

‘The Light That Shines Within’ by Abisatu Kabineh-Mansaray

Lydia desperately, wholeheartedly wanted to be beautiful.

At family gatherings, she always noticed how her aunties would greet her dazzling sister’s honeyed complexion with wide smiles and joyful laughter before their eyes slid slowly from Fatima, to her – saw the way they would smile uncertainly at her mum, questioning if Lydia was an extended cousin. They never said it out loud, but Lydia knew why.

She had only used the cream once, honestly. Just to see how it felt. Only out of curiosity.

As the seasons changed, wet autumn turned into bone-chilling winter, and new sprouts grew in spring only to wither away in the dry heat of summer. London began anew with each passing month, and curiously, Lydia had started to change.

And slowly

S-l-o-w-l-y

Her richly melanated surface, once as smooth and as shiny as

a copper coin,

began to rust

and fade

and dim

Like the flesh of a juicy plum splitting open to reveal

a dying, decaying seed.

MORE MORE MORE MORE MORE MORE

Lydia kept rubbing it in, scrubbed it in so deep her skin was rubbed raw, willed it to seep through her skin into her wanted to rip open her skin so the light would seep into her bones and cleanse her from the inside out so that she would be beautiful so that she would be stunning so that she would be Fatima so that she would be loved.

Lydia desperately, wholeheartedly wanted to be beautiful.