Time stood still one night. Only he knew it.

He awoke to find everything in its place, everyone in their position, every sound dissolved into white, every sight withheld in color.

His wife could’ve just been asleep, and the looming darkness covered the mystery of her body as convincingly as her bedsheets. Yet when he hoisted his body from the bed, he found a peacefulness only matched with death.

After reality gripped his insides, he frantically paced to the vast window of the high-rise apartment, discovering a silence to the city that hadn’t visited since old times. The familiar neon landscape arranged a spectacle as to evoke an invitation, an understanding. As its spectrum remained enclosed within structural confinement, he found himself in monotonous continuity, stark shadows and gray areas. The street below was desolate, no essence of life to be found in anything but the colors. The stoplights and crosswalks set forth a constellation of earthly proportions for no one in particular.

He looked back to align with the beady, fiery numbers of the alarm clock on his nightstand. It had been 5:39 for quite some time.

Perhaps he did deserve this. Perhaps this was an invitation. He had been living in darkness for a while, he lost track. The glistening architecture of the metal jungle
hadn’t reflected brightly in his eyes like it did now, and until now, it never seemed so alive at night.

And his wife was asleep. And it was still 5:39.

He cleared his closet to prepare for the indecisiveness mid-February offers.

Charcoal jeans, foggy sweatshirt, stone jean jacket, whatever boots, smoky parka.

Stumbling through the apartment with a sleepy physicality, he found the remnants of the living room as artifacts of a long-lost exhibit.

How long had it been like this?

The elevators didn’t work, so he took the stairs. It was here the darkness retained most of its strength. The nodes between publicity and privacy, reality and fantasy, life and death. It forced him to keep his hand on the railing for guidance. Thus, he was guided to where he wanted to be.

As he stepped into the limelight, he found his clothes mismatched in color and texture, a comfort he fell deep in for the moment. The air was stuffy where he stood, and as he stepped aside, he found the wind itself to be frozen in time. He started down the street as the instilled current halted and boosted his pace. Even the snowflakes embodied a crystalline essence as if they split from the buildings themselves, and they stood their ground in space until he stood through them.

He was part of the city at last. What a joy it was for him with every step to be more fully submerged in a place he long lingered for. A place that finally understood him once again.

Something illuminated red in the northeast corner of the four-way street he was approaching.

Why had he been here before?

The door was open. Everything was red when he sat. Red booths, red stools, red brick, red limelight, red pictures, red drinks, his drink, he was red.

He knew the Bianchi family hanging along the aging brick. He knew the signed photographs from Sinatra and Martin and Armstrong and Pavarotti. He knew how Petie always placed his drinks in alphabetical order and he knew Bacardi was next to Cuervo and Jim was next to Johnnie. He knew the cushion of his stool always forced him to slump more than he wanted. He looked around in search for a closeness he knew. This was a moment he knew.

Why was she here?

The door swayed and stopped. She stood in front of that Sophia Loren Marriage Italian Style poster between the restrooms. She stood further off than he had thought, but there she stood. She stood with that vibrant red V-neck dress whose short sleeves he thought too long but whose length he thought just right because he loved her. The red reflected from her skin, glowed in her bones. Hell was unleashing.

She made no noise as she walked toward him, but her actions rang loud. Her hair bounced, her hips swayed, her eyes fluttered, her legs floated. As she sat beside him, he found that Sophia was missing from the poster. He always thought his love looked like her. Her body was no mystery of that.
His eyes were wet as he looked at her, as she looked at him. His wife had created a safe haven free from death the best she could, and here was his love, mid-February in motion. The woman that moved with him, stayed with him, revived him, haunted him.

Here was Hell. Here was Reality. Here was Redemption. Here was Forgiveness.

She moved her fingers to the aglets of his sweatshirt and twirled them as she did his emotions. She stirred his emotions, prolonged them. She looked up from the aglets, and at that moment, he was in love with her and the red and the poster and—

Wake up.

Matthew, you okay honey? It’s 5:40, you should probably start moving.

His eyes were wet. He looked at his broken alarm clock. It was 5:4.