

Shades of Grey

There is a specific kind of silence that happens when you realize you are pretending to be okay. We were sitting in a circle on the floor, legs crossed, half-awake and emotionally exposed in the way only retreats manage to make you. One of the leaders was a beautiful girl named Grey. She started talking about how people sometimes see their lives in “shades of grey.” Not black. Not white. Just muted. Flat. In-between. She said that when you’ve been hurt enough, disappointed enough, or exhausted enough, your mind stops letting you feel things fully. It dims everything. Not to punish you - but to protect you. I remember thinking, uncomfortably, *Oh. That’s me.*

You aren’t met with the dramatic, crying-in-the-bathroom silence or the kind that comes after something shatters. It is quieter than that. It is sitting in class, staring at a worksheet, and realizing you have no idea what you just read. It is laughing at a joke and feeling nothing behind it. It is scrolling through photos of moments you know were supposed to matter and wondering why they feel so far away. It is the moment you recognize that somewhere along the way, your life stopped feeling colorful - and you didn’t even notice when it happened.

For a long time, I thought sadness was the worst emotional state a person could be in. I was wrong. Sadness is heavy, but at least it is alive. Grey is emptiness. Grey is waking up every morning and doing everything you’re supposed to - going to class, turning in assignments, smiling at friends - while feeling like you’re watching your own life from a distance. It is feeling disconnected from your own emotions, like they are happening to someone else. After enough heartbreak, disappointment, and unanswered prayers, my brain learned that it was safer not to feel too much. If I didn’t let things get

too bright, they couldn't hurt as much when they disappeared. So everything became grey.

Worst of all, grey tells you that you have time. Time to say "I love you" later. Time to forgive tomorrow. Time to give one last hug. Time to make things right someday. It makes you believe that moments are replaceable. That people are permanent. That opportunities will come back around. They won't. Tomorrow is never promised, and I didn't fully understand that until I started noticing how fragile everything is. How quickly things change. How easily people disappear from your life. How suddenly relationships end, routines break, and conversations become memories. One day you are sitting next to someone in the car, singing along to music, convinced you have forever - and the next, you are wondering how it all slipped through your fingers.

On the retreat, as I listened to other people share stories about loss, regret, and healing, something shifted in me. I realized that everyone in that room was carrying something heavy. Every person had a story that could have easily turned them bitter, closed-off, or hopeless. And yet, they were still standing. Still believing. Still trying. That was when I understood that rediscovering color does not mean pretending everything is perfect. It means choosing to feel anyway. It means allowing yourself to care even when it is risky. Letting yourself love even when it might hurt. Trusting even when you've been disappointed. Showing up emotionally, instead of hiding behind sarcasm, achievement, or indifference.

Color returns in small ways. In actually listening when a friend talks. In staying present instead of mentally checking out. In appreciating the quiet car rides and late-night conversations. In letting yourself feel grateful without immediately waiting for

something bad to happen. It returns when you stop treating life like something to survive and start treating it like something to experience.

I truly believe that life is beautiful if you let it be. I still have grey days. I probably always will. There are mornings when I feel distant from myself, when old fears creep back in, when doubts get loud again. But now I recognize them for what they are: signals, not sentences. Warnings, not destinies. Grey is part of being human. It shows up when we are tired, hurt, or overwhelmed. It does not get to define us. Because life is not meant to be lived in muted tones. It is meant to be lived boldly. Fully. Intentionally. It is meant to be lived with awareness - of how precious time is, how fragile people are, how quickly moments become memories. It is meant to be lived with courage - the courage to love deeply, forgive quickly, and speak honestly while we can. One day, the hallway will be quieter. The seat beside me will be empty. The ordinary Tuesday will be gone. And when that happens, I don't want to look back and realize I lived in grey. I want to know that I rediscovered the colors in the grey. All of them.