

*

Every night she dreamt of being an actress. Whenever she closed her eyes, she saw herself surrounded by massive buildings, living lives that had been written for her. The insistence of these dreams pushed her to move to the city. To her surprise, everything was bigger than in her head, so now she had to learn to dream bigger.

The city of Droom was built out of smooth, reflective materials. The locals made it their priority to get rid of textures; they preferred surfaces that reflected light. This made the city impressive — the size of buildings and objects felt dramatic when they became their own source of light.

The mirror city had a positive impact on her self-esteem. All the flash-like reflections of natural and artificial light felt like hungry camera shutters, like constantly being followed by a paparazzi. She had to wear black, heavily filtered sunglasses, just like everyone else in the city. They helped her avoid nosebleeds and the heavy migraines she had experienced since moving to Droom. It was okay — she had grown used to looking like a movie star.

**

The bleeding was insignificant at the beginning. After a night of heavy dreaming, she noticed that vessels in her eyes had popped. In her bathroom mirror, she examined them: the vessels looked swollen and were releasing tiny rivers of blood. She thought it had something to do with her fatigue. Her body was usually sensitive to change, so she took an aspirin, expecting her body to calm down. Swallowing the pill, she took a minute to look at the rest of her face. It had changed. She had new expression lines, sun marks had started to appear, and even some areas where her skin was dry. She sensed an awful feeling approaching, which she rapidly concealed with a sip of coffee.

It will go away — the feeling, the dreaming, and the blood in my eyes, she thought while stepping outside. The day was like any other. She felt relieved to be in a city where no one watched her — but where she still felt like the center of attention.

Her dreams had turned into an uninterrupted bright red. During her sleep, her body had changed — it had concentrated accumulations of heat discreetly stored in pockets inside herself. The heat moved to her brain, making her red dreams unbearable and pushing her to wake up.

Her eyes were totally red; everything around her looked like deep shades of red. She thought this was part of her dream, but when she opened her window, she faced the reddest, most tarnished city she had ever seen. As disoriented as she was, she noticed something else — she could see a thin layer of fading silhouettes, like ghosts. It looked like another city, probably one that was still there, holding its ground.

The blood in her eyes had turned into drops. She tightly closed her eyelids, behind which there was still a deep red. She stood still for a moment. In the middle of the red, a pair of eyes stared back at her. She screamed and opened her eyes with a strong sensation in her chest. She hadn't perceived it before, but now she realized she was being watched — for how long? And by whom?

She turned to the mirror in paranoia. This time, her face looked markedly older, and her bloody eyes crept her out. She cleaned the blood on her cheeks and rushed outside. She had barely spoken to anyone since she moved in, so she didn't know where to go.

The city of Droom was fading. The store was empty, the park was empty, the train station was empty. She was surrounded by massive buildings, but no one — except herself — was around.

She sat on the street, disoriented. Next to her, something reflected on the surface of a car — it was the same eyes as before. Steady lonely eyes looking directly into her own. As scared as she was, she didn't dare to move or blink. She waited for the blood in her eyes to accumulate and blur her vision. She was terrified to look deeper into those eyes and discover what else had faded away.