

# Fear

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October 14, 2012

Everything in the world has a distinctive colour. I am not talking about the colours the things actually show to you, when you look at them. Not about the green of the leaves on the apple tree in our garden, and not the white of the paintwork on my fathers house. Not even the red on my favourite cup in mums kitchen cupboard. I am talking about the real colours things have. They only reveal themselves when you are really, really quiet. If you concentrate, you can see the bright yellow that our house is wrapped in, or the heavy dark green that engulf the towns and villages along the seaside, even if you cannot see the ocean, from which it is pouring over the land. I call them my secret colours, because no one but me takes notice of them. Only very few places do not have a secret colour. One of these places is "Lennox House".

Ironically, I ended up in this place, because of the colours. You see, people have their colours too. Other than things, they change though. They pour out of people like water from an overfull barrel, and I think many of the colours I see are actually the remnants of colours visitors to a place left behind. If you look closely at people, their swirling colours form images, sometimes landscapes. If you are not careful, you can easily get lost in them. I think I was brought to Lennox House, because people found out about the colours and the images, and they where scared. They don't want me to see their colours and pictures, because they are afraid of what I might see. Probably they do not want to see them for themselves. And what do people do when they are afraid of something? They get rid of it, which in my case means: they tell the world you are insane. In the end even mum was convinced, that I must be a loony.

In silence two wardens take me into the building. Since mum released me from her final embrace, no one had spoken a word. The colours around their heads are as grey and dull as the building they're leading me into. I'll try to not look at their colours, that do not show anything but tristesse. These people are so caught-up in the greyness of this place, that I guess, once they leave my side, they would just vanish out of sight, becoming one with their surroundings. After a long journey through seemingly endless corridors, they lead me into a big hall, that looks like the auditorium in a school. On one end is a stage, where a grim, Victorian woman stands talking to a girl who sits on an old hospital bed, which seems to be the only prop on the stage. The scene is so surreal, that it is hard to distinguish the stage from the colours and images that surround the girls head. Apart from the girl and the woman on the stage, there are about a dozen other girls. Some are talking loudly to each other, a couple that has been sitting on a table a second ago gets up, and starts a fistfight. Others just sit and stare. No one, however is paying any attention to the strange performance on the stage.

I try to ignore the colours that emanate from them. They change and

swirl at sickening speed. Sometimes I can catch a glimpse at one of the images, most of them are either completely twisted, or very violent or both. I begin to feel nauseous. I close my eyes, but the images and swirling colours stay. I didn't always manage to shut them out, but in here, against this maelstrom of colours, I am helpless. The wardens don't see me tumble and fall, they are busy separating the two fighting girls. I fall, eyes still closed. Warm hands catch me before my head hits the ground. I open my eyes. Over me hovers the face of one of the girls. There is a look of confusion on her face, as if she cannot grasp, what she just did, or why. Her gaze is empty, and I'm not sure she sees me. Her colours begin to surround me, and form an image. I try to pull away, but I can't get up, because she's still holding me.

I find myself lying on the dusty ground of what seems to be a battlefield. The girl is kneeling beside me, holding my head. Her eyes are still clouded, but she looks as if she is trying to remember something, her mouth quivers, like she is about to speak, but no word comes from her lips. I softly touch her arm. "I'm alright."

She blinks surprised, then lets go off my head. I get up and take a look around. I stand in a barren landscape. In the distance smoke rising from the ruins of a building clouds the view. Somewhere I can see the skeleton of a tank. The few trees I spot are burnt and dead. Far on the horizon I can make out the edge of something that looks like a deep canyon.

I turn to the girl. She is very pretty, her fair-white hair frames a doll-like face, that is dominated by a pair of enormous blue eyes. She wears a blue school uniform, that reminds me of Japanese comics. But the heavy weapons-holster betrays the innocent look of the outfit. Around the waist, she wears a broad leather belt, that looks even more out of place than the holster, especially since the skirt she is wearing is so short, it reveals more of her upper thighs than I find appropriate. The belt holds a sheath from which I can see the handle of a katana. I notice that my outfit is not less ridiculous: Instead of the grey blouse and skirt I wore just a minute ago, I am wearing a heavy leather armor with a metal chest plate and bracers on my forearms. While I am still wondering about the strange appearance of the girl and my own tolkienesque appearance, she suddenly becomes alert. She tilts her head as if listening for a moment, then grabs me by the sleeve and starts running towards the smoking ruins. The chest plate is quite heavy, so I cannot keep up with her, but she doesn't wait. She dives behind the ruins of a wall, that used to be the brickwork of a larger house of some kind.

I'm a few seconds behind her, and let myself fall into the dust behind the wall. Panting from the weight of my armory, catch a breath. "Jeez, girl. What are we running from?", I ask. But instead of giving in answer, she continues to pull something from beneath the rubble. Then, suddenly, I

begin to hear it. A faint low pitched humming sound, like a distant thunder rolling. I assume she heard that sound earlier, and that is why she ran here. Now she has pulled a huge wooden box from the remainder of the house we're in, and beckons me toward her. Still panting, I get up, and walk over to her. "What is it?". Instead of an answer, she draws the katana, and hurls it down onto the rusty lock of the box. Sparks fly, and the lock snapped open with a loud click. She kicks open the box, and I look at an ancient Gatling gun, and quite a belt full of ammo attached to it. I notice the humming sound has become louder, I can now identify it as the sound of a heavy machine. And the heavy armament, the girl in front of me is equipping tells me, that the thing that approaches is not a tractor. She lifts the Gatling gun from the box, and pushes it into my arms. I almost drop the thing, so surprised am I. She looks at me enquiring, and points to the trigger. Then she points into the direction the sound is coming from, and flexes her finger, as if she was pulling a trigger, then looks at me again. She obviously wants me to shoot the thing that comes towards us. Although I have no idea what this is about, I give a thumbs up with one hand, to signal I understood.

The gun is surprisingly lightweight in my arms (or, in this world, I am stronger than usual). The girl draws the katana again, and gets down. I place myself under the shattered remains of what once must have been a window, and where is now only a gaping hole, put the gun's stand onto the sill, and wait.

Between the ruins of burnt houses, I can make out the approaching vehicle. It is a bizarre thing, that resembles a tank. It runs on chains, but above the rotating turret it is open, to allow space for the gigantic troll-like being that operates it. From the part of the troll I can see it is about 10 to 12 feet high. It wears a leather cap, like a World War I pilot, under which resides a pretty ugly face. I can see its enormous hands operating the machines levers. Around the tank marches a small army of creatures that look similar to the tank operator, except they are only about five feet tall, and armed with bayonets.

The strange procession approaches our position, and the closer they come, the uglier they appear to me. My companion nudges me, and points towards the tank. Then she jumps over the wall, and runs towards the tank. Only seconds after she crossed the wall, the small trolls spot her. At first their reaction is confused, their marching order is in shambles, but some of them begin to grab their bayonets and take aim. I realize that it is on me now, to stop them.

My hand clasps the handle of the gun, and I pull the trigger. The backfire almost knocks me over, and the noise is deafening. As the first two trolls in the front row fall, the marching order of the trolls dissolves into chaos. I

move the gun from left to right, trying to open a corridor that allows the girl to proceed towards the tank. She must be completely bonkers to take on that thing on her own, I am out of my mind sitting here with a bloody machine gun, trying to back her (on the other hand, I'm inside the mind of a girl who inhabits an asylum, and I'm a certified loony myself).

As the girl passes some trolls I missed, she strikes them down with the katana, using her left to pull out the automatic gun. As she reaches the flank of the tank, I notice that the heavy turret is rotating towards me. I try to concentrate my fire on the gigantic operator-troll. The girl managed to climb onto the moving truck, fending off two enemies, that try to follow her. I can see her stab one, and hit the other with the handle of her weapon. The troll falls off the tank, and lands right under the rattling chains. I try not to look at it.

The turret has almost turned into firing range, when my ammo runs out. The ear-battering noise stops, and the smoking barrel of the gun spins uselessly. "Shit." I dive into cover, as the turret opens fire. The wall explodes in a cloud of dust and falling rubble. I get up and run a few meters to find new cover. The last thing I can see is the girl climbing the back of the monster, with her sword raised.

Another blast from the turret hits my cover, only a few yards away from where I crouch. Too close for comfort. I hear a terrifying scream, and dare to glance over the wall. The tank is heading directly towards me, but the troll is not steering it anymore. Instead it had fallen forward, its heavy body lays over the controls, pushing forward the control levers. Blood runs over its ugly face from where its right eye was. I can see the handle of the katana sticking out of the wound. The girl is nowhere in sight. I get to my feet and run. The force of an explosion hits me to the ground again, when the tank crashes into the wall. I just have the time to think it's ammo must have blown up, before my face hits the ground, and the world around me fades.

I wake up, to find I'm back at the asylum. I lie on a bed in a small room. From beyond the door, I can hear the noise of the other girls, so the auditorium can't be far away. Next to the bed, stands the Victorian woman. Her colours are dark and brooding, and I am a little afraid of her. "Everything is alright dear", she says in a broad eastern European accent. "There's nothing here, that can harm you." Yeah, sure. Nothing. Just the twisted minds of two dozens of howling-mad girls.

She hands me a glass of water. "I am Mrs. Gorski.", the woman continues. "I am your therapist."

Great, just what I need. "I don't need therapy."

She smiles. Her smile looks genuine. "Why do you think you're here, then?"

I answer truthfully. "Because people are afraid of me." She tries not to look surprised. I'd love to know what they told her about me. "Why would they be afraid of you?", she asks. "I see their true colours.", I answer, still truthfully, although I have no idea why I should trust this woman. "Ah, I see." She nods, but it's obvious, that she has no idea, what I am talking about. Maybe it's better that way. Although I don't trust her, I begin to feel a strange sympathy for her. She is as colourless as this place, all I see around her is grey and black. I believe she is very lonely. I try to ignore the images that form around her. It's much easier than with the girls. She is extremely disciplined, so all that gets to the surface is the gray and black colour. Most images vanish as fast as they came. And yet, there is one figure, that comes up again and again. It's only the shadow of a man, or a grotesque imitation of such, but I am sure, I saw this image before. Right before I fainted, I guess. But I am pretty sure it didn't come from her.

I nip on the water. My initial fear from this woman is gone. I think there's more to fear from the demons that haunt her, then from the woman herself.

Because of the therapy-session with Mrs. Gorski, I missed dinner. She has the cook, an extremely obese and ugly character, who doesn't appear very bright, bring me some dinner. It looks and tastes like shit, but I force myself to eat at least a few spoonfuls, just not to bring Mrs. Gorski up against me. I still don't think, I can trust her, but she's probably the only friend I have in here.

I am lying on my bed now, in the dormitory. There are about 30 beds, 6 of which are empty. The room is clouded in the foul colours of the girls' nightmares, seeping into the walls and floor of the room. The room itself has a nightmarish vibe, the walls are in desperate need of some paint, and the beds are old metal beds, that seem to come from a bygone age. The sense of decay is nowhere in the house as present, as it is here. Especially with the clouds of nightmares from two dozens of lunatics screaming in their sleep.

At first it is not more than a faint feeling. A feeling, that I am not alone, that someone, something, is in the room with us. I see a fleeting motion in the corner of my eye, but when I turn, it's gone. I have the distinct feeling, someone is in the room with us, but I can't see him. Instead, I the clouds around the girls form images. It's not that I cannot see through the colours, that surround people. They are there, but normally, if I can lock out their images, I see what's behind them. I usually know, what is real, and what comes from someones mind. Then I see it. It is a thick oily liquid, oozing from a crack in the wall. It slowly flows down the wall, and towards the bed in which a brunette girl of about 12 years of age, is sleeping. It's hard

to see through the dim light, but the liquid is forming a puddle underneath the bed, and I think I can see it, covering the bedposts and slowly flowing upwards.

The space between her bed and mine is too dark, so I cannot see if the black stuff is creeping towards me too, but fear is creeping up my spine. When I see the liquid moving upwards, reaching the sheets of the sleeping girl, I think I should be getting up and wake her, shout or scream, but I feel petrified. Slowly, the black ooze begins to cover the sheets, and wrap the girl's body. I see how it reaches her hair.

"It isn't real. It isn't real. It isn't real.", I repeat the words in my mind, over and over, and I only notice, that I spoke them loud, when I hear the steps of bare feet beside my bed. With a shriek, I turn my head, just to see, that it is the girl who helped me this morning. Her fair hair is now open, instead of pigtails, and she's wearing the same nightgown that I'm wearing (most personal stuff is not allowed in here, and that includes nightwear).

She softly touches my lips with her finger, then slips under my sheets without a sound. The warmth of her body is soothing, and I feel the cold and petrifying fear retreat from my bones. She puts an arm around me, and I can feel her breath on my face. Her colours are golden-red, and I let myself sink into them without resisting.

I am on the barren plains again. The sun is about to set in the sky, covering the landscape a rusty red glow. A mild wind gently blows the last of the smoke from the ruins, and the place, despite the destruction, looks rather peaceful.

She sits beside me on the remains of a wall, wearing her odd schoolgirl uniform again (I'm in the same final fantasy gear as I was during my last visit). The sheath with the katana is placed carefully on the ground beside her. The beams of the setting sun are still warming, and I begin to feel more comfortable. In its own way, this place is really kind of beautiful, and I hope no trolls in steel tanks will disturb our calamity.

The girl doesn't seem to think so, she looks quite relaxed. I gently take her hand. "Thank you.", I say "For bringing me here." She turns to look at me, and I smile. She smiles back, it's a warm smile, which makes her even prettier. I can't help but touch her face. "You can't speak, can you?"

She doesn't answer, of course, not even shake her head. I think she understands me though. "What the hell happened to you?" I ask.

Her smile fades as she begins to concentrate. She still doesn't answer, but I think she tries to remember what the hell had happened to her, but she can't. Or maybe she can, but she can't put it together, to form an image. "Have you never been able to speak?". As I ask this, her gaze wanders longingly over to the mountainside. I can see snow capped mountains and I think in the distance I spot some green. But between us and those moun-

tains, is that huge canyon, I had seen this morning. We are much closer now, and only now I get an idea of how vast it is. I once saw a photograph of the Grand Canyon, and I'm sure you could easily lower the walls of it into this enormous tear in the earth's crust, and still have room to spare.

Suddenly, the realisation strikes me, why the beautiful girl is mute: "Your words... are over there, right? On the other side of that canyon." After all, I am wandering across the landscape of her mind, and that gigantic tear is a scar, or a wound. It keeps her from getting to the other side. Maybe it's something, that was done to her.

I suddenly feel sadness weighing heavily on my chest, and as the last beams of the red sun set behind the mountains, tears dwell in my eyes. As the night falls, I pull the girl into my arms, and cry for her. She absent-mindedly strokes my hair, while her gaze is still locked on the mountains.

I wake up from the soft touch of a hand, stroking my cheeks. I'm in my bed again, in my own nightdress. The blonde girl is sitting on my bedside, gently holding my face. She smiles thankfully. Then she lays her finger on my lips again, and sneaks back to her bed.

The first light of morning is gleaming through the gaps between the shutters, producing strange patterns on the opposite wall. I look at the bed opposite to mine, where the girl had been covered by that oil last night. It is empty!

At once I am wide awake. It must be around six, so in half an hour or so, they will wake us. I get out of bed, and look around. Most girls are fast asleep, only the blonde is awake. She's in her bed, looking at me curiously. When our eyes meet, she smiles shyly, and I smile back, and wave. The dreams of the girls seem to have soothed, for all I see are slowly swirling colours, with an image rising up from time to time, just to dissolve into the mist seconds later.

Then I turn my attention towards the bed. It is empty, and no traces of the black oily substance are to be seen. I check the crack in the wall. It's dry as the desert, and some plaster is flaking, but no black ooze. Did I just make this up? Was it just some of the colours from one of the girls' nightmares? But colours usually emanate out of people, and stick to the places, not the other way around. And this one didn't have the misty appearance of the usual colour. It was opaque and thick and slimy, just like something real. And the girl? Where is she? I know for certain that I did not make her up. Or did I?

I walk to the door, open it a crack and peer into the darkened corridor. It's empty. I step through the door, onto the corridor. I cannot say why I go out, but I feel like I have to get away from the empty bed, although I know that my chances of finding the girl in the huge house are limited.

I tread slowly along the corridor, my bare feet make no noise on the stone



floor. Maybe she's just in the bathroom. I peek into the bathroom, but it's empty. All the cabin doors are open, nobody is inside. I sneak further along the corridor, unsure what to do next. I know that I should not be here, and that I will probably get into trouble. And yet, I cannot stop myself from going on and looking for the little girl.

I head down the stairs, when I see a fleeting motion in the corner of my eye. I turn, but there is nothing there. I turn back to continue my descent downstairs, just to look into the face of a tall bearded figure. It's one of the wardens. "And what are we doing here?", he asks. It doesn't sound at all friendly.

"I.., I couldn't sleep.", I stammer, "I'm sorry. I better get back to bed." A dark cloud emerges from his head. It engulfs us both, shutting out all the light coming from the windows. It's getting very cold. "I.., really should go, I'm sorry." I feel the cold creeping up my spine. Shadowy images begin to form around me; images of a rather explicit and obscene nature. "Not so fast, lady!" He grabs my arm and pulls me towards him. His grip is so cold, it takes my breath away. He pulls me near him. I can smell his breath, and his excitement. He is enjoying this very much. I try to fight down my panic, but I lose. He starts to drag me further downstairs, when a familiar voice pierces through my fear. "Edward, what is going on?" It's Mrs. Gorski's voice.

"I found 'tis one, sneakin' 'round the house, Ma'am!", he bellows. "Let's see." Mrs. Gorski's face materializes in the darkness around me, which seems to lift a bit.

"Oh, it's Emily, isn't it? It's alright Edward, I handle this."

Reluctantly, the man lets go of my arm, hissing "I'm not done with you!", before he steps away from me. The moment his grip loosens, my legs turn into Jell-O, and I tumble into Mrs. Gorski's arms.

"Oh, sweetie, what happened to you?", she asks, while supporting me. Again, she surprises me. "I.. I had a nightmare.", I answer.

"You're the second girl having bad dreams tonight. Is it a full moon?", she cracks a smile, then turns to Edward. "It's OK, I'll take it from here."

"She was out of the dormitory! That's not allowed!", he protests.

"Yes, thank you Edward. I'll take it from here.", she fakes a smile. It is obvious, she doesn't like the man too much. Edward disappears downstairs, his colour trailing him, and taking the form of a disfigured man. . .

With him gone, warmth begins to return to my limbs, and I'm able to walk for myself again. "I am sorry, I know I'm not allowed outside the dormitory. I had a terrible nightmare, and there was this little girl. I dreamt something happened to her, and then she was gone."

"A yes, Marie. She had bad dreams too. She's in my office." Mrs. Gorski led me into her office. On the couch lies the girl. She seems unharmed, and there is no trace of the black goo on her. Her breath goes regularly; she's fast asleep.

Mrs. Gorski offers me a seat. “You know I cannot let you wander the house alone before waking hour,” she keeps her voice down, avoiding to disturb the girl. “It’s alright for this time, but don’t make this a habit, or you might find yourself doing extra shifts in the kitchen.”

“I understand, ma’am”, I answer. Then: “May I ask you something?”

“Go on, please.”

“Did something, well, evil happen in this house?”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know. A death maybe?”

She looks at me suspiciously. “Are you always this morbid?” Yeah, ever since I got here, lady.

“It’s just. I know, I’m crazy and stuff, but this is new. I keep seeing things. And not the things I’m here for.”

“Probably the new environment makes you feel uncomfortable. We will work this out, and you’ll feel better in no time.”

“I don’t think it was my imagination.” I answer, “I have not seen a disfigured man like that before.”

She looks at me surprised. “A disfigured man?”

“Yes. I’m pretty sure he was in the dormitory last night, and I saw him again on the stairs, just a few minutes ago.”

She looks very uncomfortable now. “Odd.” She mumbles to herself, and her colours get even darker, “that is the second time.” A second later, she has herself back under control. For a second, the mist around her head forms an image. It’s the face of a man, in his late twenties or early thirties. He looks a bit like a bloke from a 1930s gangster-movie, with his tiny eyes and small moustache. His gaze gives me the creeps. Even creepier, I know I have seen this face before. But where?

She is mustering me. “Don’t worry.”, she says, “This is a quite common symptom. You’re projecting your insecurities into an imaginary fiend. Keep in mind, that he is not real. I promise you, these images will go away.” I can tell from the way her colours are blurring, that she is lying. She tries so desperately to focus her mind on something else, that it is evident. Her facial expression is not giving away the turmoil inside her head, I have to give her credit for that. I have to remind myself, that she has no idea, I can see what’s in her head. So keep calm, and pretend you didn’t see it. Like always, just don’t let anyone know. It’s what brought you here.

“OK. I will see you in therapy, and it’s time for breakfast. Off you go, and I look after little Marie.” She gets up and walks toward the door. I follow her. At the door, she puts a hand on my shoulder. “Don’t worry, in this place, nothing will harm you.” While I am on my way back to the dormitory, I can’t shake the feeling, that she didn’t believe in her own words.

I enter the main hall, which also serves as a dining hall. The mood is

a bit lighter than yesterday, but it's still scaring me. I don't want to have another breakdown on my second day (is this really only my second day here?). I look around for the blonde girl, but then I spot Marie, who is just brought to a table by Mrs. Gorski. As Gorski leaves, I walk over to the girl, and take the seat beside her. "Hey!", I greet her. "Oh, hi", her answer comes with a lag. The colours around her are calm, although still mostly black and grey, and somewhat blurry. I bet she's heavily sedated.

"I heard you couldn't sleep?", I ask.

"Bad dreams.", she answers slowly, while stirring the spoon in her porridge.

"Yeah.", I return "me too. Was it the ugly man?"

"You've seen the ugly man?", she seems a bit more awake now.

"Just this morning. And I'm sure he was in the dormitory last night."

"So you can see him too?"

"I guess. And there was something else. Some strange black liquid?"

She shakes her head. "No idea."

"The man", I ask, "did he, you know, come for you?"

She nods. "He always comes for another girl. Some more often than others. In the end, he'll get you too. You'll see".

"What does he do to you?"

"He brings nightmares." Her voice is as calm as if she just talked about the weather.

"Yeah, he does." A pretty good idea of what kind those nightmares are forms in my mind.

After breakfast, we are having classes. The "lessons" however, are basically sitting around, doing stupid chores like copying a text, or acting. If there are people who are qualified to teach the sick, the traumatized and the mentally challenged, they are not here. I don't think they want us to learn more than cooking and cleaning ourselves. Obviously, we are useless: Broken girls, hardly any "marriage material". Great, welcome to the medieval.

My mood lightens up a bit as I spot the blond girl. I heard some of the girls (and most of the staff) call her "Babydoll", I think it's because of the pigtails and those enormous blue eyes, but maybe it is because she seems like a doll at times, unable to act on her own account as she is. No one except for me has an idea of the warrior that lurks inside this locked up mind.

I wish I could let myself fall into her dreams again. I've never actually enjoyed diving into a persons colors, before I met her. I think it is, because she opens up for me. I'm quite convinced that she is aware of my presence, when I walk her mind. I have -involuntary- visited the minds of many people, but none of was ever aware of my presence.

I suddenly feel a hand on my shoulder, and it's getting really cold. "Time for your medication", a male voice says.

I turn around. "Sorry, but I'm not on any drugs."

"Yes, you are." The man says, and grabs me by the arm, pushing a paper cup into my face. His grip hurts my arm. I look around, but nobody seemed to take notice of the situation. Babydoll is staring at the wall, and Mrs. Gorski is nowhere in sight. I think about screaming, but I doubt it would be any use. And it only will be one of those sedatives, so I'm going to spend the day sleeping. Not that I would miss anything interesting. I sigh, and take the paper cup. He produces a small white pill, and stuffs it into my mouth. As I swallow it, with the water from the cup, he lets go off me. I slump back into my seat, and wait for the world to turn black.

The colours around me swirl lazily. Every now and then I see an image surfacing, but it I'm feeling quite well. Whatever they gave me, it keeps most of the nightmares out. I begin to like this.

But of course, it can't last. Someone is coming up to me, and pulls me up from my seat. "You, come!" Whatever. The man (it's one of the wardens), leads me to the staircase in the hall. From downstairs, dark colours creep up and it's getting cold. Terribly cold. A tall figure appears. It's the figure of a man, his face is shrouded in the blackness he carries with him, and all I see are two glowing eyes, which seem to hang in midair under the hood of swirling blackness around him. All the lights around me fade, as he grabs my arms, and pulls me down the stairs.

"If they get you, Ed, I ain't kno' nothin'!", the other man says, and I can hear his footsteps fade in the distance.

The way down the stairs seems endless to me. I can see the little clouds of steam from the mans mouth, as his breath condenses in the cold. The walls around me become even murkier than usual. I don't know how much of that is his mind, and how much is real.

Maria's words echo in my head. "In the end, he'll get you too. You'll see." My legs turn into Jell-O. The man yells something at me as I slow, and pulls my hair. I am pushed through a steel door into a small room, my fear rising into sheer panic now. He pushes me into a chair, while I try to fight him off. My efforts are in vain. "Stop fighting, you little cat.", I swear I can hear him grinning. He brutally presses my arms down on the armrests. Long leather straps are pulled tight around my wrists. The chair is old and rotten, but his original purpose, to fixate patients, it still serves well. I can hear screams, and I think their mine. But no one comes to the rescue, neither Mrs. Gorski, nor Babydoll with her shiny katana.

With me strapped to the seat, he stands back, to look at his work. Satisfied, he comes closer again. I can smell his foul breath as he leans over me. His hand reaches for my body, and under his touch I feel hot tears

shooting into my eyes. I don't want to give him the satisfaction of crying, but I can't help it. The shades of black and grey that engulf him tighten around me, and the cold becomes unbearable. I can't breathe, while his ice-cold hand runs over my chest and downwards. Heavily, my tears splash down, over my blouse and onto his hands.

He starts; pulls back his hand. Through my blurred vision, I spot a black mark on his hand, where my tears fell. He looks at it, then into my face. His hand wipes the tears from my cheeks, leaving a black oily slick, where he touched my face. "What the fuck is that?", he asks. He wipes the stain on his hand in his pants. "Disgusting!"

He looks back up to me, shaking his head. Then he begins to unbutton my blouse. I am petrified. Unable to move, or even breathe, I stare at his legs. The stain of black oil on his pants begins to grow, and move upwards. First, I think it's an illusion, but it's undoubtedly moving. I can't stand it, so I look down. Just to see more black stuff pooling under my chair. If it is even possible to get more scared than I already am, the time for it is now. In sheer terror I recognize the oily substance. It's the same stuff, that covered little Maria last night. Looking around, I see it leaking from the walls all around me. I begin to fight my restraints, which makes my captor notice the situation. He is just about to open my blouse as he realizes the sticky liquid he is standing in.

"What the...?" He steps back, looking around. "What the fuck is that stuff?" He notices the now enormous stain on his pants, and tries to wipe it off with his hand. But the stuff just sticks to his hand, and begins crawling up his arms. "Are you doing this?", he asks me. And: "It's disgusting. Stop it."

He notices the stain on his pants, and tries to brush it off. But the stuff only sticks to his hand, and begins crawling upwards. I know what is about to happen, and fight my restraints even harder. "What is that stuff?", he demands, now with growing fear in his voice.

The oil is now leaking from every crack in the wall, and the ground pooling around his feet. It streams from my eyes, blurring my vision. He looks at me. "You bitch!", he cries, and sprints towards the door. But the door is locked, and slick black oil is seeping through the cracks, over the handle and onto his hands. He stumbles back towards me, now obviously panicking.

SLAP! He hits me in the face. Hard. For a moment, I think I'm about to pass out, but I get clearer. In panic, I try to struggle free. "What is that you bitch?", he screams. He hits me again, and lets loose a stream of swears and curses. I taste blood in my mouth.

It suddenly dawns upon me, what the black flood is. The realisation makes me feel quiet and calm. I raise my gaze to meet his, and say one single word: "Fear."

For a moment he just glares, while the black liquid crawls up his legs and his arms. When it reaches his chin, he begins to scream again. His curses and swears fade into a high pitched scream, as the liquid engulfs him entirely. The liquid streams into his mouth, drowning his scream in a gurgling sound, as he falls into the pool of oil at his feet.

I let the fear overwhelm me, flow out of me, and fall into the merciful blackness beyond.

When I come to, light is falling through a small light well behind me. The darkness is gone, and it's relatively warm. The black liquid is gone, and Edward lies on the floor at my feet, curled up in a fetal position. His hands are stained with blood, and he is quietly whimpering. His colors have faded to a misty grey, that is barely visible around him.

The door is open, and from the frame, I see the familiar orange-red glow from Babydoll. She comes running towards me, followed by Mrs. Gorski, who is paler than usual, and two wardens. While Babydoll begins to loosen my restraints, the wardens pick up Edward, and force him into a standing position. Blood trickles from his face, where he had clawed his own eyes out. They have carry, have drag him out of the room. From the floor I can hear his tormented wail a last time.

Hours later, I lay in my bed, slightly numbed by light sedatives. From my left, I can hear the sound of naked feet on the stone floor, then the rustle of my sheets, as Babydoll slips into my bed almost without a noise. I open my eyes and look into her colors. Orange-Red glows her sunset, and I happily and without fear five into it.

We sit, closely cuddled together on the remains of a brick wall, very close to the canyon. There is hardly any smoke on the battlefield tonight, and I'm confident her army of inner daemons would leave us in peace. I put my arm around her, and pull her close. I feel exhausted, but, for the time being, safe. She rests her head upon my shoulder, and together we watch the sun set, over the mountains on the other side.