

# THE COLOURS ISSUE



HERE COMES EVERYONE™

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*Tell us what you think of The Colours Issue on Facebook or Twitter using the #colours tag!*



# Editorial

I am very fond of red. I nearly bought a bright red suit the other day until I realised that (like most normal people) I had few opportunities to wear it. I think I know why I like red: it is the colour of passion, bright blood, strawberries and the idealistic Left (unless you're in America, of course, but the US always has to make things complicated). In my head, British 'red coats' stride dramatically out of the pages of history, either to oppress or to liberate depending on your perspective, and stand firm in the 'thin red line' against the barbarian horde in endless Rourke's Drift colonial last stands. Santa Claus wears red, too, but we have Coca Cola to thank for that: they seem to have cornered the market on Christmas nostalgia. According to history, Spartan warriors went to battle naked save for the protection of their war cloaks, bright red to conceal their spilled blood, although they did have shields as well. The point is that every single colour has many complex shades of meaning and contexts for a given individual

and it was this spirit that the 'Colours' Issue hoped to capture. The modern world is so alive with colour that it is sometimes difficult to remember that our ancestors lived in a much duller, browner world. There is a reason why purple was a colour reserved for ancient royalty and emperors and that is because it was incredibly expensive, difficult and disgusting to make (crushed fomented sea snails, for those curious). Similarly, one of the reasons blue became the iconic colour of the Virgin Mary (and heaven more generally) is because when the bright blue mineral pigment lapis lazuli arrived in Europe during the Renaissance, nobody had ever seen anything quite like it before and it had to come all of the way from Afghanistan. Even white had vast ranges of meaning. In Britain the 'whitewash' label still signifies something covered up by the establishment, but few people realise that the pyramids used to shine out with bright white limestone as holy man-made mountains and even iconic Harlech castle,

a picturesque fortress on a hilltop in Wales, was painted starkly white to remind the conquered Welsh that the English were always going to be there: ever visible and stark. The Colours Competition, judged by Birmingham poet laureate Stephen Morrison-Burke, has been an excellent opportunity for HCE contributors to explore their own understanding, memories and the flavour of the colours of their choosing through the media of poetry and flash fiction. The decision was taken to narrow the range of choices of colours for the competition to the big seven (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet) plus black and white. Naturally, there was lots of content submitted that didn't quite fit into these rules, but that's just the way it is with submissions guidelines. In fact, it is fair to say that every time a theme has been decided for HCE we have been surprised by the submissions. I don't think any of the editorial team really expected quite what came in. The sheer variety and adaptability of the

submissions has been a real joy to behold and, although designing the magazine has been an impressive headache, we have striven to try and reproduce something nice to look at as well as enjoyable to read. The only 'colour' question that we decided was out was the subject of 'race', not because it is not important, but because it is a subject that deserves its own issue altogether. Once more we have some new faces, and some old, and we can now introduce Ben Hayes as HCE sub-editor and our new all-star reviewer 'The Drive-By Reviewer', whoever that is. If you'd like a permanent spot in HCE, just let me know, you are definitely good enough. As a final note, with contributions from across the English speaking world, the spelling of colours/colors and grey/gray was an immediate source of controversy, but it is the view of the editors that there is no right or wrong way to spell a word, so we've just left each instance in its original format. **GSB**



# In this edition *Everyone* was:

## **HCE Contributors:**

|                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Ben Nightingale          | Sue Barnard       |
| Ben Hayes                | Mason Shreve      |
| Adam Steiner             | Marija Simits     |
| Stephen Morrison-Burke   | Dwane Reads       |
| Carly Berg               | Anthony Moore     |
| Laura Huntley            | Stephani Franklin |
| Brenda Andreson          | Gio Carval        |
| John kitchen             | Paul Francis      |
| Nadia Kingsley           | Lee Rourke        |
| Lindsay Waller-Wilkinson | Ed Higgins        |
| Mary Ellen Flynn         | Eleanor Ball      |
| Cathy Bryant             | Kristina Proffitt |
| Alexander Millen         | Jemna Dawkins     |

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# And the LORD set a mark upon him

by Ben Nightingale

And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. (Gen. 5:15)

Depending which religious myth you choose, blacks and Native Americans are/were cursed and their enslavement carried divine warrant. It is by no means clear that the 'mark' on Cain was his skin colour, or that this in any way mandated slavery (although the Bible says slavery is ok, as well as genocide). But, if you want it to mean blacks are cursed, you can easily bend it that way.

Since Brigham Young assumed leadership of the Mormon Church from Joseph Smith, blacks were denied entry into the Mormon priesthood. They were a cursed race. This problem is worse than mere equal opportunities and far worse than the current problem with the Anglican Church and women bishops: Mormon doctrine teaches there is a hierarchy in heaven, and only the priesthood may enter the highest place. Even in the next life, blacks could hope to be no better than servants to the whites. So too were Native Americans cursed, descended from a tribe in rebellion

against God called 'Lamanites'. Once fair and beautiful, God darkened them so as to signal their curse. As they repent and return to God, it is expected they will lighten and be fair and beautiful once more.

It gets slightly worse for black people. There is another Genesis myth which is/was used to damn them. Cain's seed descends to the time of Noah, whose son takes to wife a woman of Cain's line. In 1881, church President John Taylor explained that the accursed line had survived the flood 'because it was necessary that the Devil should have a representation upon the Earth as well as God.' Yes, blacks are here in order that

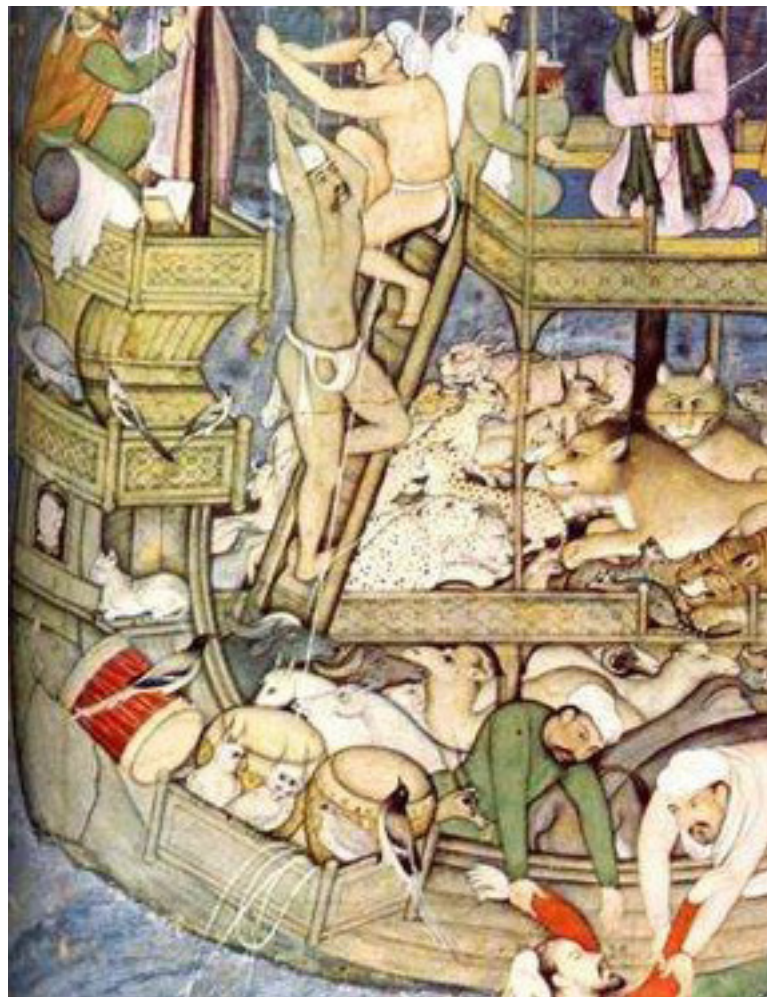
the Devil get a fair hearing. It gets worse for black people. After the flood, amongst the celebrations and revelry, Ham sees his father Noah naked. For this heinous sin, Ham and his tribe of Canaan are cursed with subservience to his brothers and their descendants:

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son [Ham] had done unto him. And he said,

*Cursed be Canaan;  
A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren [Shem and Japheth]*

*And he said,  
Blessed be the LORD God of Shem;  
And Canaan shall be his servant.  
God shall enlarge Japheth,  
And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem;  
And Canaan shall be his servant.  
(Gen. 9:20-27)*

This is a slavery tale alright, but it is not linked with skin colour. That said, if you want it to be a validation for enslaving blacks, you'll find a way. People did, and some still do. Mormons did until 1978, when their bishops received a 'revelation' whilst holding a meeting (a private, unverifiable revelation, of course). God changed his mind,



it seems: black people have souls after all, are allowed to join the Mormon clergy and are thereby no longer required to be slaves in heaven as well as on earth. Hal-lelujah.

We came very close to having a Mormon for president of the United States. There is perhaps something poetic in Romney losing to a dark man (I say 'dark' rather than 'black' because it must always be remembered, when discussing race, that Obama's mother was white). If it seem I am being harsh on Romney, then I remind you Romney proselytised (as all good Mormons do) in Europe on behalf of his officially racist church during the 1960s. He is a bishop of his church. He may protest all he wants how much he wept for joy in 1978 when the new 'truth' was finally 'revealed'. I weep when I eat too much mustard. It means nothing. He spread racist doctrine abroad and should take responsibility for it. Show us no tears, apologise and show us some shame instead.

But that's precisely what he did not do. Rather than confront the implications of his actions, he closed down any discussion of the issue by claiming that inquiries into the doctrines of his church amounted to a religious test for office, which he said is unconstitutional. Nice. And it worked. Despite the hiccoughs of his campaign, Obama was vulnerable on the economy. Libertarians, economic hawks and social conservatives on both sides of the ocean lined up to voice their backing for him. Did they know what he once officially stood for? Did they know what doctrines he once spread abroad? Did they know what questions he was dodging? I hope not. I hope they were not turning a blind eye. I hope they had no idea just how much he had to answer for. If they did, they deserve to be damned – or at least, to go no fur-

ther in the next life than servitude to the blacks and natives. That would be justice indeed.

Let us consider a moment the response that greeted Romney's leaked remarks about Obama's '47%'. Remember the outrage, the gasps, the incredulity that he could be so dismissive of nearly one out of every two Americans. Sure, Obama had core vote – so did Romney, about as large as Obama's. This was a man aspiring to govern all Americans, and he seemed to recognise the potential damage when he insisted he was on the side of the 100%. Nothing like this level of scrutiny was applied to Romney, as a Mormon missionary and bishop,

to govern on behalf of black, Latin and Native Americans. I cannot say of this be because people did not know or did not care, or whether they were too afraid to broach the topic of religion in these religiously sensitive times and open themselves to charges of bigotry and religiously testing candidates. That a religious conviction may influence the decisions and outlook of a person is obvious, and many believers boast how much their religion guides them. This was one such time that religious inquiry was justified and crucial. But everybody ducked it. It appears racism is still not taken seriously.

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# The Colours Competition

## with Stephen Morrison-Burke and Gary Sykes-Blythe

'I really enjoyed reading the poems [and flash fiction], each one was a stark contrast to the next...' so begins the feedback from HCE's first judge for its first competition. The words were, of course, those of Stephen Morrison-Burke, the youthful poet laureat of Birmingham.

As editor, I must admit, when the editorial team and I met to discuss the possibility of running a competition, we were unsure what to expect, but we were cautiously optimistic. The prizes were chosen, the rules were written and the judge was on-board. What could go wrong?

We vowed to avoid the usual judging cliches ('oh, it was so difficult to select the shortlist...') and got to work. When it came to arranging the shortlist, HCE editors were left scratching their heads and chewing their thumbs: it actually *is* hard. Luckily, we only had to prepare a select few, it was Stephen who had the real work to do. Firstly, well done to Lindsay Waller-Wilkinson and Carly Berg, both shortlisted, a narrow miss for both.

So, the top three:

**3rd place: Juice  
Nadia Kingsley**

*We liked the poetry and loved the sciency theme. -Ed.*

**2nd place: Yellow Islands  
John Kitchen**

*Great to look at and a bold tone. -Ed.*

**1st place: Brilliance  
Brenda Anderson**

*'I chose 'Brilliance' because I love the images it created in my mind. The poem instantly swept me into a completely different world, embellished with both colour and character. I genuinely didn't want the poem to finish. I was left wanting more.'*

-Stephen

Congratulations Brenda, a t shirt design of your colour and style choice (see right) will be en route shortly...



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T-shirt Competition Winner!

**Brenda Anderson**

## Brilliance

Jerome wanted whiter-than-white, a brilliance to outshine the sun. He would succeed where no other artist had. The world would acknowledge his greatness. Jerome grinned. With care he gathered essence of solar flare, nuclear explosion and supernova, and mixed them together. Satisfied, he looked around. Canvases overflowed the studio walls and blocked the rear door. Jerome tossed everything aside, then sanded and painted the door. He couldn't wait any longer. Jerome flung the transformed door open and stepped through. Brilliant light enveloped him. Blinking, he saw hazy outlines of men standing in groups, each with one hand on his neighbour's shoulder.

"What's this?" he asked. "Where's the back alley?"

One man swung round and reached out for Jerome. "You're new here?"

"New?" Jerome scratched his head. "I've been using this studio for years."

The man's lip curled. "Another painter? Join the crowd."

Jerome blinked. "Where am I?"

"We call it White Night," said the man. "A little joke."

"Joke?"

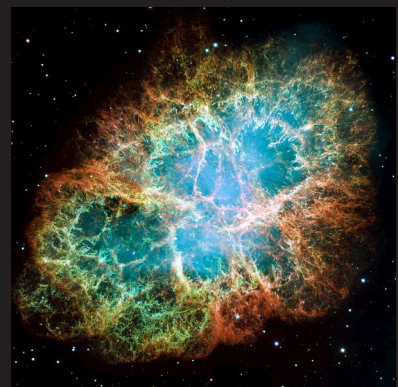
"You worked up Brilliant White, from Essence of Supernova, right? Think speed of light, man. Any second now."

Jerome saw the man's opaque eyes in searing Brilliant White, an instant before blindness embraced him in its velvet arms.

### HERE COMES... BRENDA

'I chose the colour 'white' because I heard an artist/writer comment once that it is the hardest colour to do anything special with. Also, I have two art-trained sisters and I want to make them proud.'

'My fiction has appeared in 10Flash Quarterly, Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine, Apocrypha & Abstractions, Dinosaur Bees, A cappella Zoo and will appear in Bards & Sages Quarterly. I live in Adelaide, South Australia.'



# John Kitchen

## Jackson Pollock's YELLOW ISLANDS

contemplate negotiate  
 Black  
 BLAsT  
 YeLLow calm in  
 dark Swirrrllss and flicksof  
 aTomic  
 tongue  
 shove & Pulse  
 the unfocussed tanGO  
 eye  
 bL asT BLack  
 dRawn in  
 DRift out Black cl a sh  
 fliT in  
 dark matter slars  
 nerVous break Do W N  
 disaPPear in  
 Nu clear fi SS in G  
 uN seTT L ing  
 APACHE dance  
 sPLaTTT

### HERE COMES... JOHN

John is a regular contributor to HCE. He is based in Leicester, reads regularly at open mic events and once had a poem read on Radio 3 by Imogen Stubbs.

*John's work appears elsewhere in this issue -Ed.*





# Nadia Kingsley

## Juice

Any time you are in the fruit aisle  
of a local supermarket picking out  
the most alluring of their strawberry punnets  
cast your mind back  
two hundred and forty million years  
to the accidental turning into petals from leaves

how that first flower spawned more and more species  
how through the centuries  
their fast life cycle  
turned fertilisation into art form,  
brought about the existence of bees,  
and prompted mutations in primate eye genes  
that ensured seed is at its prime  
when fruit is ingested.

At the first bite however  
you will know it's not your childhood flavour  
and that gene manipulation  
may bring a high-yield, bright red fruit to the table  
but seed that is sterile.

### HERE COMES... NADIA

Nadia Kingsley is a scientist, poet, writer, artist and publisher who lives in the West Midlands. Her poems have been published in Orbis, Brand, Wenlock Poetry Festival Anthology 2011 and 2012, Poetry Cornwall, and she has won prizes for her short stories and poetry. Her brick sculpture, photography and textile art have been exhibited in Birmingham, London and Brighton. Nadia set up Fair Acre Press in 2011. Roadkill is its third publication. She lives on a farm in Shropshire.

# Carly Berg

## Men Are Grey

Men are industrial grey. They don't have jewelry boxes. No fashion, make-up, or fruity rum drinks for them. No happy shopping for bright home décor. It's much more than trinkets, look close. A colorful woman is privileged and loved. Color is an easy life in a plush nest.

Men barely know their colors, poor horses.

My husband was reading a toaster repair manual for fun. I said, poor grey workhorse.

I shall teach you your colors so you, too, can land soft.

Neigh, he said, stomping his hoof.

But I coaxed him with a carrot, out of the barn and into the house. We did color flash-cards.

Brown he said, to the first three cards.

No. Russet, Peru, chestnut.

Three Yellows.

No. Chiffon, canary, goldenrod.

He said, Green. Green. Green.

Celadon. Olive. Chartreuse.

He studied but could not learn, even after I whipped him.

I said, how can you stand such a colorless life?

He said, neigh, silly. My colorful trinket is you.

I'm a trinket? You... think you're better than me?

He snorted, of course. I am a horse.

I was going to whip him again but gave him some oats instead. Just felt sorry for him, I guess.

### HERE COMES... CARLY

'About my color choice: It was a cold grey morning and I feel like grey really picked me rather than the other way around. I wonder what my husband will say. I fixed him a plate of sliced carrots and apples to eat while he reads it.'

Carly Berg is a pen name who doesn't appreciate how the other name gets to go everywhere while she is kept to the side like a dirty little secret. Her stories appear here and there.

*Carly's work appears elsewhere in this issue -Ed.*



# Lindsay Waller-Wilkinson

## Red and Green

The dreaded day arrives, but the sight  
of long legs, like mum's, clad in beryl-bright  
stockings topped by a brilliant emerald coat  
cuts jewel-like through the pallid half-light  
of the cold afternoon. How I feed off  
you, the clash, the brash aliveness of you,  
take you in greedily as the maws of grief  
threaten, yawn, reduce me to child.

And you  
are by my side, hold me as no one else  
could and the days, months, years that took their quiet  
toll let rip, falling round me, messily,  
dissipating into the flowers and dirt.  
Red and green should never be seen, they say...  
They – who have no understanding of grey.

### HERE COMES... LINDSAY

'I wrote the poem after my mother's funeral. The image of my sister had a powerful effect on me. Everywhere was grey, I even felt grey inside, but her colourful beauty helped me through. The last couplet makes reference to both red/green colour blindness and the old wives tale.'

Lindsay Waller-Wilkinson: A fashion designer for 25 years, now a writer of poetry and short stories, an enthusiastic open-micer at various spoken word events in and around the East Midlands and currently working on her first novel.

Blogs at [www.lindsaywallerwilkinson.com](http://www.lindsaywallerwilkinson.com) (poems, stories, dreams, realities)

*Lindsay's work appears elsewhere in this issue*  
-Ed.

# Mary Ellen Flynn

## Hacienda Red: A history

Pennsylvania Paints has conducted extensive research into the history of the use of colour in Mexican Home Décor. Hacienda Red is perhaps the oldest known pigment, most often used in entry ways and living rooms. It is a colour of meeting and joy. Freya Toyab of Norfolk further elaborated on the use of Hacienda Red in 2003 when she decided to employ the colour for her living room. “I’d been to Mexico that summer and fell in love with the multi-coloured rooms there.” She had not only fallen in love with Mexico’s walls but with one of its sons, Rogelio Jimenez. Her visa neared its end and tears flowed from her eyes, whilst he, in his own gentle relief, knew the relationship had met an end.

Freya’s living room walls are still graced with Hacienda Red, as well as the sheets that cover her bed.

## Severe Grey

Do you remember the colour of the sky that day, babe? It was severe grey tinged with a bit of blood. You and I walked down the streets of our city delighted at our discovery of one another. We walked for days under that sky in its silence. We were worlds colliding in that misery. That colour told us all that was to come but we refused to listen.



## Garage Door

*“Cobalt [blue] is a divine colour and there is nothing so beautiful for putting atmosphere around things...” Vincent Van Gogh*

I could paint the whole house cobalt—  
Its strength could become mine.  
But, I will be happy  
To paint just the garage door.  
Spots of it fleck onto pale my hand then onto my  
arms  
Gorgeous cobalt becomes me.

Dresden blue it has been called  
And all else I know about that city-- is that it suffered  
Horribly red hot fury fire....  
Could the cobalt have saved it then?

Still, this garage door won't paint itself...  
I stop to listen: children shout in the garden behind—  
My own children- should I tend to them?  
Best not.  
It looks as if it might rain, again.

Cobalt blue: keeper of a car, bicycles and a lawn  
mower.  
Mr Van Gogh called you divine. You are better than  
this.

I reach up on my ladder, teetering to meet  
The last edges, then down with my paint sodden  
brush.  
With a hush I am finished, I step back, eyes feasting  
on another world.



# Cathy Bryant

## Planet Baby

Surely the wrong word for sorrow,  
The cerulean of summer seas and skies  
The colour of light, the bright, bright blue  
Spontaneous laughter, the midnight blue  
Secret looks between lovers,  
Backdrop to smoke and sparks.  
Peacock butterfly, flutter in sunshine  
Like eyelashes batting or bats flitting;  
Such indigo flirtations make me gasp.  
Helpless in the face of them, I fall into joy  
In the planet earth of my lover's eyes,  
To the sound of a gull's cry and a feeling  
Of adventure.

### HERE COMES... CATHY

'Why Blue? It may not seem bold to you, but I was forbidden blue as a child - my parents said that it was cold and unfriendly. To me it meant freedom and joy, and I hope that I've shown that in my poem Planet Baby.'

Cathy Bryant's poems and stories have been published all over the world. In 2012 Cathy won the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Prize, the Sampad Inspired by Tagore Poetry Contest, the Malahat Review Monostich Poem Contest and the Swanezine Poetry Competition, and became runner-up Prole Laureate. Cathy co-edits the annual anthology 'Best of Manchester Poets', and her own collection, 'Contains Strong Language and Scenes of a Sexual Nature' was published recently. See more at [www.cathybryant.co.uk](http://www.cathybryant.co.uk)

# Alexander Millen

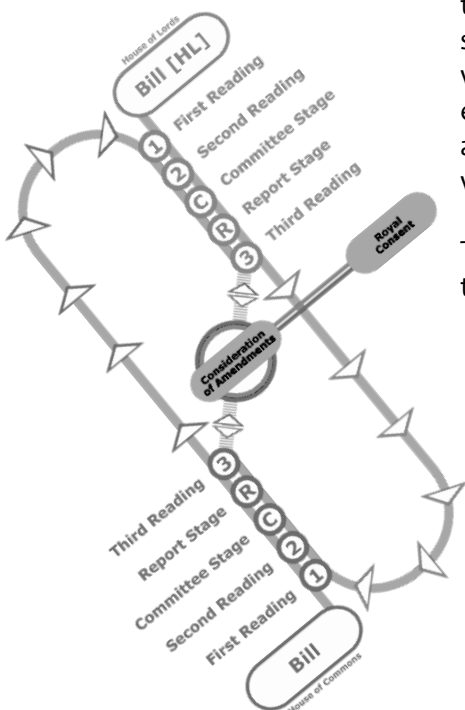
## The Colourless Forum

Sweat saturated the air in the factory. Hundreds of workers distinguishable only by the colour of their uniforms grunted and sniggered as though their work were inconsequential, each taking their place on the assembly line. The usual suspects clashed with their routine, superficially combative confrontations. And so they drudged away, ensuring the finished product was fit for public consumption. The grey smog that arose from the factory infected the body politic, rendering its citizens as docile as the workers themselves.

Then PMQs was over and the MPs scuttled off home to draft the futile debates of tomorrow.

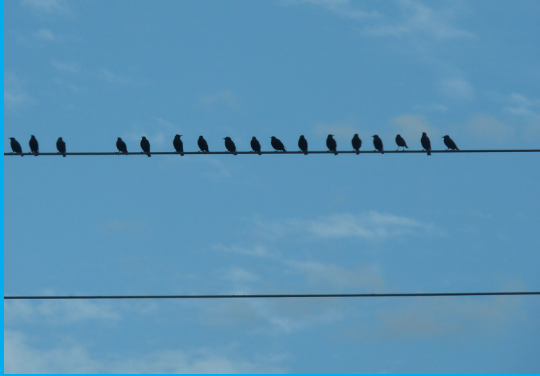
### HERE COMES... ALEX

Alex wanted to dismiss the uniformity of modern politics, so what better colour than grey?



# Sue Barnard

## Dirty Dishes Blues



## A Bluer Shade of Pale

The sky looks blue.  
It isn't really blue; it's  
black.  
It just looks blue  
because our atmos-  
phere  
disperses the sun-  
light.

The sea looks blue.  
It isn't really blue; it's  
colourless.  
It just looks blue  
because it reflects  
the sky above it.

I am called "Blue".  
I'm not really blue;  
I'm white.  
I'm just called Blue  
because that's the  
name  
Aussies give to red-  
heads.

The moon is some-  
times called blue.  
It isn't really blue; it's  
grey.  
It's just called blue  
if it's full twice  
in one calendar  
month.

Some people feel  
blue.  
They aren't really  
blue; they're sad.  
They're just called  
blue  
and I've no idea why.  
How can anyone feel  
a colour?

I woke up this morning, and I found that my dishwash-  
er had broken down.

Yeah, when I woke up this morning, I found that my  
dishwasher had broken down.

And when I looked at all those dirty dishes, my face  
wore a dirty great big frown.

I looked at the all those dirty dishes, and I thought,  
this ain't no way to start the day.

Yeah, when I looked at all those dirty dishes, I thought,  
this ain't no way to start the day.

But those dirty dishes looked back at me and said, we  
ain't going to go away.

So I rolled my sleeves up and I ran the hot water into  
the sink.

Yeah, I rolled my sleeves up, and I ran the hot water  
into the sink.

And as I started washing those dirty dishes, that was  
when I started to think.

I thought: when I have to wash these dirty dishes, why  
should I make a fuss?

Yeah, when I have to wash these dirty dishes, why  
should I make a fuss?

'Cause the food which made all these dishes dirty,  
shows the good Lord's very good to us.

### HERE COMES... SUE

'I chose the colour blue partly because it has so many  
different connotations, but mainly because it is my  
favourite colour!'

Memorably described by my son as 'professionally  
weird?', I divide my time between working part-time in  
a bookshop, playing part-time at being a writer, and  
fighting a full-time losing battle to stay sane. I try to  
keep an open mind, but constantly find that people  
keep coming along and trying to put stuff into it.

# Mason Shreve

## The Sounds of a Mustard Knife (Jesus was a Failed Abortion)

with his yellow skin and yellow  
tongue,  
he's a green hearted

son of a bitch. his sin is his culture  
double wrapped in a ski mask. (he sees black oil

flowing through her skin.) spit trickles  
and falls sluggishly

while his mouth  
is high and tight. her legs are red,

her eyes are closed, and the blood  
slips slowly down.

...

moaning, moaning, screaming

...

reverberations of broken glass  
mimic the sound  
of a mustard knife.

(a muffled groan.)

his eyes are potatoes,  
brown as dark, ugly shit.

### HERE COMES... MASON

When told his poem was 'disgusting' by the editor, he said 'thanks, that's what I go for.'

Mason Shreve graduated from Ball State University in 2012 with a degree in English Education. Now he works as a reporter for a newspaper in rural Indiana.





# Ben Hayes

## Not all Gold Glitters



I was once told that not everything that glitters is gold. I'm sure you've heard the saying. But not all gold glitters, and some things are more precious still.

The bright sun's light warm on my face, and the drought-dry grass prickly under my head. The running stream gurgles a counterpoint to a perfect moment of laughter. The flickering reflections of the lamps on wet streets, and the quiet patter of rain on my hat, the scent of honeysuckle in a severed slice of a journey.

Blond hair shining in the dim light, a warm arm around my shoulders. The taste of bitter chocolate, with the spice of a lover's gaze, and a heartbeat beneath my fingers.

The bonfire, blazing high, my face tight with the heat of it. The crackle of fireworks, and a fountain of brilliant sparks above. Hot mulled wine, and the cheers of a crowd.

The sparkle of champagne in its glass, and the dancing candle-flame. The soft rustle of pages and the feel of paper on my fingers, an instant of solitary quiet.

Not all gold glitters. But memories are more valuable than all money, and we are each the sum of infinite moments.

# Adam Steiner

## A Certain Shade of Green

Green is good, bright and alive.

Stood tall in long stalks, our only surrender through ripe youth falling.

Green is clean, neat, the future of us all. We shall rise above the individual's solitary prospects escaping ignorance dust and disease. Dressed in clipped uniform; neat verges and eager lapels in bloom, free from chemical embrace. To the sun, we avert our eyes from the colour of money.

Green has always been righteous and holy. Nature can be cruel without failure, even the spiteful turns bring on new growth (green shoots), sparking our zest to succeed as revenge. Those other bold colours act-out to pretend, like we were never even there:

The hollow promise of sycophantic canaries, an imagined victory turned to fool's gold;  
bull-blind deluded and china-charging;  
lonely sky, so hateful and isolated;  
and lurking in shadows the "independent" minds,  
their grey hearts and purple lips bruised from rhetoric-spitting  
– narrowed viruses coalescing to one bitter end.

JOIN TODAY! We promise a new way!  
To live and sleep peacefully together,  
marching proud in open defiance.  
Our cries alive, to shake the deep hills  
running free as water,  
to a naked, open state.  
Organically grown,  
now with 50% less malice or hate.

# Laura Huntley

## Little Boy Blue

There must have been the white of the soft cellular blanket. There must have been the crimson red of my blood. But I only remember the blue.

We knew that we were having a little boy. We painted all the nursery walls in a Dulux colour called 'Blue Babe', it was perfect. We filled up drawers in giddy anticipation, buying vests, sleepsuits, tiny striped socks and woolly hats.

He was blue when he was born, the cord had wrapped around his neck, and his lips were dark and bruised. Silence.

Giant waves crashed around my head and I felt seasick as I covered my ears to block out the piercing scream. It was me. It was my scream.

We buried him under a calm blue sky, we said goodbye and gave him a blue teddy bear.

Its winter now but the blues remain, though sometimes they are grey and darker still.

Blue; when a torrent of tears strips away the outer layer of numb.

## Friday Night

Red  
Is the carnal  
Stirrings  
Of Friday night.

Red  
Is my heart  
Beating  
That little bit  
faster.

Red  
Is the dark wine  
Which I sip  
And savour.

Red  
Is kissing lips,  
Exploring hands  
And breathy  
sighs.

Red  
Is the lipstick  
print  
Staining  
My glass.

Red  
Is the way  
My clothes  
Fall to the floor.

Red  
Is lust,  
The fleeting eye  
contact,  
The flirtatious  
game.

Red  
Is a passionate  
flashback,  
Hot blushing  
cheeks  
And a Saturday  
morning smile.

Red  
Is the quick  
glimpse  
Of a stocking  
top  
Meeting flesh.

## Being a Kid in the '80s

I hate orange, it tries to force you to be upbeat and happy, it's even more annoying than yellow.

Orange is the carrots scattered around my plate, as a child, the ones I loathed even more than cabbage and sprouts.

I had to eat all of those mushy orange circles before I could leave the table. If I didn't finish them, there would be no Sara Lee Double Chocolate Gateau for me. Excruciating madness.

Orange carrots were spiteful and they made me crazy. I once chopped them up into the tiniest little bits and spread them around the empty family plates, trying to pass them off as peculiar leftovers. Naturally, I was rumbled. I was sent to bed and wasn't even allowed to watch Neighbours.

I tried to put carrots in my pockets to flush down the toilet. My legs were slapped for that. Carrots made me desperate back then.

I quite like them now, after all that.

# Marija Smits

## Ode to the Colour **Brown**

O colour of faeces you hardly give cause  
For a Muse to go out of her way;  
Yet you with your palette from tan  
To black tea have inspired this ode  
With your earthy, rich hues.

For you are the colour of comfort to me  $\frac{3}{4}$   
The substance and depth of some things that I love:  
The worn leather shoes that cradle my feet,  
My old writing desk, still sturdy and stable,  
My threadbare long cardy, with holes in the arms,  
My mid-morning coffee; the odd chocolate treat...

For I am like nature and don't spurn your tones,  
You are, after all, the colour of soil  
From whence jewel-like flowers are born.  
And so humble brown, you inspire this ode,  
Although many a critic will think it pure crud.

### HERE COMES... MARIJA

'Although I love the colour brown, I realize that not many others do... mainly I guess because of its negative associations. My aim was to use the traditional lyrical ode, inject a little humour  $\frac{3}{4}$  plus some personal touches  $\frac{3}{4}$  so that perhaps I could persuade others of its merits.'

Marija Smits is a mother-of-two, a writer and poetess whose work has featured in a wide-ranging variety of publications. She was the winner of the Swanezine Short Story Competition 2012. Her work is eclectic and she loves semi-colons.

## Dwāne Reads

### Translucent Teardrop

It rained translucent teardrops from a giants' eye  
causing repeated rainbow arches to snap across the skies  
Encrusted stripes faded on wall and window sill  
Squeezed out tube from middle like incontinent dribbled waste  
As substance poured custard like flooding towns beneath  
Towns' folk took their Kaleidoscopes' and peering with an eye  
Twisty twisted patterns danced before a monochrome Sky



# John Kitchen

## Seeing Red

At the inquest everyone had been so sorry for him and his family.

120 miles per hour, a flutter of cloth and a thud, his blood against the windscreen. I hit the brakes. His remains were spread along a quarter mile of track. I stood and stared at the world through a bloody smear.

It turns out he'd been depressed, had blood tests, been put on medication, then stopped taking the tablets. He convinced himself he'd have hepatitis or HIV, worked himself into a state; chosen my train, jumped from the bridge, timed it to perfection. Now, I'm on the anti-depressants. I can't face getting in the driver's cab or even the front seat of a car. So many times a day I hear that thud, see that smear.

In my dreams he drops. I see the world through his blood. I wake with wet cheeks, and think of the life I'd had. Of course, he didn't test positive. Why hadn't he drowned himself; blown his brains out; OD'd on whiskey and paracetamol?

A red Routemaster turns the corner. I stand alone at the bus stop. My life has turned to crap. Why not?

## George Elkington, Birmingham 1840

A long way from Tutankhamen's tomb, the industrial heartland, bricks and grime; he plucked the rosebud from his buttonhole, between thumb and first finger, a showman's touch, dipped the bloom into a chemical tank; breath held, captivated they waited, until the gasp, disbelief, trickster, alchemist, applause at the transmutation, not just colour, eternal metal, even the cobweb now gold filigree, nature to precious metal.

Nowadays the magic's turned commonplace, electro-plating, we demand the real thing, solid, hall marked, not cheap and cheerful, we'll not be taken in by the surface sheen.

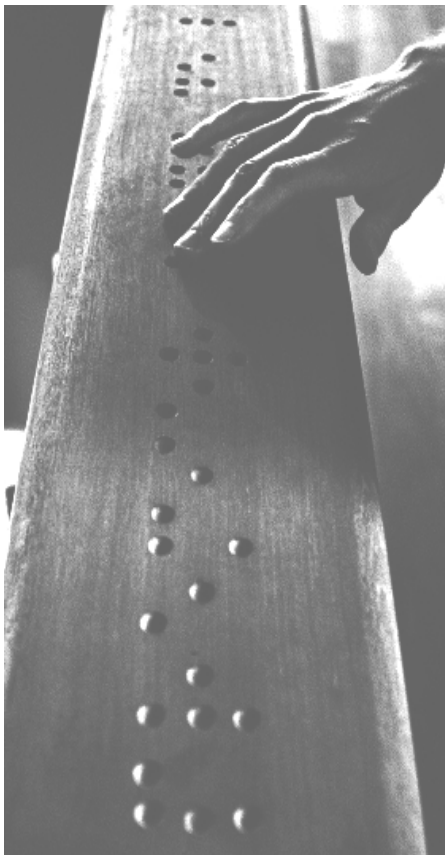
## Chrysophobia

hide your eyes against the onslaught  
this unholy colour, the shock and burn,  
glossy sheen, seared on the retina, lurid,  
incandescent, fevered severity, arcade bright,  
over the top tan shop, Guantanamo, Death Row,  
as subtle as nasturtium, top of the naga scale,  
the equivalence of a blackboard fingernail scratch,  
every nerve end begging for relief  
from the You've been Tangoed dread,  
the glow of belisha beacons, marigolds,  
the Netherlands, Blackpool FC, marmalade  
cats, and phone companies of a certain hue

# MISSING believed STOLEN

the stand out in your face  
shameless passionate  
pillar box fire engine  
blaze and rage  
bleached to strawberry white  
my valentine rose only beige  
danger and stop signs have no  
clarity  
the international  
cross without colour  
not such a noble charity  
blood rendered colourless  
my rage only fractious  
hot's only tepid  
Ferrari's insipid  
no scarlet or crimson  
no maroon or vermillion  
life is anaemic and bled  
my mist is just weak without

---



## Colourblind

by Anthony Moore

I cannot see colour.  
People tell me it's so good.  
Bleak, yet beautiful.

# Who Drew What...

## The Artists in the HCE 'Colours' Issue

### **Clare Hicks p. 3**

Clare is a self-taught artist from Manchester. She works mostly in pencils and especially enjoys drawing horses.

“The horse—a symbol of strength, power and speed—is painted in shades of red—the colour of courage and determination. Yet it runs for its very life from some unseen threat, unable to stop even as it breaks apart under the force of its own fears.”

### **Angel Dowden p. 23**

Angel is a self-taught, 18 year old artist from the lush green land that is the east coast USA.

The character in this painting is a werewolf, and Angel has enjoyed painting him often in the past to explore the theme of duality.

### **Areli Lopez p.24**

Areli is a freelance illustrator who is currently enjoying working on personal projects and getting

her work more well known. This piece revolves around the colour green, which represents the devious side that people hide within.

### **Charlie Kirkham p. 33**

Charlie is a UK based artist & illustrator. His gallery can be viewed online at [www.charliekirks.com](http://www.charliekirks.com). This piece is watercolour on paper, 23 x 40 cm.

### **Harry Corr, p.45**

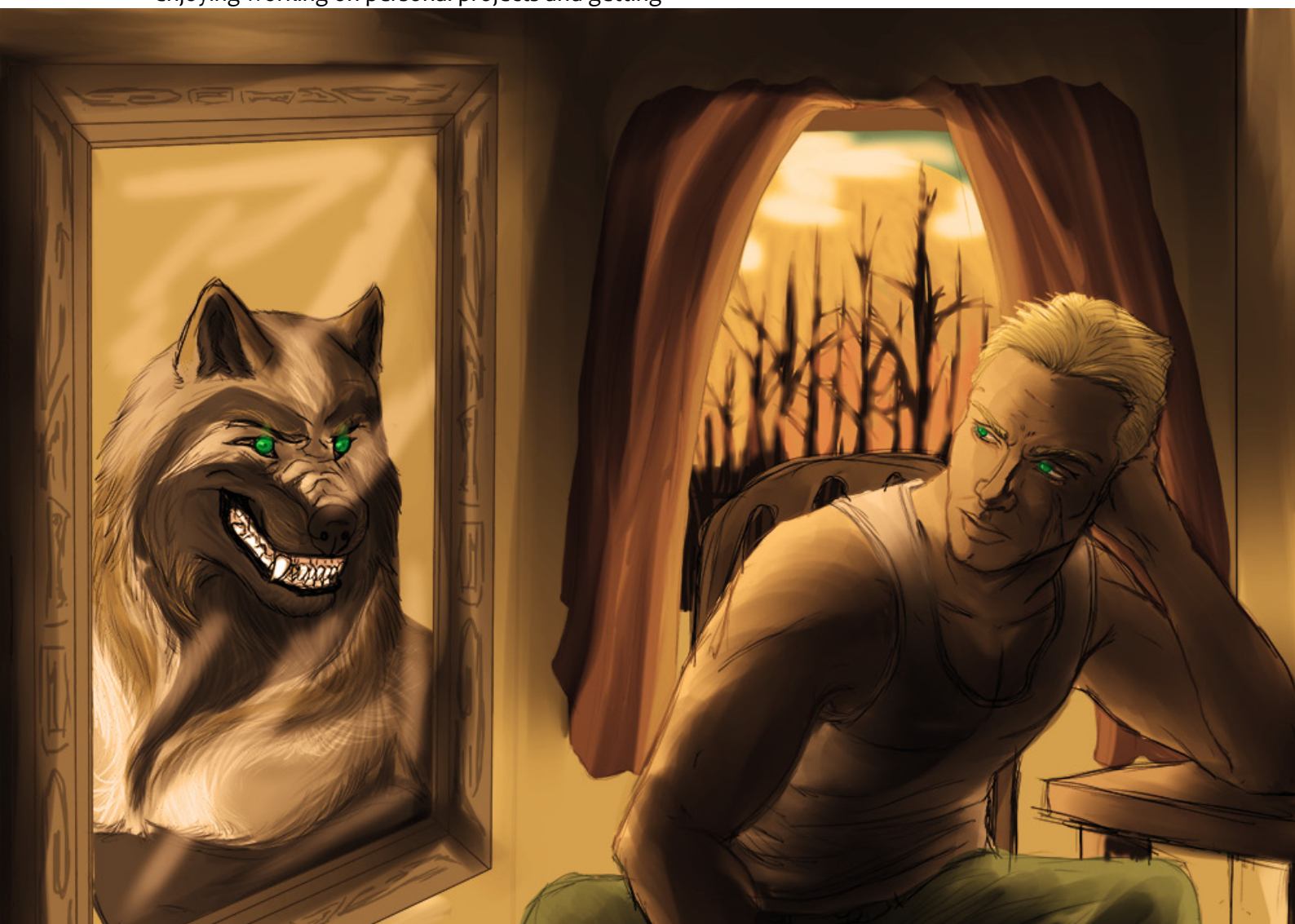
Harry is the benevolent force behind the HCE logo. He also works as a freelance illustrator and dancer-for-hire.

### **Aidy Brookes cover, p36 & 37**

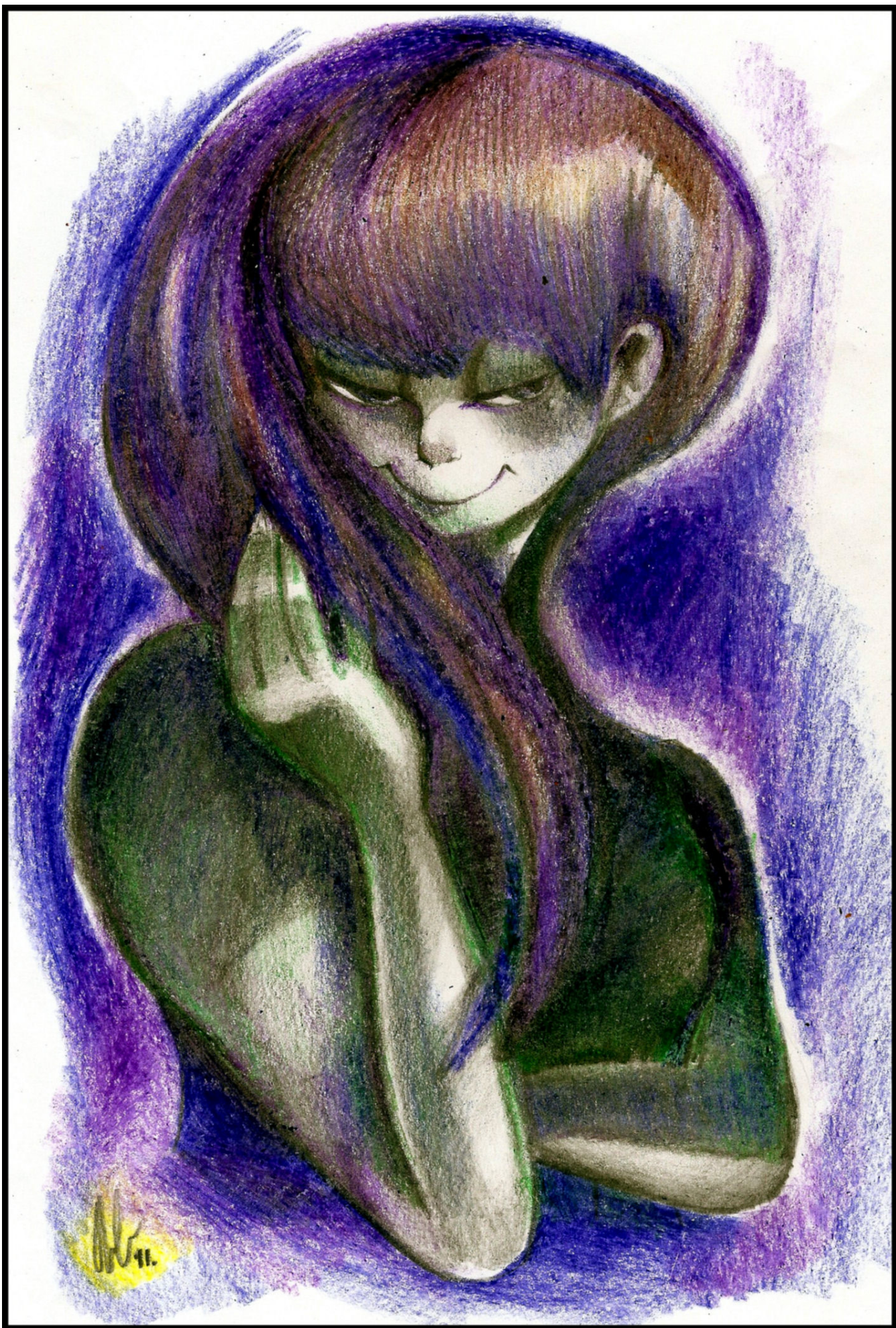
Aidy's intricate work is difficult to define and staunchly modern. he writes, draws and thinks and is a good friend to HCE.

### **Want something drawn for your own project?**

**Contact:** [jen.e@herecomeseveryone.me](mailto:jen.e@herecomeseveryone.me) with your enquiry for expert Network assistance.









# Purple Rules!

by Stephani Franklin

The assignment was pretty straightforward. We were each to create a piece of art utilizing a sheet of construction paper and items from a box Mrs. Rebmon had placed on her desk. When it was completed, we would have a collage. It sounded so exotic, so sophisticated.

I was not Mrs. Rebmon's favorite student. Truth be told, she didn't like me at all. I was adept at reading and arithmetic, but she thought I was messy and prone to daydream. I misplaced things, often left needed items at home; irresponsible was her preferred term for me. She clucked and rolled her eyes at me quite often. I yearned to be in her good graces, and I felt this was the perfect assignment for me to prove my mettle.

I imagined my classmates gathered around my desk, the one in the next to the last row in the far right corner of the room. I saw them standing in awe, hands clasped across their mouths, eyes wide, wondering how it was possible for a mere second grader to create such a masterpiece. Our principal, Sister Agatha, would swoop in to pick it up and tuck it into some secret vault for safekeeping until time to enter it in the Diocesan Art Fair, where undoubtedly they would create a special Gran Prix to bestow upon it because it's unique magnificence defied categorization. I just needed an inspiration.

Eyeing the materials laid out on her desk, I first selected a pristine sheet of 8" x 11" construction paper in vivid purple, my favorite color. Next I proceeded to the box. It was a fairly good-sized cardboard coat box, filled with beads and yarn, buttons, shells, sequins and all manner of gleaming ephemera. I saw a huge oyster shell that glinted with iridescent flashes of purple. I had my theme!

I grabbed every item, big or small, that exhibited any value of my favorite color. Lavender, mauve, grape, lilac, violet, plum, indigo, purplish-blue, bluish-purple, I scooped them up and headed back to my desk with a singular determination to create the greatest, most purpliest collage the world had ever seen. When I sat down and unscrewed

the cap on my Elmer's School Glue, I wasn't even tempted to make fake peeling skin on the palms of my hands, instead, I set right to work.

The period for art was drawing to a close, and with excitement I could barely suppress, I cradled my still-drying creation gently in my arms as I walked to the front of the room to place it on Mrs. Rebmon's desk with the great care a true masterpiece deserves. I fairly skipped back to my desk, my lips clamped between my teeth to keep from giggling in delighted anticipation.

"Look at this one class, whose is this?" Mrs. Rebmon queried. She held aloft a Pepto Bismol pink canvas, dotted with shirt buttons around which a piece of beige yarn slithered like a snake. A pedestrian offering, in my opinion.

Janice raised her hand to take credit.

"Very good, Janice." She said as she returned it to her desk. She selected a blue collage with sequins placed in three sagging rows, accented by intersecting lines of colored toothpicks.

"I like this pattern," she said. "Raise your hand if this is yours."

Tommy Brogdon proudly raised his hand.

"Very nice."

Replacing it, she began to scan the desktop in front of her. I saw her hand hover across the top of her desk and I held my breath as it paused over my inspired grape juice-hued work of genius. My moment of redemption was at hand.

"Whose is this?" Her voice dripped with disdain as she pinched the corners of my opus, holding it up and wrinkling her nose as if it were made of some unspeakably vile substance. I melted into my desk in disbelief. My ears deafened with a high-pitched ring of shame.

"Too much glue. Too much stuff. This is just a mess!"

Gingerly, she set it down as if to handle it any longer would cause an allergic reaction.

If you will indulge me, the rest of this essay is an open letter to my second grade teacher, Mrs. Rebmon.

Dear Mrs. Rebmon,  
I still love purple. I hustled my favorite color, along with a couple of other precious commodities belonging to me, out of your classroom that day, safe and sound, albeit a little worse for the wear. They have survived to this day intact thanks to the proactive stance taken by that brave little second grade girl who sat in the corner, two rows from the back.

I staked my claim on purple only two short years before, when put on the spot by a kindergarten teacher. "What is your favorite color?" she asked me. I sat mute, never realizing before that very minute that I could choose a color to be exclusively mine.

"Purple," I finally replied. I loved purple popsicles, I loved Grapette. I always wanted to be the purple piece in "Candyland". I loved gathering fistfuls of violets at my grandmother's and sticking them in an empty grape jelly jar. And purple it has been to this very day.

It could have all ended with that collage, but I wanted to write you this letter to let you know it didn't. I still wear my birthstone, amethyst, whenever the mood strikes, which is quite often. I have a hillside full of lavender hydrangeas and every fall plant hundreds of Mme. Sophie hyacinths that reverberate in a shout of purple at the end of winter that is so electric against the sullen husk of my winter garden, it's almost obscene. I have a gorgeous Concord grape chiffon strapless gown in which I look absolutely stunning when my husband takes me out for a special evening. I wear it with a pair of plum satin peep-toes with four-inch heels and an outrageous rhinestone t-strap. Sometimes I even paint my toenails purple. Sparkly purple. Too much? I don't think so!

But most of all, I wanted you to know this. I owe it all to you. Every time I swim upstream against the arbiters of convention, when I brush aside self-doubt and plow right ahead with what I know in my heart is a damn good idea, any time someone has intimated that I am not quite good enough and I whisper to myself, "Yes, you are," I have you to thank. The collage was fabulous; you only needed to wait for the glue to dry.

Sincerely,  
Stephani Franklin



#### HERE COMES... STEPHANI

*Stephani Franklin was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma and is a graduate of Oklahoma State University. She currently serves on the Advisory Board of Nimrod Journal (University of Tulsa) and recently won first prize in the Tulsa City-County Library Adult Creative Writing Contest (fiction). She also writes creative non-fiction that explores her experiences growing up Catholic in the Oklahoma in the Sixties as well as poetry and historical fiction. She simply loves to write. And purple.*



# Alizarin, with Variation

by Gio Clairval

The winds may have carried the memory of colors (or so I liked to think), but in the plains we lived monochrome lives.

"You must think in red, love," my mother would say, "like every other woman."

"I like green better."

"Green is forbidden."

"But it's my favorite color! It's in all my dreams."

Mother frowned and returned her attention to my new dress. The sewing machine made a vrrr vrrr noise I liked, but I hated the fabric.

"I don't want another red dress. I want green."

"Magenta is nice. Don't you agree?"

I didn't.

So I stalked away from home and into the woods, searching for variations. I was eleven and stubborn.

Sometimes a sapling sprouted small green leaves, but they turned puce before my eyes. I huffed and kicked the uncooperative plant. Mud covered my cerise ballerinas in vermilion. I'd found an old book in the library. Pictures showed that mud used to be orange and brown; that there had been plenty of colors in our land, but it had also been a time of discord, with quarrels and wars and sadness. The relation between war and color was unclear to me.

A floating island glided above, flaunting its cinnabar belly. Maybe, I thought, the red comes from up there, poured on us by the monstrous green-skinned men of the legends, the creatures that had waged war and

burned and raped. To glimpse one of those warriors! Just to see the color, which the book claimed it used to be the hue of grass in the old times.

Scarlet clouds deepened toward burgundy. My feet ached, but I didn't want to go home. I discovered a barn and burrowed into cardinal-red hay. In the morning, carmine blood was streaming down my thighs. I couldn't turn it off; so I paddled across a marsh, leaving a trail of pomegranate swirls in the pink waters. A peasant found me huddled up among amaranth reeds.

She whispered reassuring words and led me to her hut. "Stay with me," she said as we ate radish-colored cheese before the fireplace. "I've always wanted a daughter with venetian-red hair."

"My hair's blond. Strawberry blond, if you insist. And I must go."

"Why?"

"I'm looking for where the red comes from. It must be somewhere."

"You're a strange girl. What will you do when you find it?"

"I'll shut down the tap."

"The source of red is Life. You can't shut down Life."

I fingered the knife at my belt. "I already have, twice."

Not that I was threatening the nice peasant. I only killed the women that tried to steal my food or kisses.

After leaving the hut, I walked for months. I walked for years before I met you. And everything around me was rust.

Finally, I mustered the courage

to quit the plains, climbing the stairway that appears every night in the terracotta sky, when the moon gives a brick-rose grin and. . .

. . . I found you.

Despite the sword at your belt, you didn't look dangerous, but you stood taller than anyone I'd known. I held my head up high and laughed.

You wrinkled your forehead.

"What's so funny?"

"You're red, like us."

"So?"

"I thought all males were green."

"Female lies."

I couldn't let you have the last word, so I hit back: "And they told you women were what, blue?"

You thrust your thumb upward.

"We can see you from above."

That threw me out for a loop.

Although I wanted to, I couldn't resent you for living upstairs.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"To find the source of the red."

"Funny. That's what I'm after, too." So the red didn't come from the islands, as I'd thought.

"How does it reach your homes up there, then?"

"Tornadoes."

"Ah. And what will you do when you find the source?"

"I'll dismantle the machine the First Women put together."

"The machine?"

"Yes. A machine that sends out whispered orders to have everyone think in only one color."

"Never heard of such nonsense.

That's male propaganda! The scriptures tell of a benevolent goddess who erased all colors

but red, to end discord."  
 End discord . . . I thought of the two women I'd killed. Our ancestors were wrong: war still existed in the plains of red; only it was a hidden war. Creating the Banks of Seeds and exiling all males to the floating islands hadn't eradicated violence. All of a sudden, I wanted your admiration. "I've been seeking the source since I was eleven."  
 Your eyes widened. "You must have been a lot of places. Can I walk with you?"  
 "Why not? I have a knife."  
 "Do you have a name, too?"  
 "Alizarin."  
 "I'm Coral."  
 I didn't know what to say next. "I still love the color green," I blurted. "Then it must be a beautiful color."  
 A flatterer, all right. You didn't impress me nearly as much as you thought.

#

After six months of searching, we arrived at the mountains of the Deep South. You said the chill whiteness was called ice. "We have lots of it back above." (I would have loved to see the frozen lakes of your floating islands.) Soon we found the source of the red: it crouched somewhere under the glacier and spurted out in a river.  
 A guardian dragon sprang out with a roar. You didn't step forward to protect me with your body, for which I was grateful. In theory. The fiery breath singed my hair. My eyebrows will never grow back, I fear.  
 I burst the dragon's eye with my knife. You stabbed the flank. Together we hewed at the neck. Then you fell to your knees, hand against your leg. A serrated claw had pierced your thigh. "Go on," you shouted. "I'll be right behind you."  
 Inside the mountain I saw no machines. A glowing woman writhed, two of her three arms chained to the rock. Blue and yellow stuttered at the tips of her imprisoned hands,

but red streamed from her third, unbound palm. I looked closer at the chain: the hallmark of the Women's Plains branded every rusted link. I stared. It couldn't be. My breath came out ragged and thin.  
 I shattered the goddess's fetters with your sword. My victory cheer echoed her joyful cry as I raced from the cave to tell you my triumph. And here you lay, the taps of your heart running dry.  
 (Please breathe please please open your eyes and breathe.)  
 We did it. Blue and yellow squirt from the goddess's freed hands. She mixes new colors in her lap. On the road toward home the flowers will blossom in unfamiliar shades, and the green of the grass will be soft and new.  
 But the flame in my hand only blooms red as I stand by the pyre. It's quiet as you burn.  
 I wish you could see the ribbons of seven colors arching across the sky, bound together yet free.  
 --end--

#### HERE COMES... GIO

'I am an Italian-born writer. After living most of my life in Paris, where I worked as a strategic-management consultant, I recently moved to Edinburgh, Scotland. My publication credits include *Weird Tales*, *Polluto Magazine*, and *Postscripts* (forthcoming), among others.'

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# Tea Break

by Paul Francis

Under a pitiless Moroccan sun  
we head into the foothills  
along a narrow beaten track  
of solid ruddy clay.

The village isn't much. A line  
of crude block shacks along the path  
with bare square windows, simple doors.  
No colour, no relief.

Our guide negotiates. This house  
can give us Berber tea if we'd  
just like to climb these stairs,  
come in through here, take off our boots.

And there it is. Oasis.  
A sea of solace, comforting  
with breeze and shade and cushioned  
seats  
a pool of Atlas blue.



# Mezquita, Cordoba

by Paul Francis

So, when I know the bomb's about to drop  
here's what I'll do. I'll walk around the square  
formed by these double arches. I shan't stop  
or hurry. Just keep walking, being there.

The Christians followed rules from the Crusades:  
install cathedral where the mosque was, fast.  
But even they could see these colonnades  
were special, worth preserving, built to last.

Way back, the architect confronts a queue  
of questions. So, the columns in this dream?  
I thought eight hundred. Or is that too few?

No decoration? Just a colour scheme.  
That's lots of colours, then? No, only two.  
Cream and terracotta. Terracotta, cream.



## HERE COMES... PAUL

Paul Francis is a retired teacher, who writes and performs poems on a range of topics. This year he's launching *Boxed Set*, a series of poems on film and TV, and will be reading a selection of those at the Wenlock Poetry Festival in April.

*Paul also provided the images that accompany his poems -Ed.*

# Lee Rourke

## completely black

Cold light slants,  
Moves forwards  
Towards blackness.

Not slanted like  
A Hammershøi,  
Exposing dust motes;

Slanted indefinably,  
Turning back  
Towards black.

Within this:  
Form turning  
Away from form;

Shuntering through  
Open space  
Like light.

### HERE COMES... LEE

'I chose to write about the colour black because like gravity it leads to the grave.'

Lee Rourke is the author of the 'The Canal' (winner of The Guardian's 'Not The Booker Prize 2010'). He's Writer-in-Residence & an MFA Lecturer at Kingston University, London. He lives by the sea.

There is black,  
It is there,  
Hovering near.

Sickening black.

No need to scatter  
The assumption of  
Memory —

To somehow surpass  
it.

It's always there:  
Black.

Never ending —  
Black.

## there is black



# a geometry of blackness set against light

Cold light slants,  
Moves forwards  
Towards blackness.

Not slanted like  
A Hammershøi,  
Exposing dust motes;

Slanted indefinably,  
Turning back  
Towards black.

Within this:  
Form turning  
Away from form;

Shuntering through  
Open space  
Like light.







# Crayola Dreams

By Ed Higgins

## Ultra Yellow:

Your hair drenched in  
So. California rain,  
drops hovering from  
a golden river.

## Ceruleans:

The sky, shivering  
underside of black space,  
sinister as happiness. An  
invitation, still.

## Magenta:

Purplish-ochre sunsets.  
Our words racing like  
gazelles overtaking themselves.

## Gray:

It's all become clear  
as smog, you said,  
laughing. Our hands scooping  
up dreams.

## Flesh:

Blushed to peach. Arrows piercing  
as easily as tears stain a pillow.  
As snails crushed on a sidewalk.

## Fun in the Sun:

That hawk circling overhead,  
in its stained beak a small field mouse.  
Time to part, you said.

## Bittersweet:

Your tongue a fire of remembrance.  
Shall I tell you more? You once  
whispered tears to me.

## Outrageous Orange:

Colors talking in riddles.  
Mirror-laughing, knee-slapping  
ironies. Love's never after.

## Cotton Candy

Your silken blouse in moonlite.  
Waving summer-lit branches  
in the avocado orchard.

## Denim:

We laughed back then  
through California Disney air.  
Whatever this is, you said.  
my toenails stay Carnation Pink.

## HERE COMES... ED

Bio: My poems and short fiction have appeared in various print and online journals including: Monkeybicycle, Pindeldyboz, Pen Pusher, CrossConnect, Word Riot, The Centrifugal Eye, Mannequin Envy, and Blue Print Review, among others. I teach creative writing and literature at George Fox University, south of Portland, OR., USA.



# Pink Frilly Girls

By Eleanor Ball

I am either male or female. As a result, I've been encouraged to associate with a certain colour from an early age. It wasn't my parents who encouraged this – it was, you know, society and all that. I'd flee shelves of pink frilly dresses, boxes of soft pink toys, and lines of pink toy ovens. I still can't cook, by the way.

Meanwhile, I'd watch my brothers having to resist or succumb to the colour blue. From cool blue t-shirts, to bright blue footballs – to, of course, blue toy guns (but that's another rant for another time).

As we all know from QI (or from people who have watched QI; or from people who have watched QI but pretend they got the information from an actual book), a hundred years ago it was the other way around. Boys wore pink, which was seen as a softer version of the purportedly “strong and masculine” red, while girls wore blue, which was perceived as “serene and dainty” (and all those other things that little girls most definitely are not).

Currently (in our society at least), it's commonplace to put your daughter in pink and

your son in blue, supposedly because it's a bit embarrassing for all involved if someone gets your baby's gender wrong. But when the child's a bit older, you can generally guess which one it is. So why the continued colour choices?

Perhaps nobody cares. And why should they? I'll wear what I want, and my child will wear what they want. Or maybe, when those kids become adults, their colour choices are about irony. Last week I noticed a very buff guy in a bright pink shirt strolling around with his guy friends and doing a bit of mild spitting on the pavement. I think the idea is that he's so comfortable with his male heterosexuality that “not even pink” could convince people otherwise.

And at university I met someone who said she was wearing pink “as an ironic statement against goths who wear pink ironically”. What?

So pink has wandered into a sort of dully metaphysical realm of its own; one in which nobody is quite sure what to think.

While I was ranting about this to a friend of mine, she pointed out that there may in fact be an evolutionary cause for the attraction of some



women to redder shades. According to a University of Newcastle study, being drawn to red and pink may have helped prehistoric women spot ripe fruit – or ripe mates. But is this instinct really going to be so prevalent in a two-year-old girl?

Suffice to say, even the most basic evolutionary instincts are these days superfluous. We don't need to eat meat to get protein, we don't need to have sex to be parents, we don't need to notice ripe fruit, and it's not altogether necessary for potential mates to sport a reddish hue. If it was, Piers Morgan would be a sex symbol.

So the evolution argument isn't a valid defence for dressing



most little girls in pink. And incidentally, shouldn't it be the *boys* dressing in pink if that's what attracts females...?

If we stick with our "who cares?" approach, these gender-colour associations are going to stick to us like glitter. Pink glitter. So, after so many decades of encouraging our children to stick to their allotted colour schemes, maybe we should try the opposite.

There's something about

seeing a pink frilly girl that irritates me. I can't help it. It's as though her parents are screaming: "look at her, look at us, we have a daughter, a girl, a girl girl girl girl girl". When in fact, the message we should be sending is that it doesn't matter if it's a boy or a girl, it can do what it wants, be what it wants, love who it wants, wear what it wants.

And really, when I look at that pink frilly girl and turn my nose up in righteous indignation, *I'm* the prejudiced one. So while

you work on buying your girl a blue shirt and making your boy a pink birthday cake, I'll work on reining in my judgement.

But if I have kids, I'm dressing them in black.





*Its father a fellow from the electromagnetically radiant  
An artist's tool of spot or gradient  
A mother of international, intergalactic distances of travel  
Frequencies fluctuate in a state of ravel  
Its creator born from consumption or rejection  
Infinitely dynamic in forms of refraction or reflection  
Some may see it, less fortunate may not  
Through these black holes in my head its beauty begot  
Aidy Brooks*

## **LISTEN to HereComes... Gary and Adam!**



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# The Dress

By Lindsay Waller-Wilkinson

‘Oh, it’s you...’ he says, ‘thought you’d forgotten...’ He’s known her as long as I have so he ought to know better. I can feel her bristling as she walks in. ‘Are we ready?’ She says. ‘You up for this Mum?’ ‘Yes... Give me a minute,’ I say. She sighs. When did she become so impatient? I know – it’s different these days – life runs at a faster pace. I blame video and the invention of fast forward. Now you can skip the boring bits.

She helps me into the car, fastens my seat belt, turns down the music. I can still hear it, but only the low and the high. The middle is missing, like a dry sandwich with no filling. We don’t talk and I feel a bit sick. After a few minutes she breaks the silence.

‘So... How are you?’

‘I’m fine thank you.’ I look out of the window at the grey November day. Even the hands folded in my lap are grey.

‘Look... I’m sorry, Mum.’ She says. ‘Dad just winds me up... Don’t sulk... Please?’ I’m about to say something, but then it’s gone. It happens all the time. I think about why we’re here instead. I told her I’d like to buy a dress. She likes to shop. And so did I... once. I still feel sick, but I don’t tell her.

We arrive at the shopping mall, find a space in disabled parking and she helps me from the car. As we walk towards the entrance the knot in my stomach tightens. A hot bitterness rises in my throat and bursts onto the back of my tongue. I swallow hard, force it down. Then I think about my breakfast and that makes it worse. I said I’d like an egg although I didn’t imagine it fried. Why is everything fried? But if I want things to change I have to make an effort and I can’t be bothered. I don’t like that – that I can’t be bothered. We reach the doors and I’m out of breath, wheezing like an old woman. I don’t like that either. There’s so much I don’t like these days.

‘Shall we sit for a min?’ She says. ‘No rush.’

We sit on a cream velour sofa in a room-set. I feel very sick and I can’t ignore it any longer and... Oh God... I put my hands out, cup them to catch it, but there’s so much... more than two cupped hands can hold. Most of it lands in the folds of my skirt, a brown tweed – probably one she bought me on a previous outing.

‘Oh shit,’ she says, ‘oh God... oh no... Don’t worry. I’ll get something... Sit still. Don’t move.’ Off she rushes and I’m alone. People stare, so I stare back and they look away. She returns soon enough.

‘OK... Let’s sort you out. Are you all right?’ Armed with a roll of tissue fatter than her thigh she begins to clear up. She’s never been good with sick, but she swallows her heaves. Yards of soiled paper lie at our feet in a crumpled heap. She’s clutching a black bin-bag and she scoops it all in, ties the top in a knot and starts to breathe again.

‘Shall we go home,’ she says, ‘or would you like a glass of water?’

‘I’m fine,’ I say. ‘Let’s find that dress.’

‘Your skirt’s covered in sick. There’s a big wet patch.’

‘Do I smell? Are you embarrassed?’

‘No Mum... You don’t smell. If you’re OK, so am I.’ She doesn’t care what people think. I don’t either today.

‘Here...’ she says, swinging the trolley in front of me, ‘if you push no one will see. Let’s go to the Ladies and wash our hands.’ We walk through the store and I feel quite jaunty all of a sudden.

We find the loo and freshen up. She buys me a bottle of water from the café, but we don’t stay to drink it. We wander through rack upon rack of stuff and after a while I can’t take it all in. There’s too much choice. You start off knowing what you want and it’s clear in your mind, but after a while it mingles and blurs and you can’t remember what you imagined in the first place.

I touch a few things, which she dismisses with a sneer.

‘No Mum – you need vibrant tones with your colouring,’ or ‘No, that’ll do nothing for you – you’ll look like a sack of potatoes. You’ve got no bum or boobs anymore, you need a bit of structure.’ Soon the trolley’s full of colour. She heads for the changing rooms and I follow.

I try on too many dresses and she disappears to find matching vests. They’re all so low cut these days. Modesty vests, we used to call them. Now all they hide is the crepey skin that a cleavage used to fill. She paces outside the changing room and I ignore her when she asks if I can manage. I’m quite exhausted by the end of it and I’m not sure what she’s chosen.

‘I’ll buy these Mum,’ she says, ‘my treat.’ I insist on buying the dress, but give in over the other things. By the time we reach the till I’m so frazzled I can’t remember my pin. I get it wrong three times and the machine won’t let me have another go. She pays for everything and I notice the look they exchange, her



and the shop girl. I don't remember when our roles changed. Today it feels like this is how it's always been.

She listens to the news on the way home and I close my eyes. Mummy pops into my head. These days she waits just behind my eyelids and appears as soon as there's an empty space in my head. She's wearing her faded green housecoat. A dog-eared book of half finished crossword puzzles pokes out of one pocket and I know there's a handful of knife-whittled pencil stubs in the other. My tummy rumbles and I wonder if she's been baking today. A batch of scones perhaps? I smell them. Warm. Sweet. Straight from the oven. I see the curl of butter beginning to melt into the crumbly surface, sultanas poking through the golden puddle. My tongue feels flour dusting my lips.

'I hope mummy's made scones.' I say. She looks over at me. Even in the low light from the dashboard I can see her expression and I realise what I've said, but it's too late to rewind. She turns down the radio. 'What was that?' She says. I turn away, look out of my window, try to get my thoughts in order. 'You said mummy. Whose mummy...?' I don't answer, but she won't let it go. 'Did you mean your mum? Granny?' She looks at me again. 'Mum? Don't ignore me... Who were you talking about?' 'It's OK dear,' I say. 'I was just thinking aloud.' We're quiet for the rest of the journey.

We pull up in front of the house. She helps me out and guides me up the path. He's at the front door, beaming, holding it open before we reach it. I think he's been standing there since we left.

'Hello girls... Nice time? Cup of tea?' He says. I wish he'd leave me be. He shuffles off into the kitchen and she follows. I can hear them talking, but not what they're saying. She returns with a tray – tea and triangles of shop-bought shortbread on my best china plates. They sit down and she tells him the rest.

'Oh no... Poor you,' he says, reaching over and patting my knee, 'are you all right now? At least you bought your dress.'

'She bought it.' I say. 'I forgot my pin,' but as I'm speaking it jumps into my head. 'Five, eight, seven, nine, see... I do know it.'

'Never mind,' She says, 'as long as you wear everything, it's money well spent.' She likes to spend her money on me. I'd rather her company, but I suppose that's not fair.

When she's gone he asks to see what we bought. I say I'd prefer a glass of wine. It's there on the coffee table when he wakes me later to tell me supper's ready. I'm not hungry and go to bed early.

A few weeks later she calls.

'I know you want a quiet Christmas,' she says, 'but come for supper on Boxing night. All the family will be there. Wear your new dress...'

It's been hanging in the wardrobe ever since, along with the other things – the slip, the vest, the tights and the cashmere cardi. Sometimes I take them out and look at them. I don't like it much – the dress – ultramarine, covered in splashy blooms of cadmium, alizarin, crimson, vermillion, spiky leaves of celadon and viridian.



All those colours. The names were printed on the tiny tubes of paint daddy gave me when I was ten. The box was pale wood, polished to a shine with a brass clasp that closed with a click. Opposite the paints sat a bone-white china palette. I couldn't bear to use them they were so perfect. I wouldn't have done, but for daddy looking so hurt to see them unopened weeks later.

The blooms are chrysanthemums – not a flower I've ever liked – always full of earwigs. Or is that dahlias? Whatever, they're showy, all look-at-me fuss over in a second. No quiet beauty – not like aquilegia or



love-in-a-mist.

We arrive at six and I'm wearing the dress. She's there to meet us and she comes out to help me across the gravel. I see them all waiting – the family, the children, the grandchildren, the grand reception. It's cold and maybe that's why I'm cross. I've had enough before it's begun. I feel curmudgeonly to everyone, especially her. I stop half way across the drive.

'I don't know why you chose this one...' I say. 'It's not me you know... It isn't my colour... Not my style at all...'

'What are you on about Mum?' She says, tightening her grip on my elbow. 'Come on now... Let's get you inside...'

After the hellos, the hugs and kisses, the happy christmases, we make our way through to her big room – kitchen, dining room, living room, all mucked in together, not what I would choose. I give up my coat and everyone is telling me how good I look, what a lovely dress, how well it fits, how the colour suits. She ushers me into a low leopard covered armchair that I know I'll struggle to get out of. I'm facing the table. Everyone's standing about and talking at once so I can't hear anything in particular, it's all a rush and bubble in my ears. I look round the room and count the hens. She collects them – little china ones, big wooden carved ones, paintings, drawings, silly stuffed ones – they're everywhere. She tells me this house is a barn conversion. Perhaps that explains the farmyard theme. I've got to 32 when I hear her calling to me and I lose count. I know that nobody cares how many hens she's got, but I want to know and I start again. I get to 16 before she interrupts me for the second time and this time I want to explode.

I hear a fizz and then a loud pop. The sound makes me jump and I clamber to my feet. I hold onto the chair and there's a kick against my thigh. Something breaks through my dress and shoots from one of the chrysanthemums. It flies over our heads and explodes above the table with a bang. A gold mushroom lights up the eaves. Something else shoots past our ears and red pom-poms hit the roof and bounce off the beams. Tiny orange buds burst into a blaze of flowers. A green galaxy lights up the table and all their faces making them look like little goblins. The rest go off all at once. Pink. Purple. Blue. Turquoise. More colours than you could dream of. They whizz and whine, they screech and bang. So much light and colour and noise. I put my hands over my ears and I spin around. I feel dizzy. But then I stop. And I look. It's beautiful. A big warm hand is squeezing mine and I say,

'Look, daddy, isn't it beautiful. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen,' and I laugh. I laugh and laugh and I call out. I want everyone to look. The children jump and squeal.

'Look! Look at Gran! Look!' they shout. She looks. Her mouth is open wide. They all look.

'Careful!' She shrieks. 'You'll fall! What are you doing? Mind the lamp... And the candles... What's happening? Shush... All of you! Stop!'

And then it's over. I look up for daddy's smile which will be twitching his moustache at the corners, his heavy brows curling over to meet his dark lashes, but meet my husband's pale grey eyes instead. He leads me back to the chair.

'Steady now...' He says. 'Best sit down, dear.' She moves him aside and says,

'It's OK dad. I'll deal with it.' She's crouching in front of me. Her forehead is furrowed. She peers into my face and I notice the fine lines around her eyes. They search mine for I don't know what and I cough. I can taste sulphur at the back of my throat. No one says anything. I think they're all waiting for me to speak.

'Can I have a glass of wine?' I say. She stands up.

'Mum?'

'What?'

'What was all that about?'

'It wasn't me... It was the dress.'

'What about the dress?'

'The fireworks... They weren't my fault.'

'What fireworks?' she says, shaking her head.

I say nothing. She looks round at the others.

'I don't know what you're on about, Mum,' she says and someone hands me a glass of wine.

They take a while to clear up. A lamp is broken, a vase smashed, flowers scattered across the table, their stalks all higgeldy-piggeldy like a pile of pick-up sticks. There's a dark puddle on the pale wood floor. Grown-ups mop and sweep, change the tablecloth. Children giggle and run around and she tells them to calm down. I sit and watch. I drink my wine. My fingertips find a small hole in the skirt of my dress. I fiddle with it until it's big enough to poke one finger through and underneath I can feel the silky polyester slip I put on earlier so as to avoid static.



# Should've Said No

by Kristina Proffitt

Red was the colour when we first met,  
I saw you standing there, and my heart was set.

White was the shade as we began,  
I was so happy  
our wedding was planned.

Green was the colour when I saw you with her,  
It hurt me,  
it killed me,  
it ruined my world.

Blue was the colour when I let you go,  
but I had to -  
you should've said no.

## Shooting Pains

by Kristina Proffitt

You stab me -  
repeatedly -  
I take it,  
because  
I'm a masochist.

I trusted you -  
my best friend -  
but I misjudged you.  
What was once  
bright and colourful,  
so magic and wonderful,  
is now grey and dismal.  
It's tragical.

I'm in denial,  
thinking we still live in rainbows,  
when you're just shooting arrows.  
There's no rainbow,  
no pot of gold;  
I can't keep losing myself  
in memories so old.

### HERE COMES... MARIJA

'My favourite colours are teal and mulberry (or pink and green if you don't want to be so precise).'

'I love to write, and when I'm not writing I'm running websites, baking, or attempting to use my sewing machine (I'm slowly getting better). I have a kleptomaniac Siberian Husky called Merlin, a bookshelf full of everything from Stephen King to Nigella Lawson and, since moving out of my parents' house (where I wasn't allowed candles), I've acquired a candle obsession.'

# Turquoise Dreams

by Carly Berg

I believe most people can name their favorite color without hesitation, but I've never heard anyone say why it's their favorite. To me, it's symbolic. Turquoise blue has long-term associations in my mind with things I like.

My first crush on turquoise blue was at age seven or eight, back when girls had to wear dresses to school and the mothers usually sewed the family's clothes. We visited Grandma, who was fond of telling stories, if not in written form. She held up a beautiful turquoise-colored dress, a jumper with pleats. Grandma said a woman had come in to the fabric store where Grandma worked. The woman said she hated the store clerks and their damned fabric. She flung the dress she'd made to the floor and stormed out. The dress just happened to fit me. I don't know what to think of all that, but it soon became my favorite dress. On mornings when it was clean and ready to wear, I felt a bit uplifted, like the day ahead would be a good one. It was soft and swingy and I was a proud little peacock in my exotic dress (Peahen. Which, come to think of it, is a slightly less disgusting word than 'peacock'). The teacher said it made my eyes look turquoise blue, too.

Then Grandma's mother died. My great grandmother had left me a musical powder box. It was metallic turquoise blue and smelled heavenly, like powder. I played the melody over and over but now I don't remember what it was. I thought it impossibly grown up and sophisticated, yet she'd specially chosen me to receive it (or so Grandma said).

Also, Grandma had a large mirror with shelves on it high up on the wall. Two large ceramic turquoise birds perched on the shelves, presiding over the room. The mirrored shelves themselves were magical to me, a miracle might happen in that room. I didn't understand that the mirror was just a reflection of the small living room. For years, I thought it was a window into another, secret, side to Grandma's house (I may not have been as bright as advertised, as I didn't figure it out until about age ten).

Grandma herself wore a lot of turquoise blue. It went well with her coloring and white hair, which

would not have been lost on her. My mom was practical, penny-pinchy and unhappy. Grandma's life was hard, but she laughed with her neighbors, played Bingo, bought me astonishingly wonderful red cream sodas and little treats from the Avon catalogue. She took her poodle to get its dog nails painted and matching bows on its ears. Turquoise blue was Grandma. It was snatching up your smidgeon of living large when you got the chance I'm sure I sought out my favorite color, building on the early links between it and happiness.

Turquoise blue is the color of swimming pools, of carefree summer days, the tropics, exotic vacations. I've always been a summer person.

I saved up my babysitting money forever and bought an expensive, ten-speed Schwinn bike, in gorgeous turquoise blue. I couldn't quite believe I owned it, or that I bought it myself.

Make-up, eyeshadow, stood for being almost an adult, when that seemed glamorous. I remember my first Maybelline eyeshadow. It was a turquoise blue.

Turquoise and silver jewelry became the big thing. It stood for rebellion, hippies, counter-culture, wildness and attitude. I adored it and stayed covered in it.

Now I'm thinking of a special turquoise colored shirt I used to have. And another.

When turquoise is offered as a color choice on a purchase, I still almost always get it. Whenever I run across the color turquoise blue, I feel a tiny bit uplifted.

Once, in a gray winter mood slump that dragged on and on, I tried to cheer up by painting my living room vibrant turquoise blue. It soon made me nauseous and gave me headaches, a turquoise nightmare. Since that color bad trip, I wonder if color influences us more than we're aware of in more subtle ways as well.

The walls went back to beige, but my turquoise overdose didn't ruin the color for me. Just a dash is enough, though. As long as it's on my earrings, fingernails, necklace and shirt.



MARK SANDERSON

# DON'T LOOK NOW

## HERE COMES...William

The 1973 feature film, Don't Look Now focuses on an elusive hooded figure in a red coat stalking the winding streets of Venice. The red figure haunts the story's protagonists, a couple whose daughter recently drowned, throughout the city.

During the film there is a heavy play on the colour red and the movement of the Venice canal waters, I took the opportunity to use both of these elements in order to create this piece physically rather than digitally

The process involved pouring red food colouring onto a beaten-up sheet of plastic and laying another sheet over the top of it. I then began to lift and lower the top sheet at will. Depending on how fast you pull up the top sheet, a tree-like effect is created as the colour runs. The final shot was chosen for the single bubble that escaped that created a small hooded figure within the woods that resembles the opening scene from the film, giving the piece an eerie feel.

There is a video of myself creating this piece on my website:

[www.williambonniger.com](http://www.williambonniger.com)

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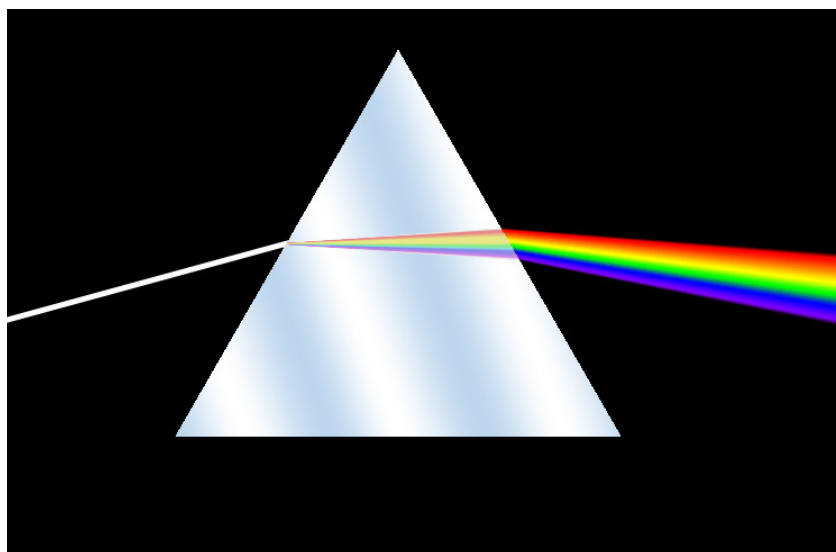
# Synaesthesia: Beyond Technicolour

by Gary Sykes-Blythe & Adam Steiner

Synaesthesia is a beautiful word: it feels pleasant in the mouth and satisfying to the ear, but for many people it can mean a lot more than that. Synaesthesia (literally meaning 'a blending of sensation') is a neurological condition which transcends mere brain chemistry and is as much a question of perspective as a state of consciousness. Those with the condition, synaesthetes, describe vivid a blending of colour, shape, texture, form, sound, place, smell and even taste associated with the seemingly abstract world of letters, numbers and ideas. Those with the condition typically describe two or more senses being 'linked' in a way that is utterly baffling to a non-synaesthete: letters in words sometimes have colour; numbers have aroma; music has shape, form and visible movement. The intensity of synaesthesia ranges from being able to 'smell' all of the prime numbers to knowing what the personality type of a letter 'Q' is (one subject described in a famous case study explained that K was female, quiet and responsible and that 9 was a shrewd and dark gentleman). First recorded by the Ancient Greeks, it took the psychological

investigations of Gustav Fechner to bring empirical science to the subject in 1880. Even today, some 120 years on, the condition is so little understood that its genetic prevalence in the population is estimated to vary from 1 in 20 to 1 in 20,000. With the additional complications of

The condition is extremely difficult to detect and confirm, since it is almost impossible for a non-synaesthete to explain why blue is and not just what, for example, and harder still for a synaesthete to do the same in reverse. Tests for the condition are unreliable, but are primarily



epigenetics (the study of heritable changes in gene expression, Ed.) and other environmental factors such as childhood trauma and injury, the scientific community is left to ponder every aspect of the condition; it is even unknown whether the differing kinds of synaesthesia, and they are abundant, are aspects of a greater whole.

based on modified versions of what we now call the 'Stroop Effect', which was first described (in English) by John Ridley Stroop in 1935, whereby participants are shown the names of colours presented in differing pigments and struggle to divorce the colour they see with the colour that they read. Scientists have little to no idea.

## Something Stroopid...

*Put simply, the Stroop Effect is the name given to the human inability to divorce the meaning of a colour word that is read from it's appearance.*

*Sturides consistently show that when the word RED is presented in a colour other than red (RED) it takes longer for people to understand it. Try saying these aloud and see if you notice the same effect:*

BLACK BLACK  
GREEN GREEN  
YELLOW YELLOW  
BLUE BLUE



as to the cause of synaesthesia, any evolutionary origin or even potential usefulness of synaesthesia, although it has been suggested that increased feedback along neural pathways or more connectivity between sensory nodes in the brain, could be the cause. It has been noted that after head injuries, taking certain drugs, epilepsy and illness, synaesthesia has been triggered in people who've shown no signs of it in the past, suggesting that its origin could be linked to significant structural and chemical differences in the brain. When those with synaesthesia are analysed using advanced imagers such as fMRI scanners, considerable variations have been observed compared to non-suffers. Researchers hope that they could unlock some of the mysteries of human consciousness through a deeper understanding of synaesthesia, but so far progress is slow. Although synaesthesia is in fact a misnomer and should be more accurately described as ideasthesia (meaning combined ideas and sensation), the notion that there could be a way to perceive the world so vastly differently to the norm has fascinated scientists and artists for centuries. Synaesthetes have been shown to be more likely to engage in creative work than non-synaesthetes, although traits such as autism and the ability to photographically memorise have also been linked with the condition. The altered states and intermingling of perceptions found amongst synaesthetes seems to lend itself well to creative people and there are several examples of well-known artists and writers who experience this strange phenomenon. One of the most well-known

It is possible that synaesthesia can hinder as well as benefit an artist's work and alter their experience of others'. For example, an artist may confuse colours with words or sounds and attempt to express these (mis)perceptions through their work as they perceive them to be genuine, along with the Stroop effect, this might explain the odd occurrence of the happy mistake, so common in painting, where a few altered brushstrokes or striking inclusions of seemingly irrelevant material can entirely change the tone and meaning of a piece of art. Contrariwise, imagine the novels of Franz Kafka and his all of which feature a protagonist who is often simply named 'K'. The possible confusion this might wreak on an unsuspecting synaesthete is immense, quite literally colouring the reader's impressions of the character, or creating strange associations such as smelling of fish or being indelibly pink regardless of the actual mood and tone of the book. In this regard, synaesthesia can act as both a blessing and a curse, to artist and audience alike.



### **Famous Synaesthetes you might have heard of:**

*Vladimir Nabokov (Elegant Proseur) The author of the infamous Lolita and big fan of butterflies, Vlad said that the sound of different letters in different languages created slightly altered perceptions. For example, an "a" in English, evoked weathered wood, whereas the French equivalent, brought about the impression of ebony.*

*Jimi Hendrix (Guitar Hero) Not a diagnosed synaesthete, but his track "Bold As Love" displays all the hallmarks of synaesthetic blending of words, music and colour.*

*Richard Feynman (Charismatic Physicist) Noted that as he lectured to students, different elements of equations, Xs, Ys, etc. took on their own shades of colour.*

*Duke Ellington (Jazz Trumpeteer) Claimed he could hear notes in shades of blue, the tone of the colour altered with the intensity and tone of the note.*







# Color Wonderful

## by Jenna Dawkins



He used some old, creamy, loose tarp he had covering the living room furniture. The paint had been bought first, the singular, drab color that told his future for him—total predictability. He opened the cans, and for nearly three hours, simply stared at the garage floor. Sufficiently high, he laid the fabric on the ground, poured the goop into the three, immaculately paralleled trays on top, and inserted the rollers, pushing back and forth, covering every inch of space, watching the sponges soak up the blah. He started with stray newspaper, for practice, drawing what he imagined his innards to look like—sloppy, deformed, spaghetti. But all clean, somehow. All tan, and human.

“Gunther,” she began, trotting into the garage on her four extra inches, barely treading on the concrete. “I’m leaving.”

“Yeah, I know.” He was on his knees, swooping his finger around in the wet, trying to make paintballs. He watched them melt, right before his eyes. He tried again, with the same result. He blew downwards. It wouldn’t dry. It was just so wet. Wet, and cold.

“Do you know why?” Cynthia placed her perfect hands on her perfect hips, smoothing down her perfect skirt with her perfectly manicured, French fingers. It all so perfectly covered up everything she really was.

“Yeah, I know why.” Gunther heard a car, not his own, pull up in the driveway. Within seconds, he could smell the fumes accumulating around him. He wanted to hit the button, close the two-car door, and inhale until his lungs exploded. He put his whole palm down into the liquid, watched it seep underneath his fingernails. Watched it swallow the gold band, suffocating the engraving, “Forever,” like lava, or quicksand. It covered completely, and disappeared.

“Wash your hands, Gunther.” Cynthia snarled, disgusted. Gunther wanted to ask her how the house would look, if those shutters weren’t tan. If they weren’t the same shade as every other house on the street. Or if he didn’t paint them at all. What would happen? Nothing so dramatic as the world ending, surely. But somehow, Gunther just couldn’t imagine anything but sixteen gleaming aluminum cubes, all in a row, with no more differentiations than the people living in them.

“It matches my skin, Cynthia.”

“It’s ugly. You look... gross.” Her O’s were always a little bit too open. Gunther heard something closer to “grass.”

“Isn’t this what you wanted?” Gunther stuck his other hand into the widening pool. Raising both of his hands in front of his face, Gunther shook them, watching the small droplets scatter, and hit. Scatter, and hit. He watched his wife cover her face and scream, curse, hurl herself past him onto the drive. Gunther watched her open the trunk to the two-seat, red monster; shove her suitcases inside, followed by her body, into the front. The driver’s seat was completely obscured. Or, maybe, Gunther just didn’t want to look. Instead, he watched her face, as she sped away from him.

He heard her in his head. “This is why, Gunther. This is why I’m leaving you.”

Gunther licked his pinky. He tasted nothing.

Mopping, Gunther left the miscellaneous splotches to dry on their own. He walked into the house, empty, every single wall, white. He coughed, and heard an echo in the open, marble foyer. Sitting down on the tile kitchen floor, he watched the bananas in the fruit bowl, long enough for them to turn what seemed to be a deeper brown. He thought about her face. It was already hazy. And he was glad.

Finally grabbing his keys, he started up his Suburban, trekking through that perfect suburbia to the local hardware store.

Gunther examined the four shades of tan in the paint aisle, knowing he needed to replace what he had lost—but they all looked the same. “Neutral,” “Buff,” “Khaki,” “Earth Yellow.” These colors didn’t deserve names like “Earth Yellow.” He forgot which one he had bought before, though he doubted it would make much of a difference. After standing and looking for an hour, Gunther decided instead on ninety-eight pints of blues, purples, grays, peaches, not knowing what he would do with them, but knowing full well that he wouldn’t be painting the shutters; at least, not anytime soon. He carted them along, pushing with both of his arms, watching himself being watched. He recognized the faces. They all blended together. They were all him, looking down, looking inside, fishing for a reason. He couldn’t answer them. He didn’t feel embarrassed. All he was doing, after all, was buying paint.

He pulled the truck into the driveway, and scooted to the passenger’s side, right where he’d seen her last. After turning on the radio to full blast, he got out. It was dark, and he knew it was only a matter of time before some neighbor complained, but he wanted to live a little on the edge. He unloaded the cans and laid them in colorful order on the curb. Gunther unscrewed every lid, inhaling ROYGBIV. It was windy. He watched the branches of the front yard trees swing back and forth. One by one, Gunther chucked the colors onto the house’s aluminum face, moving from left to right, methodically, almost with purpose.

It was something like tepeeing with a rainbow.

Gunther continued with the lawn, the seven maple trees, the car, the entirety of the driveway, the old swing set that had remained childless, and the twin gnome statues by the side fence. After emptying every single jar, all scattered on the graffitied grass, Gunther began to feel the stuff seep and crust into his pores. He could feel what he’d done. But to see it, he told himself to wait for morning. He wouldn’t admit to himself that he wasn’t satisfied. That it hadn’t mattered. Hadn’t made any difference. He would sleep on it. Unwilling to go inside alone, Gunther crawled back into his Chevy, and pushed down the two back seats. He wedged himself between them, and the trunk, falling asleep to the blast of Talk Radio, underneath a blanket of colors, disturbed by no one—for better or worse.

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Gunther’s neighbor of 57 Baxter was the first to notice. Woken up from the blasts of wailing men hurtling from the car speakers, George Miller muttered a “fuck” from his four-poster, and stuck his aging feet into sheepskin slippers by the end table. He massaged his temple with his forefinger and thumb, anticipating one of his arguably self-induced migraines. Ones that George Miller always wished he’d had in situations like these, just so he could scrunch his brow a little tighter, or have an excuse for refusing to weed or wash the dishes. Ones where he had a reason to be as melancholy as he always was.

“I feel one coming,” he said to his wife, who was teetering between sleep and awake.

She listened to the stereo, eyes closed. “I’ve been listening to that muttering. I keep trying to make out the words. It either needs to be louder or softer. I can’t stand it where it is,” she said. She could be very particular. George and Miriam’s backs were facing each other, with Miriam’s face towards the wall and dressing table. She watched herself in its mirror. Picking up her hand, she flexed her pointer finger back and forth, watching it bend, listening to it slightly crack.

“What the hell is going on?” George shuffled to the window, carefully maneuvering the thick, crimson drapes apart. “I’m surprised someone hasn’t complained.”

"They're waiting for you to," Miriam said, slightly laughing, almost mocking. She tapped her nose and pulled out a few loose eyelashes, blowing them and looking down to the floor, covered in black, pretending to watch them fall between the strips of hardwood. She wouldn't put on her slippers the next morning, so she could check her feet in the bathroom, to see if any had stuck. She felt her eyelids. She could feel the empty spaces, and already regretted them.

George could see the open car door, with one foot sticking out, a lone shoe dangling. Some of the silver cans were sparkling under the dim streetlight. 58 Baxter was dark, but George could see strings of aqua and fuchsia nibbling on the sidewalk.

"Looks like colors, Miriam. I'm seeing colors. Everywhere."

"You're just faking another migraine, George."

"I can see it. There's orange and yellow and greens. Just blobs of them all over the walk. And one, random foot." George pointed, narrowing his gaze on the limb, noticing the toes jiggle.

"It's a migraine," she insisted.

George turned back to his wife, watching stray curls spill from the clips on her tightened scalp. He sighed. "Miriam," he said, "you know I don't really get those."

Miriam flipped to her other side, propping herself up on one shoulder, looking through her husband, through the window, to the other side of the street.

"Well then," she sighed, "maybe all of this is a dream."

George returned to bed, and Miriam mirrored his pose—face to the ceiling, eyes wide, arms stiffly to the side.

They both contemplated holding hands until the sun rose, but never got around to it.

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Gunther's head hurt. He woke in his car, the radio station having switched to a mix of static and string quartet. His skin burned. It was a painful itch. Gunther scraped his fingernails through the layer of what looked like old frosting on his arm. With every flake came clumps of follicles, little pieces of flesh. Gunther could feel himself peeling, stripping something away, shedding an old, tired skin. The black leather backseat of his car was littered with colored confetti. Gunther didn't particularly like it. Switching the radio off, Gunther sat up, banging his foot against the open door, shaking it awake. He stepped out, not looking around, but walking, eyes down, to the street in front of his house. Gunther sat down, mid-Way, Indian-style. Breathing deeply, he raised his head, and looked.

At that moment, Gunther wondered what he had expected to see. His property was littered with globs and streaks of everything. But there was still tan. Underneath it all, and peeking through, Gunther could see the "Buff" staring at him, condescending, indestructible. It was ugly. He wouldn't be able to look out of any of his windows without having to peer through some obstruction. He had only made his life more difficult. Some of the small pleasures—like letting the sun absorb through the glass and onto the soft carpet—were gone. Gunther would have to open the windows, or buy new ones, or let his living room turn a dark purple; like some reflection that belonged on a church's stained glass, not in the middle of an Oregon suburb. It was completely out of place. And though Gunther had craved that dash of individuality for so long, and though he had always felt somehow out of place himself, all he could think about was how obvious he had made the fact.

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"What kind of lunatic would do this to his goddamn house?" It was Sunday morning, and George Miller peeked from behind his gray, tarp-like living room curtains across the street, to where Gunther sat. George watched him watch. "I told you it was no goddamn migraine."

Miriam Miller looked through the same window, feeling the colors brighten up what had otherwise been a copycat house, an exact replica of her own. She should have known that what he had created was nothing short of pathetic, let alone ingenious. But to her, it was anything but. Having been so used to the constant droll of her perfectly routine days, Miriam Miller had grown restless, agitated, miserable. This house, she thought, was the only thing she hadn't seen. She was riddled with an excitement she hardly recognized. "Just look at it! Have you ever seen something this..." Miriam paused, finding only one word to describe it all, "...fantastic?"

"Fantastic?" George was confused. He knew what it really was—just paint on house, on grass, on asphalt. "It's disgusting, Miriam. The guy's totally lost his marbles. And you call it art. Jesus Christ. What the hell has happened to the world?" But George had been wondering that long before his neighbor had spelled it out. "Look at him in that street. He's going to get hit, too."

She stood indignant. "He's going to make a difference."

Miriam knew she, however, probably never really would.

She pulled the curtain back a little further, squeezing her miniscule frame through the small center crevice, and stood in front of it, fully exposed in the bay window, away from George, with a wall of drab draped solidly behind her. Miriam pulled her cashmere cardigan tight around each arm. She smiled, feeling close.

"And besides," she said, "I know what it is."

"No, Miriam," George answered. "You know what it isn't."

"What isn't it, then, George?"

"It isn't good."

"That doesn't mean it isn't important, somehow. It's artistic."

George sighed. Somehow he seemed to break, like a puzzle. He stood on the other side of the curtain, completely disguised and covered, somehow in pieces, unable to trace even the slightest silhouette of his wife on the hardwood by his feet. All he could see was his own shadow and some of the strongest turquoise from across the street bleeding through the window and the drape, onto his pants, his hands, his face. He thought for a moment that he could taste it.

He wanted to gag.

"So what now? How about I buy a million Lego's and glue them all over the fucking place? How about that? Is that art, Miriam?"

"The house could use a paint job, George..."

"Goddamn it, Miriam." George had always been satisfied with blending in. He hadn't been restless like she had. He liked simplicity. He liked knowing what to expect. And he hadn't been expecting this.

George curdled a wad of saliva in his mouth, swishing and swooshing it.

"Then this spit," he said, "is art."

He paused, licking his hand. Miriam was silent.

"This spit..." he continued, looking at it bubble and settle, "is the greatest fucking thing I've ever seen."

There were moments of silence, only breathing. George rubbed his fingers together; Miriam fiddled with a loose sweater thread. "George," she finally said, still staring at the drying splotches and splashes. "Come stand here with me." Miriam stuck her hand through the curtain, gesturing for him. He sighed. Wiping his hand dry, he complied. They stood there together, hands unable to touch beyond a graze, realizing how mismatched they seemed with everything they saw. The Millers were utterly, completely, and absolutely ordinary. George and Miriam knew this. It wasn't news. But now, looking out across the equally ordinary street, onto the one unordinary lawn, they knew that they had proof.

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Gunther's wife wasn't so important. She didn't really make him happy. He knew from the start. But he took a chance. Cynthia wasn't beautiful, or unique, or kind. She didn't have long blonde hair; the kind he would always dream about, the kind he would always stare at in the supermarkets, and the bookstores, and the coffee shops. At least, not naturally. She was flat-footed. She walked like a chicken. Her toes were disgusting. There was a weird fungus that Gunther wouldn't go anywhere near, and neither would she, and so it remained, acting in their love life as an elephant in the room, keeping them apart, leaving Gunther to sleep with three pairs of socks, so it could "air itself out."

There were lots of elephants.

The biggest, it seemed, being her overcompensating for all of those shortcomings.

"Gunther," she would say, "Mow the lawn in lines. Not those awful zigzags."

Gunther tried to do the same. His zigzags became perfect, unfaltering lines. For every imperfection, Cynthia

Heschel needed twice as many perfections. Just so she could string together the moments that convinced her that they were



real.

"Gunther, I need a massage. Give me a massage, Gunther."

He would rub her neck for hours, feeling out the knots, kneading them like overly thick yeast.

"Love me." Eventually and, almost ironically, she stopped saying his name. Her demands became more aggressive.

"Love me. You have to love me." Her guilt created a man, a woman, a couple that neither one recognized.

And still, he loved her. As much as he could. Just enough to trick them both into delusion, if only for awhile.

He knew that she had stopped loving him years ago. Maybe she never had.

With ferocious eyes, "Hey," she insisted, "You've got to fuck better. I can't be with you if you don't fuck better."

He couldn't fuck better. He tried. Three separate times, frantically pushing under the sheets, on top of her, a limp rag below him, giving nothing back, but taking everything. It was then that they both knew it was over.

"Gunther, paint the shutters." That disgusting shade of tan.

She packed her bags. Gunther helped her. And his house became a living Van Gogh.

Gunther knew that not everything could be compensated for.

A week later, Gunther was informed by the city council that he couldn't have such a gaudy display of a house—it was against some policy. Without any protestation, he took the next two weeks, gradually painting it tan. Each day, line by line of color began to blend in with the sidewalk. Gunther began painting sometime during the dead of night to avoid the frequent, impolite passers-by. He disconnected his phone to distance himself from the constant calls of anger, of people telling him that "it was about time," and "how dare he make such a spectacle to begin with?" They were convinced that their drab, perfectly up-kept sidings, and green, perfectly manicured lawns, were the representation and result of completely problem-less lives. Gunther didn't get that logic. Still, though he didn't accept it, he'd always been unwilling to protest it. It was impossible to determine who's life was truly phony. Gunther tried to find something beautiful in "Buff." But all he saw, all wrapped up in that one word, all that he didn't want, was himself.

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George Miller should have been pleased. He should have relished watching what he considered to be a lunatic strip away the grimy tints that had made him feel inadequate for what felt more like two years than weeks. But every morning, when he took his ordinary trash out for collection, or retrieved his ordinary newspaper from his ordinary drive, George noticed the increasing, even streaks of ordinary tan, accumulating on that same house he had spent so much energy despising. Miriam would watch Gunther from the window during the night when she couldn't sleep, a cup of Earl Grey in her hand, sipping lightly, forgetting to remove the bag. George could hear her footsteps leaving the bedroom every night. He began to follow her, giving her time to find her spot by the glass panes, watching her watch from the top stair, silently, asking himself how long it would be before she would stop wanting what she saw, but needing it. And what she would do, now that it was being taken away, right in front of her eyes.

She had memorized every plop of burnt sienna, every drip of lime. When she first noticed change, she sat on the living room piano stool, playing no music, simply watching, wanting to scream, but remaining silent. When there was no more sun, she flipped on the garden spotlights and sat back down, finally noticing Gunther carry his ladder from the side of the house to the front. She watched him climb, and dip, and run the brush along the siding, which he had refused to replace; she watched the tan, the ordinary tan, and she could feel it, eating away at her.

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Though Gunther had become a professional when it came to hiding, he too had been watching. He had come to know Miriam Miller as a woman with absolutely no place in the world. Gunther wasn't sure, initially, if she had been staring in disapproval, like he knew George had been, or happiness, dismay, or even contrition. But Gunther knew Miriam's feelings of inadequacy, and he knew that she would never overcome them. He had been watching her for years—she was

the epitome of a trapped housewife. He could see this in the way she gardened, the same rose bushes year after year, the same mulch, her matching apron and gloves. He could tell all of this simply by detailing the lines of her face, all the way from across the street where he knew that he, himself, liked to hide from the world. No matter what reasoning Gunther had for acting out, he knew that Miriam would never find one of her own. Her house was tan and clean, straight out of Pleasantville. No matter how she tried, she couldn't get herself to see it any other way. But he could see her through the window in her nightgown and curlers, weeping, her face only illuminated by the reflected glow of the spotlight in her front yard. He could see her as he painted, staring into his own bay window, feeling her behind him, breathing down his neck, and whispering in his ear, begging him to stop.

Gunther was well aware of Miriam's shortcomings—her façade, her chiseled life that she had worked so hard to attain and yet, meant nothing, even to her. She thought she went undetected but, then again, on the first night, he had thought the same. Gunther wondered what it would have been like for her, if she knew he watched her back, with equal intensity, and curiosity, and knowing. He knew that she only felt safe behind the glass—the barrier between herself and what she couldn't seem to bring herself to be.

Gunther kept tabs on her. He noted what she was wearing. He guessed what type of drink, most likely tea, she kept in that mug of hers. Gunther wondered if she drank it steeping hot or let it cool, and if she'd ever burned her tongue. He tried to watch her face, though it was mostly just squiggles in the window, but imagined her stare, her electric greens traveling as fast as light; the paint, drying quicker than the tears that he imagined she had shed, on the hardwood, and the piano bench, the sill, and into her own palms.

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After two weeks of remodeling, Gunther had covered almost every square inch of the house. He had sprayed the gnomes with the hose on high-power, knocking them on their chubby sides. He scrubbed the leather swings free of rust, and mowed the grass to its brown, dry roots. Everything looked back to normal. Once again, everything matched 56 and 60—but somehow, 58 looked a little more dead. The fumes had finally worn off, and Gunther had fallen hard from his high. He was finally free, but he wasn't sure what to do with his newfound freedom. Maybe this hadn't been the right thing, from the beginning. But still, he convinced himself that it was a start. A start to what, however, he did not know—just something else.

Gunther stood on his ladder. He had scrubbed the last window clean. Finally, he coated the shutters he had been successfully avoiding. He gently brushed the topcoat onto the dried paint, waiting for the bulbs lining the street to shine through him. At eleven p.m. exactly, Gunther could feel the halo of light encompassing him. He looked into the panes, back to the Miller's first floor, but the bay window, he noticed, was empty. For the first time, Miriam Miller didn't go to her regular place at the window.

"Let me do it," she said, standing below him, looking up towards the roof and seeing only the soles of his shoes.

"Miriam," Gunther began, taking in the sound of her voice, combining it with what he already knew.

"Don't. Give me a brush." She reached her arm up, standing on her tiptoes, balancing her weight on the ladder. Gunther felt it shake. "Let me do it."

"I'm done," Gunther said, feeling himself absorb into the walls.

"You're not," she said, solemnly. "You've missed spots."

"It's just paint," said Gunther, tossing the paintbrush and newly empty can to the ground. He wished, with all of his heart, that it was something else.

"Just paint?"

Silent for the longest of moments, Miriam Miller breathed, and exhaled. Gunther looked down on her, waiting for her to tip the ladder, or climb up behind him. For the first time in those two weeks, now that he could see her face up close, he wasn't able to read her.

She pointed to the siding. "That," she said, her eyes small slivers of white, "is my skin." She nodded at the shingles. "Those are my guts." She laid her hands on her stomach, gingerly, looking down at herself almost lovingly, as though she was pregnant. She walked

backwards, slowly, rubbing her feet into small anthills, careful to pick around the ants, and globs of mulch. She sat on the ground in the middle of the yard. She became to pluck individual blades of grass. Then, growing more urgent, she started grabbing at the graying strips of green, licking and sticking them to her skin. "My hair." She looked up at Gunther, her eyes widening. She was covered in grass, from her hair, making her look natural and ethereal, to her feet. She rose, wandering to the swing set, her voice remaining at a whisper. She touched the frame. "My bones." She stood there for a while, careful not to rub off any rust, but touching it as if it was a part of her.

She began to smile. She bent down, grabbing and tossing, dancing in the grass. Miriam took off her shoes, exposing her bare, strangely unpolished feet, and ran around the yard of 58 Baxter, smiling, aching, breathing, and letting Gunther watch her, in astonishment. She didn't care. She felt free. Miriam twirled, and spun, taking in the air through every pore, sticking out her tongue as if she could taste freedom in the evening dew. Her hands were thrown up above her head, like a prima ballerina, her fingers spread wide and grasping at low clouds, at stars, as if she was her own constellation. Satisfied, she let herself fall, her back on the ground. The streetlight gave out partially, flickering, sucking out, and lighting her up, over and over again.

"Come here," she said to Gunther, who remained at the top of the ladder.

"I can't," he said, holding himself up on the ladder, looking over the roof.

"You can do whatever you want."

"Shouldn't I be the one to tell you that?"

She narrowed her focus on his face. "Not today."

She patted the earth where she lay. Gunther finally complied. He met her on the ground, and lay with her, staring at the great open sky, soaking in the unknown. He could feel the yellow of the stars. They stayed feet apart, feeling their own space, but acknowledging the other. Gunther looked at her, her hair splayed beneath her head. She was beautiful, he thought. She thought the same of him. But their connection wasn't sexual. He had imagined this in his mind, her coming up to him and kissing him, them running away and freeing each other from their painful existences. But he didn't feel that anymore. Because no matter what, they wouldn't leave. Their lives would continue as they always had—all they could ever be to each other, all they would ever want to be, was an escape. A lovely, harmless, innocent, naïve escape.

After minutes of silence, Miriam stood up. She held herself, poised as ever, in the center of the grass, looking up at the house, feeling it's every crevice, it's every perfection that she had always known, and imperfections, that she grown to appreciate and love. She closed her eyes. Gunther stayed where he was, with his hands underneath his head.

"Underneath all of that tan," she said, "It's all still there."

"What is?" Gunther asked.

"The colors." She smiled. "All of this," she started, "means life, Gunther," Miriam finally spoke. "My life."

She walked to the front door, with a side of her skirt held in her right hand. She tiptoed as to not disturb the sleeping earth. She stood beneath the porch and touched the front door. He realized that it was the only thing he had forgotten to paint over. She turned back to Gunther. "This," she said, finally, placing her fingers on the lemons, and maroons, looking at the door almost longingly and with every imaginable sweetness, "is my heart."

He could smell the grass and taste the air; he could feel the earth; he could hear her breathing and could see her, watching. Gunther sat up. All he had done in his own attempts to satisfy himself had failed. But watching Miriam Miller, in her bare feet, and her loose curls, and a cardigan too big for her slim shoulders, Gunther realized that, more than anything, all she had needed was a little bit of color. And that, he realized, only he could give her. Maybe the escape could be a little more permanent.

Gunther stood and met Miriam by the door.

"Well then," he began, "I can't very well send you home without that, can I?"

Miriam looked at Gunther, and smiled. Gunther lifted the garage door, in one swift pull, and, after retrieving a screwdriver,

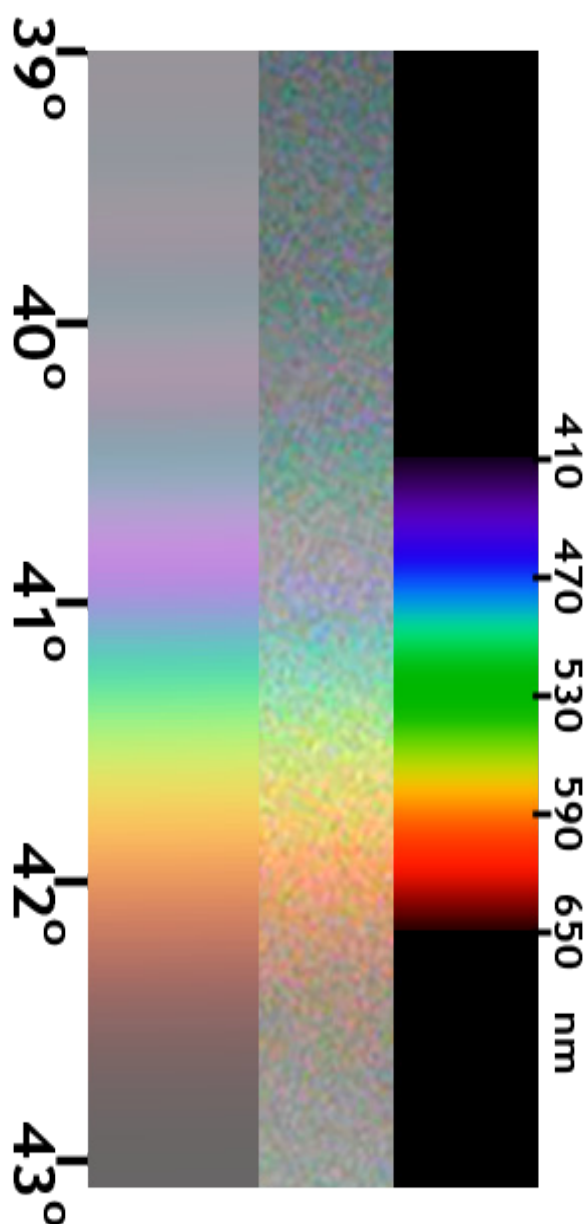
walked through his white house, leaving footprints of leftover colors that he knew he would never replace. He met her from the inside of the threshold. One by one, Gunther released the screws on the left side, loosening the large frame, bigger than him, but somehow, small enough to fit inside of Miriam Miller's chest. The door fell free, descending and hitting in front of Miriam's feet.

"Help me," he said, throwing down the tool, picking up the top of the door. Miriam placed her hands beneath the opposite corners, and lifted. Placing the wooden canvas beneath their arms, the two walked towards the street, Miriam finally facing home.

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George had taken Miriam's place, positioning his feet into the two small divots where hers had worn into the hardwood. He placed his hand around the thin muntins of the window. He got up close. He could see his breath. He watched Gunther through the window, dirty with color, messy, and his wife, carrying the door across the street. He could feel his head clear. He met her eyes. Removing his glasses, George could feel the pinks, the greens, the turquoise, bleeding through to him again. He could still taste it all.

But this time, he smiled, noticing its sweetness.



# How I Upset Your Mother

## The Drive-By Reviewer presents...50 Shades of Grey

'Mummy porn' and 'omnishambles' were the two words that truly defined 2012, for better or worse. The *book* that defined 2012, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, neatly combined both of these ideas into a semolina-bland erotic best-seller.

The story opens in easy, predictable style. Someone is off to interview a high-powered and mysterious business man. The interviewer is Anastasia, the book's protagonist, and the interviewee is high-powered title character Christian Grey: a depraved, controlling, complex man in need of rescue (obviously). A series of sexually-charged meetings lead to a passionate and intense love affair and a raft of psychological tropes are trotted out for Grey to explain his mysteriousness and behavioural quirks. Oh, and there's a bit of BDSM (Bondage, domination and sado-masochism, as clarity for the pure and virginal).

E.L. James, the author, set-out to consciously ape the style and mood of the *Twilight* books; she adapted and expanded on the characters through the medium of fan fiction. *Twilight*'s Edward Cullen is transformed from moody, petulant and mysterious vampire into Christian Grey, who is also moody, petulant, mysterious, but, critically, not a vampire. The naive Bella Swann, a waifish misfit who doesn't entirely get along with boys, is replaced by Anastasia Steele, another surreally named, waifish misfit who doesn't entirely get along with boys. The characters are instantly recognisable banal archetypes.

The book is billed to have been written about sex, but, in reality, the sex gets in the way of the story. The long-winded 'this is how you have sex' process of Ana's sexual awakening not only takes too long, but contributes very little to the book. Ana is described as being a virgin before having slept with Grey, despite being in her early twenties, but the revelation that she already knows her way around oral sex (extremely competently, apparently) does some harm to the characterisation. It is far too sim-

ple and easy a contrast between Grey, the sexually debauched devil, and Ana the virgin, whereas Ana the 'normal person' who had enjoyed normal sexual activity before meeting Grey would have provided a more nuanced contrast.

The frequent email exchanges between the two principle characters are a genuine delight to read. As someone who sends many emails from day-to-day, I was extremely satisfied to note that the conversations reproduced faithfully the kinds

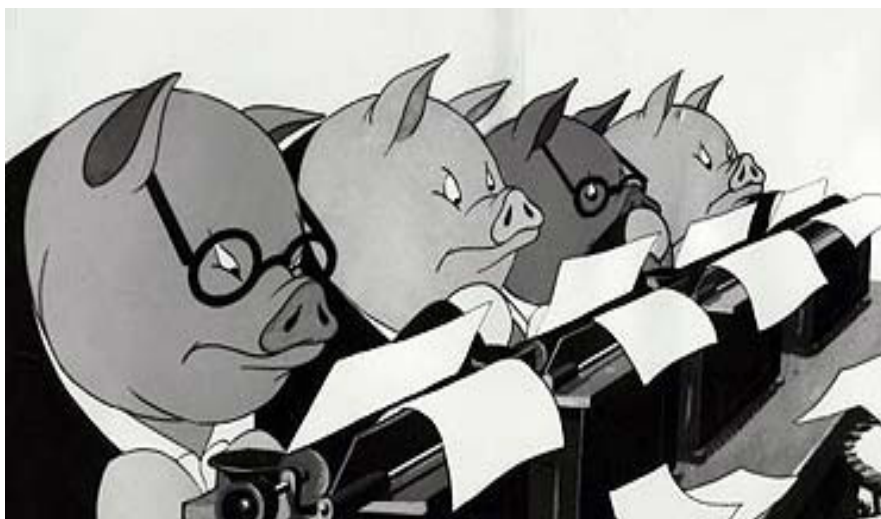
### Appendix- Fifty Sheds of Grey

*'Colin Grey's life was happy and simple until the day everything changed- the day his wife read THAT book. Suddenly, he was thrust head-first into a dark, illicit world of pleasure and pain. This is the story of one man's struggle against a tide of tempestuous, erotic desire and of the greatest love of all: the love between a man and his shed.'*

*'WARNING: This book contains graphic shed-based images. Please don't look if you are easily offended.'*

*Fifty Sheds of Grey takes an amusing post-modern, post-feminist swipe at the world of mummy porn with the devastating pseudo-erotic tale of one man and his shed (daddy porn, presumably). A number of classic mannish tropes are satirised as the 'inner gardener' pokes amusing fun at *Fifty Shades*'s Ana's 'inner goddess', whilst the excellent quality imprint (£9.99 RRP, though, so it'd better be) is interspersed with genuinely artful and attractive black and white (and grey) pictures of sheds. Sadly, parodies are always limited in their jocularly to the source material that they work with and *Fifty Sheds* is no exception: '[s] he knelt before me on the shed floor and tugged gently at first, then harder until finally it came. I moaned with pleasure. Now for the other boot...'. Critically, however, *Fifty Sheds* keeps it brief. Rather than outstaying its welcome, each spread has a big picture and as many words as quoted above. *Fifty Sheds*: a fairly good parody, but not a brilliant book, but that's alright, isn't it? *Fifty Sheds of Grey*, C.T. Grey, Boxtree*





of emails that real people send. James occasionally tweaks the small details of the messages, a twist to the subject head or a modification to Grey's footer reward a careful eye with an amusing, witty and extremely genuine record of a relationship. Equally, the dialogue between the two characters feels spontaneous and genuine, both well observed and well executed, and James deserves credit for having captured the speech of couples so well. Dialogue can often fill an entire page with repartee, but at no point does the reader lose a sense of voice for each character and the 'hands off' narration style makes for engaging reading.

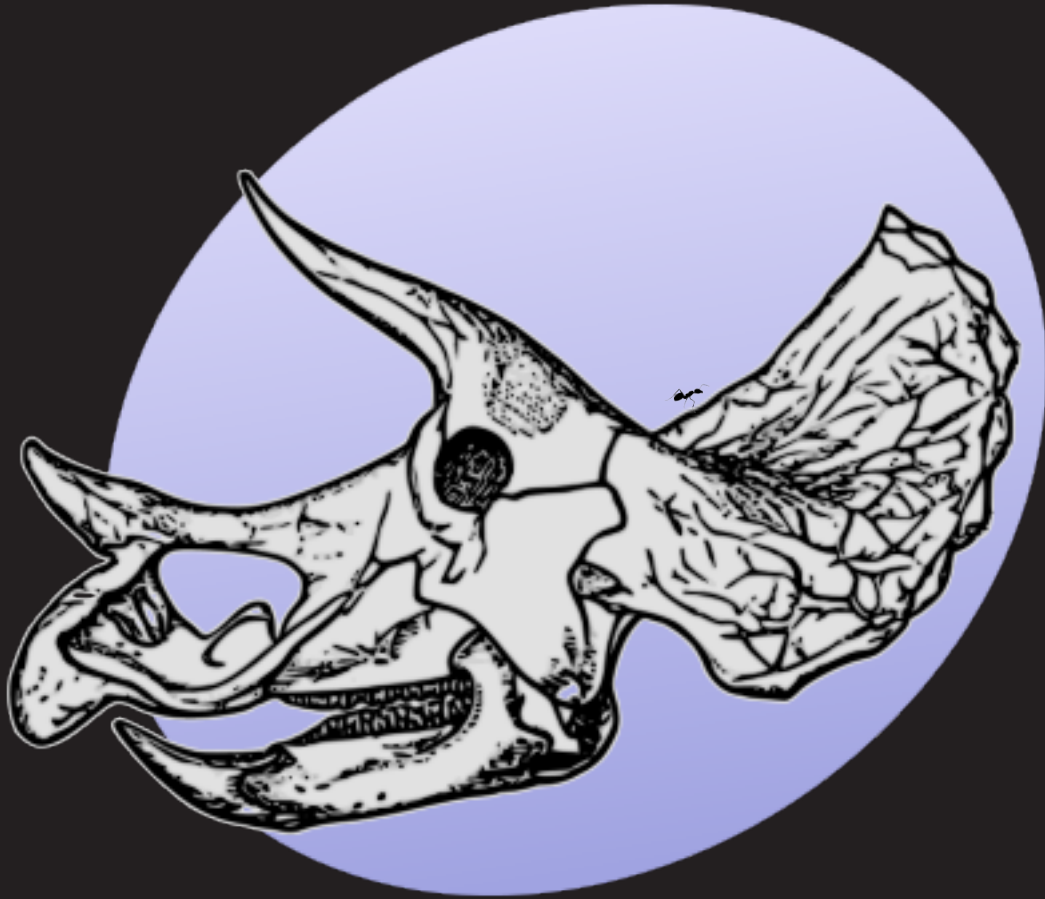
However, in terms of the quality of the intercourse and its description, the Law of Diminishing Returns devastates the second half of the book and the same worn and tired descriptions from previous chapters return in their often anticipated order. The use of 'shattered' for the female orgasm, for example, not only grates by the time it is used in its fifth or sixth iteration, but the consistency is baffling, especially from the male perspective. When reading a phrase (again, distinctly over used) of '[a] muscle deep inside [that] clenches'

when Ana thinks of Grey, it is fairly hard to relate, but this is perhaps a question of biology and anatomy. I like things to be called their proper name, so couldn't help but cringe at mentions of 'my sex' for genitals. Curiously, the BDSM is more frequently discussed than enacted and when it does occur, approximately two thirds of the way through the story, there is a strong sense of being overwhelmed. Once again, James makes it difficult to follow the action without an accompanying anatomical model and a set of notes, but perhaps this is a simple case of James allowing the reader to draw their own conclusions. The book is, no doubt, a victim of its own hype, but people do not read a book like *Fifty Shades* expecting *Last of the Summer Wine*. The 'Red Room of Pain' (as the sexual 'playroom' is frequently described) sounds more like a gentlemen's club than a parlour for erotic debauchery with red leather and classy decor. The book leaves the reader reeling with questions, but primarily 'why is this so popular?' The obvious answer is that *Fifty Shades...* is popular simply because it is. A positive feedback cycle of hype has created a mon-

strous behemoth that is little more than overgrown teen fiction with 'hair down there'. Although the popularity of such 'teen fiction' suggests that readers of all ages crave holiday reads and so the writer is left with something of a conundrum: Are the books popular because the 'guilty pleasure' side of reading has become more acceptable? Certainly, the anonymous covers of e-readers have made it easier avoid judgement during the daily commute, but there has been no (particular) increase in pornography consumption on massed transportation generally, despite the large number of tablets being sold. The questions for the publishing industry are more troubling. When the *Da Vinci Code* destroyed the best sellers' list, a vast swathe of 'code and conspiracy' books suddenly appeared to support the new genre, but that is partly because there are many ways to explore the story. By contrast, *Fifty Shades* has no particular room to grow. A romance book is essentially a story written backwards from the end to the beginning: everyone knows that Ana Karenina is not going to end well; everyone knows that Hugh Grant is probably going to get the girl. Everyone knows there'll be love, but the erotic story is fundamentally alike to the action genre of films. Once you've seen all of the big explosions, the small explosions don't seem quite so impressive anymore.



# Next Issue Theme: Dinosaurs!



Everyone remembers their favourite dinosaur.  
Everyone knows someone who's a 'fossil'.

Submissions of fiction, non-fiction and poetry  
(and artwork) on the theme of 'Dinosaurs!' now open.

Closing date for submissions is the **15th March**.  
Submission guidelines can be found at:  
**[www.herecomeseveryone.me/submit](http://www.herecomeseveryone.me/submit)**