44 Don’t Look Now

I find myself closing my eyes more and more often. It’s a crutch that’s become an unshakable habit. I can pretend to hide in plain sight, trying to avoid the inevitable. Heat. I am used without question. More heat. I’ll never get used to it. Even more heat. Anything but this. My screams. I am finally left alone. Peace.

I used to solely belong to Robert Andrews. He chose me among other models from his local supermarket before heading off to Uni. He placed me on his desk, plugged me in, and didn’t bother me for two months. Then he filled me to the brim with water and forgot about me again. The extra weight made me feel sluggish at first. When he wasn’t sleeping, he wasn’t in the room. I found my life to be peaceful, but unfulfilling. I didn’t know what my purpose was. To pass the time, I memorized patterns within the grains of wood on his desk and watched spiders weave cobwebs in the high corners of the room.

I’ve always wanted to do something more with my life. Something passionate and creative. Perhaps a painter. Robert’s roommate in college studied painting. His name was David Abernathy. Since Robert left me turned just the right way, I would watch David flip through reference books and we would listen to Aerosmith albums together. His creations were spectacular. Only when he leaned back in his chair to stretch could I see them in their entirety. I could see his soul. Melancholy. Clear. He mostly painted heavily wooded landscapes in shades of blue on midsize canvases. He painted like a machine. Each line a choice, functioning to showcase the depths of his imagination.

I’ll never forget the first time I was used. Robert was in class. “Our secret”, he whispered to me. I was too distracted by the upwards curve of his smirk to fully comprehend what he was saying. I thought he was going to tell me a secret, something only I would know. His grip around my handle was firm, almost loving. I’d never been touched like that before. Recklessness began to wash over me as I heard him flip a switch.

The first waves of heat rippled through me, and I began to fill with confused panic. Perhaps I was getting a little bit too excited. I needed to calm down. But I kept getting hotter and hotter. I was burning. His smile wasn’t appealing anymore, instead, he looked a little impatient. When the pain finally became too much, my eyes shut, and I started to scream. A high-pitched wail, begging for help. Why didn’t he help me? I didn’t know I could make a sound like that. His smirk deepened, and I was overcome with embarrassment. It bubbled inside me. I wanted to hide. But he reached out for me. With those strong fingers, he very carefully, and deeply, dipped me towards his mug, like we were dancing the tango. It was only him and me. The pain dulled, and I calmed slightly. I searched for his eyes but couldn’t find them.

David silently returned me to the top of the microwave, facing towards the wall. He couldn’t even look at me. He never touched me again. It must have been guilt.

Eventually Robert graduated, met his wife Lucy, and settled down in a small yellow rowhouse. I saw the exterior just once, on moving day. I peeked over the flap of a cardboard box as I was being carried inside. Lucy placed me upon a shiny white countertop in the kitchen, near the sink. This is where I have sat for many years. Their family expanded. I watched. I feared. My use, my torture, became both a daily and expected occurrence. And my eyes closed habitually.

One day, Robert carried a wide and slim rectangular parcel into the kitchen. He removed the cardboard and tape with a knife, revealing a painting. It was one of David’s. Was it a gift for me? How did David know how desperately I wanted to see his life’s work again? This must have been his way of apologizing to me. My eyes slammed shut. I couldn’t look now. The moment had to be just right. I listened to Robert quickly tap a nail into place directly across from my countertop. A painting, just for me. Only after he left the kitchen did I look up. A slice of David’s soul stood right in front of me. The wilderness. All in his signature blue. A delicate river. A small patch of sunlight. It was, and remains, the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

David is always with me. I stare at the landscape he painted when my eyes aren’t closed. The painting calms me. It has collected a considerable amount of dust over the years. But its beauty has never waned. I see the darkness of his hair in the black shadows of the deepest parts of his painting. His eyelashes, thick and lovely, are in the tree branches of his sprawling landscape. I see his high-pitched and carefree whistles in the swirls of sunlight. I love being alone in the kitchen. Just me and the painting. Me and David.

On cloudless and serene nights, when moonlight glimmers through the window, and settles upon the painting, the red “D.A.”, written in script at the bottom left corner of the canvas, glows. This is when I miss him most.

I want to ask Robert where David is, and to be taken to him. I want to feel his grip around me again. To make the pain go away. I want him to fight for me. To make me trust in him again. We could have had a life together. Two painters, a team, taking the world in, creating our own. It would’ve been spectacular. Through the pain, when I shut my eyes, there is not darkness. I see David. I would have done anything for him.

I just wished he asked.