

Noir and a glass. They were combined with a fresh cigarette fished from her handbag and taken onto the balcony. She would need them to dull the fear. Time passed slowly, sipping and puffing gently under the cool night sky, with the glowing lights of the city below. Anna was alone except for the inanimate body of a man, but it was indoors, slumped into one of her sofa chairs. Her eyes evaded it.

Fourteen floors up. She rarely went to the edge of the railing – great heights made her anxious – but it was a pleasant view without too much proximity to the drop. The bottle spun gently between her thumb and forefinger, its label displaying a silver horse over a floral embroidered field on one side, and a winemaker’s sales pitch on the other. A quick flick through her phone showed no new text messages, but there was a promotional e-mail from an airline. Delete. Anna savoured the last of the Pinot. Her cigarette butt was planted in the ashtray. With a resolute sniff of air she went back inside.

It had the features of a male, eyes shut. Clean shaven, short brown hair, minimal lines or blemishes. Clothed in a dress shirt, suit pants and belt – a physically unremarkable figure, but perfectly still. Anna took a seat on the couch opposite. The only sound was wind against the face of the high-rise, but she rose to close the door and sat back down. Time slowed further. She stared. Her heartbeat quickened, but soon reached a plateau. Before her it was perfectly still. Finally she sighed, “mind if I smoke?”

Of course there was no reply. She laughed, although whether that was an appreciation of the absurd or merely paranoia Anna did not know. As an emotional response it gave her strength. There were more cigarettes in her bag, but there they would remain, considering the building’s smoke alarms. When the joke was over, her mood quietened and she looked at it again. Now, her eyes closed too. She saw with her mind this time, and in her mind’s eye was the picture her eyes had given her brain just part of a second ago, so she continued to stare. That nameless, motionless male face confronting hers unassumingly, dwindling in the darkness of her blind sight until it threatened to be forgotten.

Then she opened her own eyes – its eyes, his eyes – and saw herself.

Like a reflection with no mirror. Anna studied the woman in front of her. A thin feminine frame in a black dress, even blacker hair, straight like silk, fair skin, deep red lipstick, closed eyes – but ones she knew were blue. Time ground slower still. The cigarette in that woman’s hands remained unlit. Anna felt herself slumped into a sofa chair. The attempt to rise was arduous, like the first movement after a deep sleep. Her lungs surged and her lips parted for air, and then her eyes snapped closed – its eyes, his eyes. And for an unmeasured period of time, her mind’s eye.

The rushing return of breath to her familiar self was realised and she leapt to her feet with the words *...the fuck?* And then there was no denying that she was afraid. The inanimate thing in her sofa chair was deserted as she made a break for the hallway. First stop: the bathroom mirror. *Like a reflection with no mirror.* Anna saw the same familiar image of herself but put a hand up to it for re-assurance, as if to remind her that there was something physically

contiguous between her own body and the reflection of it in the glass. She used her other hand to rub at the goose bumps on her arm.