

The Color Followed Them

After the fall of modern society by unexplainable magic, one man meets a woman that he never thought could exist, and with her, wonder.

He stared at the grizzly-faced man looking back at him from the reflection in the cracked mirror. He couldn't believe that three years had already past since the fall of modern society. Three whole years. And he was still alive. His last conversation with anyone was more than a year ago, and he couldn't even remember that person's name.

He laughed to himself at the idea of it all. Some guy or thing they called Dreilkog had appeared out of nowhere, announcing in some grand television special that everything was about to end. That was it. Within days, the world changed. It was like all of the color in the world made a sudden departure. Life started ending on every level. It wasn't a bomb or chemical warfare or anything that reasonable. It was magic. Unfathomable magic.

People didn't die; they just stopped existing. It was like the Darkness found you, and then you were gone. Leaf had no idea how he had made it this long. He didn't know how much longer he could make it, either.

After months of wandering through the vast nothingness, Leaf found an old car wash called The Scrub-a-Hub and converted it into a living space. All of the houses or apartments in the world had disappeared. Buildings were gone. The Darkness, as so many called it, was anything but explainable.

The large washing mechanisms had fluffy covers that were once used to soap up the surfaces of vehicles, but he now used them for bedding. He stayed alive, somehow, even though food was only a luxury. His rare meals consisted mostly of colorless vegetables and meats from once colorful cans.

On this morning, Leaf ventured to the front of the old Scrub-a-Hub, watching the wind have its way with the grey and brown that surrounded him. With only a cup of hot water in his hand, he sat and watched, noticing the lack of scent in the air. No odors. No colors. All he could do was sit outside, drink his water, and wait for something. Anything.

Then something changed.

Over the years, color existed only in his imagination. As color seeped into his surroundings, he merely believed to be in a trance state.

But the ground around him began sprouting grass, which immediately began to grow at an amazing rate. Where the abandoned corpses of trees and bushes had kept him grim company over the last year, leaves began filling out the sparse branches. When spots of blue started peeking through the grey sky blanket, Leaf perked. Something was vastly different.

Hundreds of feet away, a woman carrying a jar approached him. Even from this distance, her simple beauty could be *felt*. The wind carried the sweet aroma of cinnamon and autumn. Her rich, mahogany hair played in the wind. Her clothing was made up of colors he had long since forgotten the names of. She smiled, her vivid, red lips curling slightly, revealing pearl white teeth.

He stared, unable to speak, watching as she bridged the gap between them. Cradled in her arms like a small child was a jar filled with wonderful glowing.

“Hello,” she said. Her voice was music.

He waved a trembling hand, his vocal chords only exercised from the occasional laugh of disbelief. He didn’t know if he could even speak anymore. He took a sip of the water and attempted a word.

“Hi,” he croaked. He wanted to ask her everything, but his words failed. He took another drink from his cup. Tears started coming to his eyes, as he couldn’t bring himself to blink, fearing that she would disappear.

Something was moving in the jar.

“Are you alone?” she asked, her words dripping with honey and sugar.

He nodded, his words still prisoner deep in his throat.

“Look what I found,” she said, holding up the jar.

Between them, in a display of glowing and fluttering, several small women with semi-transparent wings darted to and fro, waving and blowing kisses at the bearded man.

For the first time in months, maybe even years, he felt warmth. A smile spread across his lips.

He was standing now, and he felt something around his ankles. A longhaired orange tabby kitten was doing figure eights between his legs, purrs coming deep from within its tiny body.

She led him inside the old car wash to the makeshift table he had created for the infrequent meal he would find. Everything about the inside of the building was different. Alive. Vibrant. On the table was a feast. Brilliant, color-saturated foods filled plates and bowls; foods he forgot ever existed.

They ate, and she spoke, telling her story, speaking mostly of the present and vaguely of the possible future. The jar rested on the table beside them, the comforting glow illuminating the normally dismal room. The faeries flitted and played. The orange kitten ate the bits of food Leaf fed it from the table.

Two days passed. Leaf was clean-shaven, well fed, and happier than he could ever remember being. In the late afternoon, the woman informed him that it was time for her to leave.

“Why don’t you stay? You can have this kitten.” he said, a hopeful note in his voice, holding up the orange tabby.

“*We* brought the kitten.” She paused, looking at the lovely faeries dancing about in the jar. “We actually came here looking for you. We want you to come with us.”

“You did? Where are you going?”

“We’re going to the other world. But we have to find the remaining first.”

“There’s another world?”

She nodded, smiling.

“And others?”

“The ones like you. The hopeful hopeless.”

“I thought this whole time that I was alone.”

“You were never alone, but you are the first one we found. And now we need to find the others.”

They joined hands, walking in a direction he had never thought to walk. She held the jar, he cradled the kitten, and the color followed them.