

## Color Blind

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To Calvin, the world was grey, or some dozen or so varying shades of it. The granite of the squat, low buildings along the old industrial boulevard slid into the concrete sidewalks and framed the slightly darker asphalt, cracked from age and wear and patched up with blackish streaks that webbed down the street like a tar-spider's web. The buildings off in the distance – the high-rise skyline that gave the city 'character' – that rose well above the old warehouses and repurposed factories were silhouetted before the sun and blended together *en masse* as a great shadow over the city that blotched the light and obscured the brightening sky in the early morning. And, even as the sun rose and peaked the steely tops of the great skyscrapers, all it did was highlight the dead and dying grass and the greyed and naked trees. Winter had come, and with it had come the great slaughter of the greens and reds and rich purples that dotted the landscape with its oppressive chills and low, grey clouds.

And, Calvin thought as he kicked his car door shut and began his short march up to his office's front door, Winter wasn't even kind enough to bury her victims under a blanket of snow this far south. No, all Calvin got was ice and wind. It distressed him when he first moved down from Illinois, where snowstorms and blizzards weren't entirely uncommon, and he'd grown used to shoveling out his driveway every morning since he was old enough, in his parents' eyes, to use the shovel. He didn't exactly miss it, but he looked back on those winters with a nostalgic fondness – he wouldn't go back to them even if you paid him, which his parents didn't even do, but there was something familiar and tied to home in the memories.

Now, his mornings just constituted putting on a light coat, maybe covering his ears with a wool-knit hat, and trying not to fall down the stairs as he walked down from his third-story apartment on only half a cup of black coffee. He'd always hear his neighbors complaining about the cold steel steps against their bare paws every morning, but he was always more concerned about how steep and uneven they were.

He really didn't miss the shoveling – he didn't! – but the lack of ritual in the mornings left him wanting, as if he should have been doing *something*. It always nagged at him, gnawing at the back of his mind while he sat at his desk at work and tried to concentrate on the monitor in front of him. The feeling had faded with time – he figured it was just homesickness manifesting in the most awkward way he could imagine – and he actually grew to feel liberated now that snow was out of his life, but one thing always stayed the same.

At least Illinois had color in its winter! Sure, there was the bleached white snow, and sure, after a few hours when the snow was no longer fresh and hundreds of paws had plod on through it, it turned to a grey and slimy sludge, but there was color! The icy blue of the frozen lakes, the warm orange glow of the heath fires, the dark green hues of the evergreens – even in nature's slumber there was life.

But now, all Calvin saw when he looked out the window by his work desk was grey.

"Hey!"

Calvin snapped his head back towards his desktop's screen and hunched over his keyboard. He moved his fingers over his keyboard in an attempt to look busy and kept his ears up and attentive so as not to look guilty.

"No, Cal, I'm not yelling at you to get back to work."

Calvin looked up along the cubicle wall – felted grey – and leveled his eyes with the pointed, black nose poking over the top. "What do you want, Amy?"

The grey vixen's muzzle twisted into a weary smile. "You seem down."

"Just tired," he said. It wasn't a complete lie.

"I've seen your tired," Amy said. She disappeared behind the cubicle wall and walked around Calvin's little desk-box to stand beside him. "Tired is you before your second cup of coffee."

"Only on one and a half," Calvin said. He raised his mug up without turning to look at her.

"Don't be smart with me, kid," she grabbed the back of his chair and spun him around to face her. She hunched down in front of him, leveling her head with his own. "Your productivity's plummeted and you spend more time looking out the window than you do looking at your computer. I know you well enough to know this isn't the kind of employee you are."

Calvin's ears flattened against his skull. He tried to look away, but wherever his eyes went, Amy followed. "I'm sorry. I'll try to step it up," he said.

"No, that's ..." Amy sighed. "That's not what I'm trying to say. I'm not here as your boss, right now." She pulled her ID card off of her black cardigan and stuffed it into her pants pocket. "There, see? Not your boss right now, just your friend."

"I don't need a friend right now," Calvin said. He tried to swivel around again to face his desk, but Amy spun him back.

"Like hell you don't," she said. "When's the last time you've gone out, Cal?"

Calvin narrowed his eyes in a scowl. "That's a bit personal, Boss."

"Not your boss right now," she said.

"Then I still don't have to answer your question," Calvin said.

Amy looked like she was about to say something, but the gears behind her eyes seemed to grind to a halt as her face hardened. She set her jaw and straightened her back instead, brushing down her front to smooth out her clothes. "Fine." She pulled her ID out and clipped it back into place over her left breast. "I don't know what's been making you act this way, but if you're going to be like this, Mr. Clearwater, then so be it. Shape up before I have to report you." At that, she turned on her heels and walked away, her silvery tail lashing against the wall of his cubicle with erratic thumps as she marched past.

Calvin turned back to his desk and planted his elbows on either side of his keyboard, burying his head in his paws with a heavy sigh. He tried to look up to his computer screen, but the glint of a picture frame to his right caught his eye. It wasn't anything particularly special, just a picture of himself and his older brother and sister. They were all smiling about something – he

couldn't really remember the circumstance – and he had his arm around both of their shoulders as they were caught mid-step by the camera.

What had happened to that? That smile and that mirth? He picked the picture up and held it in front of his nose, looking deeply into the face of his past. He looked so much lighter, and not just in weight. His eyes, his nose, his face, his fur – they all shone with a sort of light and brightness he hadn't seen in years. Not in his new home, poor and grey, and certainly not in himself, equally poor and grey. It was almost alien, looking at himself. That wasn't the face he saw in the mirror, that wasn't the smile he flashed people anymore, and those weren't the eyes – the ones full of wonder and color and joy – that he saw through anymore.

He stood up with a sigh and stretched his arms and back, popping his spine as he twisted and pivoted his torso. He kicked his chair under his desk and turned to walk out of his little grey box. He paused for only a moment to look back at the picture then walked down the aisle, past the dozens and dozens of other little grey boxes to stand in front of Amy's office door. He rapped on the door with a knuckle a few times, opened the door open without waiting for a response, and poked his head through the crack.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I know," Amy said. She was sitting behind her plain, pine desk with her back to the wall-sized window. Her thin, vulpine body was framed by the spindly skyscrapers, and only worked to make her seem that much taller and thinner. "Come on in," she said, motioning towards the chair across from her desk.

Calvin slid through the cracked door and kicked it shut with the heel of his foot, swishing his tail out of the way. He tried to make it look like a wag for Amy's sake, but the appendage just hung limply behind him as he crossed the room and flopped into the offered chair.

They sat in silence for a while. Amy checked her desktop every once in a while as an email popped up with a little chime, but kept her ears cupped towards Calvin even while she typed a quick reply. She looked about to say something after the minutes stretched on, but Calvin cut in quickly before she could open her mouth. "Months."

Amy stopped her black-tipped fingers in mid-sentence to look up at him. "Come again?"

"You asked when the last time I'd gone out was," Calvin said. "It's been months."

Amy folded her arms across her desk and fixed her yellow eyes on Calvin. "Do you mean with just friends, or on a date?"

"Friends? Months. On a date?" Calvin sighed. "Years. Not since I moved down here."

The fox's eyes went wide. "Years?" She shook her head and sat back in her chair. "Calvin, you're telling me that, for the past two years I've known you, you've not had one Hobbes to keep you company?"

Calvin couldn't help but smile at that. "No, I think I've had enough people try to tell me that comfortable self-preservation's the way to go as it is."

"You know what I mean," Amy said, but she smiled back as well. "Well, if you don't have a beau to keep you busy in the evenings, and you've not spent time with friends in months, what do you do when you're not working?"

“Read,” Calvin said. “Cook. Clean. Browse internet forums. Sometimes *post* on internet forums.” He motioned to the window behind her, “Sight see.”

Amy’s brow furrowed. “Do you leave the house at all?”

“I run out of food,” Calvin said. “Though, I have been looking into those food delivery services lately ...”

“Shit, kid,” Amy groaned. She pressed her fingers into her eyes and ran them back along her face. “That’s not even funny.”

“You’re right,” Calvin said. “I need my weekly grocery store trips to keep my socialized, lets I go feral.” He tugged at his black tie and popped his starched white collar up. “Might even be starting, already. Careful, Amy.”

“I will report you,” Amy said.

“No you won’t, and for what? Dress code violation?” Calvin straightened himself up and leaned forward in his chair, resting his elbows on the fox’s desk as he looked into her grey-furred face. “Who would you harass if HR came down here and moved me to another floor?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Amy said. “Mike’s a wolf too, you know. And straight, so it’d be even more fun.”

“Christ,” Calvin said, an honest to god chuckle escaping his throat. “Maybe I should be the one reporting *you*.”

“You won’t,” Amy said. “Who would make you smile if I got moved to another floor?”

“I dunno,” Calvin said. The shadow of a grin danced over his muzzle. “I don’t think Mike’s as straight as you think he is.”

“I’ve been drinking with him before,” Amy said. “Trust me.” She glanced back to her computer as it chimed at her again. “Hello .... One second, Cal.” She turned back to her computer and started typing away again, this time her ears pointed towards her computer screen in absolute attention. She finished the email she had left off on then moved onto another seamlessly. It only took her a few minutes to type out a reply, but by the time she turned back to Calvin he’d already pulled his phone out and was fiddling with something on the touch screen. “So,” she said, “Speaking of drinks, you’re coming with me to the bar tonight.”

Calvin snapped his attention back to the fox. “I’m doing what, now?”

“Drinks,” Amy said. “I’m taking you out. My treat.”

“I really don’t think so,” Calvin said. He looked down at his grey-furred toes as he scraped his claws through the beige carpet. “I mean, I appreciate it, but ... I don’t really drink, and I’m not really dressed for going out in public, and I haven’t showered since yesterday morning ...”

“Cal,” Amy cut in. “It’s a bar, not an upper-class ballroom social.”

“I’m just not sure,” Calvin said. He lowered his ears and picked at the fur along the back of his paw.

“Do you have anything better to do tonight?”

“Better?” Calvin sighed. He thought of his little economy apartment just a few miles away: the squat little brick building, the freezing stairs, the terrible internet connection, the lousy cell reception, the complex’s complete unwillingness to fix his dying heater; he thought of the lonely nights filled with online chat rooms (from just chatting to what virtual tail he could get) and Netflix marathons and the hours spent naked on his bed watching internet porn after the previous two failed to entertain him. He thought of all the nights he’d spent with only his paw, and how it’d been all he’d known for years now. (Had he even tried to find somebody after moving down here?)

So, did he have anything “better” to do? Well, it was a Thursday. He always had plans for Thursday nights. Thursday was the night where he’d pull up his DVR and watch through all his recorded shows from the week. He didn’t have much in the way of food money, but he could always afford one night of popcorn and a pint of mint chocolate ice cream a week. And so he’d stay up till ten at night watching the four shows he cared about as he gorged himself on buttery salt and sugar, all the while telling himself he’d finally work up the motivation to get that gym membership to work off his sedentary life filled with cheap and filling foods (But ultimately not caring by the next morning, because, after all, who would he be losing weight for?). And, once his shows were done and his bowls were empty, he’d sprawl out on the couch and fall asleep in his underclothing, his tee and boxers sticky and oily from the night’s “dinner.”

Calvin looked down at himself and had to hold in a groan. He had a plan, like always, but was it better than what could happen? He tried to picture what the worst outcome could be, and all he saw was him coming home early, rejected and alone, and crying into his ice cream while he watched bad soap operas. Which, he noted bitterly, was all he did anyways; he’d just start his DVR marathon a few hours later than usual, worst comes to worst.

“No,” Calvin finally said. “I suppose I don’t have anything better to do.”

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The bar was only about a twenty minute walk from the office, and despite Calvin’s protests Amy had convinced him the walk and the “fresh” air would do him some good. He stuck to the side of the sidewalk closest to the buildings and kept his ears low against his head as the five o’clock traffic buzzed around him like a low, dull throb. He kept his eyes downcast as they walked, watching his grey feet against the concrete with the occasional black tipped tail flitting into view as Amy pressed on ahead.

When the bar first came into view, Calvin had thought Amy had taken a wrong turn or was pulling some prank on him. He’d expected some sort of industrial building made of cement or cinder block that stood no more than one story with flashy, gaudy neon lights announcing some cheesy name in bright purple, green, and yellow. He expected the stench of alcohol and destitution to hang in the air and to see more than a few homeless – or people who *looked* like homeless – people staggering around after a long afternoon of cheap liquor and even cheaper food. After all, Amy had lead him right into the epicenter of the poor, artsy district of the city, right between the Latino and African American neighborhoods (which he had heard stories of gangs in both, and lots of wars between them).

But the “bar,” if Calvin was willing to call it that anymore, was made of solid, richly stained wood with rich, forest green trimming along the edges of the windows. Its black-shingled roof angled up into a point, giving it an A-frame like second floor with a single square window overlooking the street Calvin and Amy were coming up along. There was an open patio out in front with green iron fencing around the mahogany tables where a few people sat about, laughing and nursing their drinks in the early winter evening. The trees along the sidewalk were bare and mangled and the grass long yellowed, but the aesthetic somehow made the little tawny building seem more authentic, more alive.

Something nagged at the back of Calvin’s mind as they drew closer to the white-painted stairs that lead up to the patio. It reminded him of something, and it didn’t occur to him what it was until he started ascending the stairs with Amy and tested the air for the rich smells of wood and alcohol.

“A gingerbread house,” Calvin said. “It looks like a gingerbread house.”

“A bit, yeah,” Amy said. She pulled the front door open and ushered Calvin in with a motion of her paw. He moved in, and she followed in close behind him as the door shut behind them, blocking the fading orange sunlight coming in from behind.

The bar was dark on the inside, though not in an ominous or unsettling way; the dim lights, covered windows, and the dark wood gave the whole building a rather subdued feeling to it. The air was thick with the musk of pine, oak, skunk, fox, badger (There *had* to be a badger regular, Calvin decided), wolf, tiger, raccoon and alcohol; all mixed into a subtly intoxicating haze in Calvin’s nose that left him overwhelmed and exhilarated. Not even his office – mostly canines, strangely enough – had this kind of diversity, and the cocktail of scents left him light-headed and giddy.

He hadn’t realized he was sniffing around the bar – quite loudly – until a few of the patrons turned to look at him, gazes burning through his clothes and fur and leaving him feeling naked and bare for all to see. Calvin fell back behind Amy with his ears plastered against his skull when he noticed their eyes. “I’ll grab us a table,” he said. “Outside.”

“Alright,” Amy said. She nodded her grey head towards the bar. “What do you want?”

“Nothing too strong,” Calvin said. “It’s been a while, remember.”

“Roger,” Amy said. She gave the wolf a pat on the chest and then walked over to the bar. She spoke in a low voice when the bartender moved over to her, but Calvin didn’t try to listen as he slipped back out onto the patio. He took the closest table to the door and sat with his back to the window, facing towards the now distant downtown area as the sun hung just above the tops of the skyscrapers.

Amy came out a few minutes later with two glasses filled to the brim with a dark liquid topped with a foamy head. She set one down in front of Calvin and then circled around the table to sit across from him, taking a long drink from her own glass while she crossed her grey-furred legs under the table in mock femininity. Calvin tested his own glass, first with his nose. It smelled strong and bitter, and with the slight hint of nuttiness under the rich alcohol, and when he finally put the glass up to his lips the taste came on just as strong.

Calvin coughed a bit, putting the glass down with care not to spill it all over himself. “I said ‘nothing too strong,’ Fox! What is this?”

“Something stout,” Amy said. She grinned coyly around her glass as she took another long sip. “Just relax and drink. It’s a bit of an acquired taste, but you’ll get it.”

“I think I’ll pass,” Calvin said with a sigh. He pushed the glass further away from him and folded his arms over the table, resting his chin on his forearms.

“You can go get something weaker, if you’d like,” Amy said.

Calvin looked back through the window behind him. He still felt stupid after his little display (and like they’d all remember him, remember that fat weirdo that wandered into their bar and started sniffing around like a pup in a sweets shop). “I’ll just sit here.”

“Suit yourself,” Amy said with a shrug. She drained her glass to about the halfway point, then set it down to pull her phone out of her pocket. Calvin watched as she tapped away. He opened his mouth to say something, but snapped it shut just as quickly. Why had she dragged him out here, anyways, if all she was going to do was get him drinks he didn’t want and text people who weren’t there? He sat up enough to look down the street they’d just walked up and tried to see if he could find their office from where he sat. He thought he could see its roof a few blocks away, just poking out over the tops of a line of double-stacked shops that ran down the street. It looked straightforward enough, and he thought he could remember the rout they took enough to find his way back; maybe it was better to cut his losses *now* rather than later in the evening. After all, his popcorn and ice cream were still waiting for him.

Calvin was seconds away from working up enough resolve to storm off when Amy slapped her phone down to the table and looked up at him with a slight grin. “Enjoying yourself, yet?”

“What’s there to enjoy?” Calvin grumbled.

“Just relax a bit,” she said. She motioned towards Calvin’s collar, “Loosen your tie, pop the top button, un-tuck your shirt – stop looking so uptight and miserable, Wolf.”

“I really think I might just go home,” Calvin said. He started to get up, but Amy grabbed him around the wrist and held him steady.

“We just got here, though!”

“I’m just not sure this was a good idea,” Calvin said. He tried to tug his arm from the fox’s grasp, but her grip was firm.

“Just give it some time,” she said. “You’re still kinda wound up from work is all.”

“It’s not that,” Calvin said. He tugged at his wrist again, this time with a bit more force, and pulled himself free. “I can unwind just fine; I do it every day at *home*.”

“That’s what’s worrying me, Cal,” Amy said. She folded her paws in her lap and kept her eyes firmly on Calvin, not even leaving him when her phone buzzed against the table again (though her ears did pivot towards it briefly).

“You don’t need to worry about me,” Calvin spat. He could feel his hackles rising and fought to keep the edge out of his voice. “I just don’t like being surrounded by people after being cooped up in an office all day long.” As if to accent his point, the sound of a car door slamming shut rang out from the parking. “Where I’m surrounded by people, as well, I might add.”

“It’s better than sitting around alone and stewing in your own self-pity, Wolf,” Amy said. She kept her voice even and body language neutral, but the hardness in her eyes bore into Calvin at his core and made him squirm.

“It’s not self-pity,” he said. “I’m just not a very social per- you know what?” He threw his arms up and pushed himself away from the table, stalking towards the street they’d walked up not ten minutes ago. “Forget it. I’m going home. I don’t know why you dragged me out here.”

“You *agreed* to come, wolf,” Amy said. “I asked if you wanted to come and you agreed.” Her eyes darted to look behind him for only a heartbeat, then leveled themselves back with the wolf’s.

“Yeah?” Calvin snorted. He spun around to give Amy a vicious glare. “Well, now it feels a bit more like you coerced me into it.” He took a few steps backwards, his voice rising with each step he took. “Like you judged me, pushed me, thought you knew what I needed when you aren’t —”

Calvin let out a muffled yelp of surprise as his back hit something warm and sturdy. A pair of paws found their way down to his hips and he could feel hot breath tickling against the side of his neck and ear. “Woah, hey. Easy there.”

Calvin spun around quickly and took a step back. He was about to snap at whoever had grabbed him (despite the fact he backed into *him*), but as he looked up into the stranger’s face he found his breath choked from his lungs and his resolve dissipated. The Stranger – a tiger – smiled, which made Calvin’s whole body both tensed up and relaxed all at once. It was one of those genuine smiles, something Calvin hadn’t seen in the longest time, where it lit the cat’s whole face up.

And while his smile was captivating in its own right, it wasn’t what had caught the wolf’s attention; it was the tiger’s eyes. They were yellow, but not in the way that Amy’s were; they were softer, more pastel than anything else, with little flecks of gold here and there around the edges of the iris. And they weren’t only yellow. There were brown accents that streaked through the yellow like copper veins set in amber, and as his eye drew closer to the center they deepened and pixelated into a rich jade unlike anything else he’d seen.

He wasn’t sure how long he stood there and stared. The rest of the world seemed to just drop away as the Tiger’s eyes came into focus, and time almost seemed to stand still as his gaze remained transfixed. “Hey,” the Tiger said. “Everything alright?”

“Y-yeah,” Calvin squeaked (how long had it been since he did that?). “I was just, uh, having a disagreement with a friend.”

“Nothing too serious, I hope,” the Tiger said. The little grin he gave made Calvin’s heart race.

“No, no,” Calvin said. “I was just, uh, just thinking about leaving.”

“Oh, don’t do that! I just got here.” The Tiger held his right paw out towards Calvin, his smile even wider than before. “Name’s Rajiv, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you, Rajiv,” Calvin said. He took Rajiv’s paw and gave it a firm shake. His pads were rough, fingers scarred underneath the fur, and his arms were thick, which made Calvin feel all the smaller, all the weaker in the tiger’s presence.

“Oh, please,” Rajiv said. “Just call me Jeeves. That’s what all my friends do.”

“I-I dunno,” Calvin said. “If it’s just a friends thing ... I mean, we only did just meet, after all. I wouldn’t say we’re quite friends.” He hesitated then added, “Yet.”

“True,” Rajiv said. He pulled his paw away (which Calvin hadn’t realized he was still tightly gripping) and flashed a grin down at the shorter wolf. “Maybe we can work on changing that?”

“Maybe,” Calvin said. He tried to swallow the sudden surge of nervousness (he knew, just *knew* he was making a fool of himself in front of this guy!) as the heat rose in his cheeks (which he also just *knew* the Tiger had to see, curse his lighter winter coat) until his entire face burned against the cool winter breeze.

“So,” Rajiv said.

“So?”

“Ever going to tell me your name?” Rajiv said.

“Oh!” Calvin looked down at the ground between his feet and coughed lightly before looking back up into the tiger’s face. “It’s, uh ... I’m Calvin.”

“Really, now?” He reached down and pulled Calvin’s right paw into both of his and shook it again with a newfound vigor. “Then it truly is a pleasure to meet you. I’ve heard so much about you.”

Calvin was so lost in the warmth of the tiger’s paws that he didn’t hear what Rajiv had said at first. “Wait, what?” Calvin shot a glance back to the table the fox had been sitting at, but found her seat bare. When he looked back to Rajiv, he saw that the tiger was smiling even wider than before, his sharp teeth (mostly white, but with little tinges of yellow around the roots and just slightly crooked) showing past his lips.

“Calvin Clearwater, right?”

Calvin nodded.

“Amy’s been telling me all about you, I’ve just been so busy that I’ve not had any free afternoons or weekends.” Rajiv let his paws fall away from Calvin’s and stuffed them into the pockets of his navy blue jacket. An air of nervousness seemed to sweep over the tiger’s whole posture: his tail twitched behind him, ears a little less perky, and his slouched as his smile wavered. “I hadn’t realized you’d be here, tonight. I, uh, would have gone back home to change out of my work clothes.”

“No, no, it’s fine,” Calvin said. “I would have, too.”

“She kept you in the dark, too?” Rajiv chuckled. Calvin couldn’t help but grin a little bit back at the sound of the tiger’s purring rumble.

“More than you realize,” Calvin said.

“She never told you about me?” Calvin was worried Rajiv would be hurt by that news, but the tiger only shook his head and laughed a bit harder. “Of course she wouldn’t. Sounds just like her.” The tiger just grinned again, “Suppose that means I’ve got that much more to tell you.”

“I suppose so,” Calvin said. He didn’t realize his tail was wagging until he heard it rhythmically thump against the table next to him (much to its occupants’ displeasure). It had been so long since something had genuinely made him wag his tail that he’d almost forgotten he could.

“So,” Rajiv said. “Does this mean you’re still thinking about leaving?”

“Nah,” Calvin said. The thought hadn’t even crossed his mind the whole time he’d been standing there. “I think I’ll stick around.” Besides, he thought. The look on the tiger’s face after he said that made his heart skip faster than any soap serial had ever managed in the past.

“Good!” Rajiv put both of his paws to Calvin’s shoulders and gently pushed the wolf to the side. “Lemme just grab something from inside and I’ll be all yours for tonight, alright?”

“All mine, you say?” Calvin said. “Sounds good to me. Great, even.”

“Awesome!” Rajiv gave him one final pat on the shoulder and then sauntered on up the steps towards the front door, his striped tail arched high over his worn blue jeans. As he pulled the door open and walked inside, Calvin looked over to the table.

Amy was there again, sitting in the seat she had been in earlier with her back to him and a mostly drunk mug in her paws. She shot him a playful grin as he walked back over to her with his ears splayed and his tail more still than earlier. He sat down across from her, his back to the window again, and crossed his arms over his chest. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Would you have come if I did?” She drained the last of her mug, set it on the table in front of her, stood, and then walked around the table to stand next to Calvin. “What do you think?”

“He’s a tiger,” Calvin said.

“Other than that.”

“He seems nice,” Calvin said.

“He’s a sweetheart.”

“And genuinely interested,” Calvin said.

“He has been for a while,” Amy said. “At least, as long as I’ve been talking about you to him.”

“He’s cute,” Calvin said. He looked down at himself – at his ever increasing waistline, at his matted, unwashed fur (that he’d forgotten about, and felt even more self-conscious about, retroactively), at his stained and dirty clothes – and let out a long sigh as he folded his arms across the table. “Maybe too cute.”

“He hasn’t walked away yet,” Amy said.

“Yet,” Calvin said. How many times had “yet” been the keyword in all his relationships?

“Give it a chance,” Amy said.

“Do I really have one?”

“Yeah,” Amy said. She ruffled the fur between his ears and smiled down at him warmly. “I’ll see you in the morning, Cal.” Before Calvin could say anything, the fox turned and walked

down the walkway that lead out to the street. She crossed with a flick of her black-tipped tail and disappeared behind the painted brick buildings that lined the road leading back to their office.

“Hey,” Rajiv said. Calvin looked up to see the tiger standing next to him with a mug in his paw.

“Hey,” Calvin said.

“Did Amy leave?” Rajiv set his mug down on the table and slid into the seat across from Calvin.

“Yeah,” Calvin said. He looked over the tiger’s shoulder up the empty street to where he’d last seen the little grey fox.

“Well, that’s too bad,” Rajiv said. “I hardly get to see her, anymore.”

“We could always call her,” Calvin said. “Make her come back and hang out.”

“Nah,” Rajiv said. “I’m happy enough with the present company.”

Calvin smiled. “Yeah.” He turned to look the tiger in the face again. “Me too.”

The sun had finally fallen low enough behind the buildings to make the sky fill with brilliant oranges, rich reds, and muted yellows. The light filled the backdrop behind Rajiv and blended with the tiger’s fur like a watercolor painting, the oranges that much more vivid, the blacks of his stripes and ears that much more stark, and the whites of his cheeks and throat tinted with a golden hue.

He thought back to his apartment one last time, back to his usual nightly routine and his usual morning ceremonies. He thought back to what he could have gone home to that night. Thought of what he might be missing by not being home catching up on his DVR. Thought of how much it’d set him back in the next few weeks as he tried to catch up to the shows that had been so integral to his life the past few years.

And, he realized, he didn’t really care.

He had better things to do than sit alone in his colorblind world.