncaring eyes. He wraps the other even more tightly around his own.

"This is the best think I can do," he says. "For both of us."

-Carol Wukovits

