

The Wells Street Journal

Colour

Issue 19



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About The Wells Street Journal

The Wells Street Journal is a London-based biannual literary anthology of poetry and prose run by the University of Westminster's Creative Writing: Writing the City MA students. Founded in 2014, it was named after the street in which the department of English, Linguistics and Cultural studies was hosted.

Representing all ends of the globe, the journal's main impetus is to provide its readers, both national and international, with literary works that represent equality, diversity, and inclusivity. It achieves this by showcasing not only the talents of its own writers, but by sharing its platform with a collection of external writers from a wide range of locales and experiences.

This issue embraces the concept of colour in all its facets and interpretations. It is the nineteenth issue and the ninth in print.

Foreword

For Issue 19 of The Wells Street Journal, we chose the theme of Colour because of its vast potential for creative work. However, throughout the project, the themes of colour came to define everything I love about the journal. The diversity, the depth, the uniqueness, and the incandescent talent of our community are what made Issue 19 possible. I am proud of the dedication, teamwork, and ingenuity displayed by our team, and I am inspired by the creativity and artistry of each of our submitters. Thank you.

Additionally, we would like to express our deep thanks and appreciation to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Westminster, Dr. Peter Bonfield, for his continued sponsorship of the journal and enabling us to produce and promote each issue. Without his generous donation, we would not be able to work as freely as we currently can to produce an issue that truly incorporates our vision and our passion for everyone's creative works. Likewise, thank you to the Student Union who have been unfailing in their continued assistance to The Wells Street Journal.

We also want to give a special thanks to our mentors and course leads in both the creative writing and professional writing programs. Dr Monica Germanà's steadfast support and Kieran Yates's knowledge, encouragement, and mentorship are what makes this program possible. The opportunity for each cohort to produce a fully student-lead journal is something the university should be proud to offer. It provides well-needed experience in different roles, develops teamwork, and prepares each student for future careers, regardless of the field.

Finally, I would also like to thank Mark Webster and the team at Blissetts for their prompt communication and help in the printing process. As a managing editor with limited direct experience in print publication, it was their patience and assistance that allowed everything

to fully come together.

The theme of Colour has been an interesting one to produce. In part, because colour means so many things to different people. However, whether colour is the first spark of joy in a child's eyes as they twist together blue and red playdough to make purple, or if it is a poignant commentary on the complexities of race and colourism, the emotions and stories of colour can be found in everyone's lives. So lastly, to our readers, I hope you read and enjoy these works in the theme of colour, and to you also, thank you.

Gabriel Clark-Clough
Managing Editor

Colours of Now

Mehak Zehra

Am I living it right,
The colours of now?

They say:
Today's are vibrant
Tomorrow's are bright
Yesterday's are faded.

You have seen their dramas
You have seen their movies

Isn't that what they show?
Red and green, also life for the present
Blue and pastel, also hope for the future
Black and white, also death for the past

But my colours of now aren't lively;
My colours of then aren't deadly.

In the days gone, I see colours,
In the days coming, I see fear,
In the days of now, I see dread.

My colours of now are dull, faded, full of dread.

Into The Blue

Marni Whiteley

She sees the first punch coming way beyond the sight of his arm reaching back. She sees it coming when she opens the door and the silence grabs her and wraps tight around her heart. It is not the interrupted silence of an empty house. This silence has form, as it grips her chest and squeezes her guts. The knuckles coming towards her in the dim evening light are a relief. The crack of her bones will fill the silence and turn it into noise and stop the waiting. The waiting is the worst part.

He hits her heavy on the cheek, below the eye, near her ear. She feels it as sound and starts to breathe for the first time since the air was pushed from her chest. Her eyes close as her head lifts.

Now there is roaring in her ears, mocking the silence. She stumbles back, weaves like a drunk as her balance shifts. He grabs her collar, both hands pull the fabric tight. She hears her button hit the floor as it loses its mooring, and rooms flicker through her head as she locates needle and black thread. His hands are sweaty where they connect with her bare skin and they smell of the sea. This, then, is where she will go this time. She feels the air shifting as the next punch comes in but her eyes stay shut as she allows the smell to overwhelm her.

It is sunny and bright, so bright she has to shield her eyes as she gazes into the sea. The blue is dark, thick and vivid like sapphires and she can see it darkening as it recedes from the shore. She knows it will get cooler the further in she will go.

He shouts and she straightens, standing to attention. A clock hand moves by her head. She holds her body firm, to give him the reality of her, of her mass. To hope that her form will make him see who she is. To say, I am who you love. I am the one you cannot live without. I am the one you want to keep safe. Remember? He pulls her close and

time stops between a tick and a tock as she feels his lips brush hers and her muscles sag as relief floods and softens them. Then his teeth dig in and her body crumbles and she has no strength to try and remind him again. She sinks deeper as the red taste of metal fills her mouth. His breath smells, faintly, of fish. She breathes it in, takes in its overlay of alcohol and thinks of the smiling man on the label of the rum bottle, his favourite, surrounded by carnival bunting, a stretch of sand of whitened gold at his feet, tall verdant trees behind.

She sees there is a cocktail waiting for her, set on a small wooden table next to her matching sun lounger, plump with red cushions. The glass has a pink umbrella and two pink straws protruding from it. The smiling man is beckoning her over, his eyes playful. She starts towards him but her feet sink into the sand.

He is close now, very close and she feels his spittle falling on her face as he roars, feels his body pressing close to her as he backs her up against the wall. She tries to speak but his hand is smearing her lipstick onto her cheek. Turning her from whore to clown, though he is still calling her whore. She wonders if she is smiling.

He pulls her from the wall, his grip tightening as he readies himself to push her back into it. He pushes. Her back hits the wall and her head snaps back. Her eyes open with the impact and she says, *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry*, over and over, as she slides to the floor. Her eyelids close down and now all she hears is the rushing sound of the waves as they break along the shore.

The smiling man waits patiently by the lounger, beckons her towards him. She walks towards him, her feet heavy but willing. He holds up a small bottle of oil and she lies down, groaning with pleasure as his hands make the first broad strokes over her back. She feels the tension in his arms grow, swelling his muscles. This is a memory, an old one from the beginning. She changes the scene, removes the oil, the gentle hands. She cannot have any reminders of the beginning or she will run from the sea back, again, into his arms.

She lies on the lounger still, though the smiling man has gone. The sun sends sharp needles through her skin. She is naked and she is alone

on the glorious sand. She feels reborn. Her head rests on her arms, light, her whole body weightless. It sways gently from side to side as she moves it in time to music that has begun to play. The music is dramatic, rising and falling with urgency but the words of love being sung make it restful and she lets a hand drop down to the sand to steady her as the ground starts to spin.

He has her by the throat, his hand no longer sweaty as it clamps coldly underneath her jaw. She feels the pinch of her skin as she tries to swallow. He has lifted her only slightly, so that she stands on the balls of her feet. His breath is hot and he is so close now she feels the moisture of it layer itself on her lips. She has no words, there is no more chance for regrets and as she feels his grip mount with his anger she knows that, this time, then, will be the final time. Every time she tells herself it is the final time. Janice next door, who still wears a hat on Sundays and smells of lavender, has turned her music up – a rousing, big band tune – and she feels sorry for her, knows that she finds his shouting disturbing, ungracious. Janice looks at her sympathetically but there is a rebuke also in her eyes; Janice wishes they could wash their dirty linen quietly, privately, wishes, more, that a house had linen too clean to fight about in the first place. He wonders if Janice will feel the coming peace as relieving as she will. She hopes so. She looks, takes in the memory of the room for the last time. Light reflects off his cufflinks and throws playful dots across the smiling photographs on the wall. Underneath, the sofa they chose is sleek red velvet.

It is time to go into the sea. She is light-headed but she is so hot, her skin is blistering. She knows she must move or lose her chance to determine her own fate. The only cool place is in that sapphire blue that reflects the sun in every direction, light flashing off it like fireworks. The lights spin, erupting like white-hot cartwheels above the surface of the water, too bright. She clamps her eyes tight shut and breathes. She must see the beauty in those cartwheels, for it is their sparking silver flames she must follow. She can breathe and she opens her eyes. The wheels have slowed, the sparks erupting now like liquid mercury, flying before slowing and arcing towards the sea heavy at the bottom like teardrops. She watches as they hit the water and spread into the sea, laying on the

surface in curling, amorphous shapes. She starts again towards them, stumbling but moving all the time in the right direction. The music plays on, rising against the rumble of the waves.

She is trying to rise, her knees laying hard against the polished wooden floor. Her throat stretched back now, his hand in her hair. He is pulling the straightened hair he does not like curly, or is curly hair that he doesn't like straight? She cannot remember, it changes. She wonders if it is not straight enough as she feels her scalp lift. He will straighten it now as he has tried and tried to straighten all her kinks. He has tried so hard but it has not been enough, she has failed to change in the ways he wanted. Up and away, the pain sears through her head as roots tear. Her hair, like the rest of her, resisting his valiant efforts at improvement. Uselessly, as she feels the hairs separate from her scalp. Her hands leap to the top of her head and her wrist is knocked sideways as her lip is sliced open on the smooth edge of a gold wedding ring.

It is so hot now, her skin is on fire. Sweat pours into her eyes but she never loses sight of the sea. The sun burns on her scalp. She licks her lips before gasping at the coolness of the incoming tide as it reaches under her toes before sliding away, pulling her feet into the wet sand. Her feet move forward. Spurred, she moves into the water feeling it rise along her legs. This first touch is always so sweet. She kicks out for the joy of feeling it swirl around her knees. It is soothing, this water, soft. She wants to keep going, wants to move into the deep blue letting its coolness slowly inch up her skin but patience evades her. She bends until she feels the water flow over the lines of her body.

She can see underneath the raised cabinets and can see the dirt of which he complains. All her life is under there, it seems. Pieces of food wrappings, dog biscuits, bright plastic toy parts sheared off by the force of a fall to the floor. She watches as the clump of her hair recently sheared is gently blown under by the movement of his leg. As his foot connects, the recent scar in her abdomen bursts and she feels the pain as that of another child, another one she does not want but must have all the same.

The water rushes over her thighs and pools down into the hollow of her stomach. The salt stings but she lowers her knees and sinks deeper. Restored, she stands with conviction. The sea is sparking still and the soft molten flames no longer hurt her eyes, but beckon her. She hurries only when she sees that the sun has dipped lower on the horizon and she is aware that time is passing.

He does not exist any longer. His foot moves rhythmically against her side and she notices it no more than the ticking of the clock on the wall. He is disappearing and only his foot remains. Soon that will go too. She concentrates only on the vomit that is rising up from her stomach, imagining it being flushed back by that beautiful cool blue. She, too, must disappear, without a trail of bodily fluids to give clues to those who would try to follow her. She thinks of her daughter. Would she take her if she could?

The water is up to her lips now, the salt invading her wounds. She moves forward, drinking deep, feeling it cleanse her inside. All that is left is to wash clean the raw scalp. It is the only ache left, the skin protesting its loss of covering, exposed to the heat of the sun. She continues to drink as the water closes over the last remaining piece of warmth. The music fades as her ears fill until all she can hear is the soft thump of blood as it rushes to her head.

The blood is a siren. She is alone, the ticking of the clock counting the rhythm. The siren wails, rising and falling. She looks at the clock and understands that Connor has returned from his evening shift. He always calls for help, too scared of him to come in from upstairs, but he always calls, thinking he is helping. He sits in the dark waiting for her to appear, stretched. He looks at the scene from behind his curtains and she smiles at him, if she can. He does not know the beauty of the sapphire blue she sees.

The water is falling away from her and she crouches, trying to keep her head below its surface. She opens her eyes and manages one glimpse of the world underwater and she sees the ocean floor slope downwards, descending deeper until the blue darkens to black, a velvet

black that would be smooth to the touch. And then she is up, the water rushing from her, abandoning her skin and leaving her naked. Heat builds, rising within her until it scalds her fingers and fattens her lips.

She flexes her fingers because she has been asked to, obligingly follows the woman's finger with her eyes. The people who come are always so nice, so solid in their sturdy jackets, she does not want to disappoint though it hurts her fingers to be held. The warmth of the stranger's hand erases the memory of the soothing water from her skin but she sits up so as not to make a fuss. He is no longer there but he is always there, watching. He is somewhere giving his excuses, building up his sorry and, later, he will come and embrace her and make promises she will believe. She smiles at the stranger, nods her head, yes, just as she will later smile, and nod, at Connor on her way out while behind her, the sea scoops in and under itself warning of the tsunami still to come.

Blue

Michele Clark

The first time it happened, it was a Wednesday. I parked my car and was walking towards the agency when I received a text, and before I could open it, a second text. They both said the same thing — CODE ELIZABETH. I started running.

The agency was a converted building. Once an old warehouse, it had been gradually reconstructed by teen and young adult trainees, helping practice the hands-on skills needed to succeed in the workforce. From a block not far away, I saw a police car parked on the sidewalk, its doors open on the passenger side. The agency's lobby was framed by great picture windows, designed to invite new clients. Through those windows, I saw the CODE ELIZABETH unfolding.

A crowd watched two trainees, face down, police standing over them. The officers held shotguns to the back of their heads. I ran through the door.

“What is going on here? And why do you have our students on the ground at gunpoint?”

A third officer turned to me. “Step back or I will tase you.”

“I'm the director here,” I said, unmoving. “That would be a career-ending choice.”

In an agitated tone, the officer justified, “There was a robbery a few blocks away and these youth matched the description.”

A teacher stepped out from the crowd in the lobby.

“These youths have been in class, on site, since 8:45 this morning. When was this robbery?”

There was no answer. The police kept their guns pointed at the trainees on the ground while they searched them. Finding nothing, they lowered their weapons, pulled the trainees off the ground and demanded they turn over their identification cards.

Years ago, our agency was founded by a group of teachers from the St. Elizabeth School who had seen enough teens failed by the system. They chose to create programs to give disadvantaged youth the

chance to do something better with their lives. Our trainees were rarely perfect, but that didn't mean they were guilty.

Although the agency was no longer associated directly with the school, we used CODE ELIZABETH to denote direct threats or safety concerns to our staff or trainees. Threats like when men in blue uniforms held deadly weapons to the backs of their children's heads.

I called my contact at the mayor's office, looking to reach someone in authority. They assured me a supervising officer would be there shortly. I didn't bother waiting. In addition to the teens targeted by these officers, there were over twenty impacted teenagers that had watched their classmates on the floor with shotguns pointed at their heads. I got the students back in the classrooms and had the counselors contact the parents of the two youths.

The sergeant arrived, and as soon as he was brought up to speed by his officers, the youths were released. We had them wait with staff members for their guardians to arrive.

The sergeant wouldn't let his officers speak to us, insisting that it was his job to speak on their behalf. When we asked for the name and badge number of the three, he insisted that his presence made that unnecessary.

I reminded him the city's policy was that all officers must identify themselves by name and badge number. The sergeant looked at a strip of paper and rattled off two names. I asked for the name and number of the third officer.

"He wasn't really involved."

"Don't be ridiculous – he threatened to tase me."

I sat beside the trainees' instructor and one of my co-directors, while we listened to the sergeant rattle on about how hard their job was, suggesting that they were just trying to do their job, protect the community, and solve crime.

"I know these guys; these are good officers and they are just trying to keep you and your students safe."

"Then how did they end up with shotguns pointed at the back of the heads of students?"

The sergeant put forth the same story about a robbery in the neighborhood, but was unable or unwilling to give any details and before he left the room, the three of us could feel the story begin to

unravel. That afternoon we pulled the strings. Three weeks after the officer entered our lobby with shotguns, the deputy chief of police and the mayor's head of violence prevention entered our conference room to discuss the issue with me, our Operations Director and the students' counselor. We began the meeting by telling them what we now knew.

In searching for information, we had expected to find a vague description of the robbery with suspects — something like 'a tall black male' — but there was no robbery or any other reported crime in the neighborhood that morning. We learned the officers were part of an elite homicide task force nicknamed 'the murder squad', and they knew we served high-risk teens. Contrary to what the officers said, the students were never outside our building. They pulled them onto the sidewalk and entered the building unwarranted, to scare them. Furthermore, the sergeant knew this when he was meeting with us and deliberately tried to mislead us. All of them, the three officers and the sergeant had colluded to conceal the truth.

We sat in silence for a few minutes.

"What can I say?" asked the deputy chief. "Newsflash — cops lie. And, in case you haven't heard, blue protects blue."



A Head Full of Flowers by Carella Kiel

The Winds of Change

Andrew Scarborough

The colours change with every season,
A natural cycle without reason,
From greens of spring to leaves when they fall,
A canvas painted by nature, standing tall.

In spring, buds bloom, new life begins,
Reminders of a love that never ends,
A death to the past, a rebirth ahead,
Hope and renewal, nature's daily bread.

Summer brings warmth, the brightness of sun,
You loved this place... I see you run,
From the blues of the sky to the yellows of the fields,
Emotions run high, yet joy is revealed.

Autumn arrives, the leaves begin to fade,
A sad farewell, but beauty is displayed,
In the reds and the oranges, a fiery show,
The cycle of life, we watch it go.

Winter comes, a blanket of white,
A peaceful calm, a peaceful sight,
The world is still, a moment of rest,
A reminder of life's ultimate test.

The colours change with every turn,
A symbol of life's ebb and return,
From death to rebirth, what more can I say,
I still miss you Mum, each and every day.

Through my Kaleidoscope

Nupur Lakhe

The first time I looked through a kaleidoscope, I was eight. At a fun fair, a stout man sat at his small table, and children stood in a line to look through it. Seeing the changing shapes, colours, and fluorescent light in which it was all enveloped was fun. I never witnessed a physical kaleidoscope after that, but this shapeshifting perspective and the physics behind it have remained with me since. I used it to view other things in life – metaphorically, allegorically, and mystically. It became like a third eye. I never fathomed I would envision a city with this line of sight. But here I am.

On a pitch-black night, I stepped into the city of London. The chill grabbed me by my wrists; I hadn't prepared enough for the coldness of this event. It was 6 PM, but it felt like nine, with no traces of dusk but a dark black. I saw the twinkling yellow lights of the city, sometimes from the cars driving by, and from the distant buildings. The feeling of this evening was akin to meeting a stranger at a party and failing to fill the white silence between us. I outlined the city of London with blatant strokes of a black pencil: incomplete and sketchy. Would filling it with colours make it whole? I wondered. If yes, how many would I find?

As I rotate the kaleidoscope rim, bright colours hit my eyes like memory flashes. I recall it as sunset hues from back home; a bright orange against the greying sky, violet diffusing in pink, or like the breaking of an egg yolk – yellow splitting against the blue. Sunset has always been a part of feeling at home; an omen, a safe space, and a soul-stirring moment for me. So when I spotted my first one in the English skies, I was overwhelmed. But a kaleidoscope challenges the principle of permanence, and change is inevitable. And so I give it another turn to see a new stream of patterns.

The colour palette I first saw London in was grey; the grey overcast clouds succeeding in hiding the sun, the grey coats that walked around me, and the grey evenings that would turn so at 4 in the winter

afternoons without a sliver of the sunset hue. It reminded me of Natalia Ginzburg's essay where she writes about London; its greyness and its limited colours; a red fire engine, red and blue doors to beige houses. Ginzburg writes about solitude, while Vivian Gornick about loneliness and overcoming a certain grittiness in these big, crowded cities. I would often reminisce, during this time, my love for Vivian Gornick's *Approaching Eye* level, a yellow paperback where she writes about walking the city and how it feels cathartic for our existence. Memories of her reaffirming words would warm my heart out of the blue. Perhaps that is how life and literature entwine. Writing that makes us green with melancholy but also pink with hope. Or it percolates through that vulnerable space of being. Drip by drip, throbbing in our nerves. Even in my early days arriving in the city, the urge to question my belonging grew as I rode with people in trains and tubes. My white sneakers, aloof amidst the brown boots; a sight I became accustomed to. This city felt cold; icy white with a cold shoulder. Was I the odd woman walking this world?

Walking on the cobbled streets and sidewalks became my escape as I prepared to welcome this shift, from a place of validation to territories unknown. I had uprooted my cushioned self from back home to be here. My walks became the medium to shed my inhibitions, brace for the change, and look at the city. Sometimes I surprised myself: one moment I would look at everything with misty glasses, like the fog that settles, lazy to wake up from its slumber, and the other, something in sight would delight me. I would walk the London streets, my neck to-and-fro, looking at tinted people, at the colourful shops, and at the ambience. Some slightly emptier streets, where an old couple snuggled and walked, loners like me hurrying to a destination, or runners braving the cold with their bright blue running shorts.

Spanning the city on foot relieved me of the naïve nervousness when I arrived; the odd woman was becoming a wanderer now, walking where the maps took her. The picturesque empty streets lined with rust-coloured buildings, the leafless trees waiting to turn green, and the occasional sunshine that would light up an arena made it into my phone gallery. I would watch women walk with a certain paced flamboyance. Some, having coffee or a glass of wine alone. I would draw a different kind of bliss from such scenes. A sort of reassurance. Probably, this is

the green solitude Ginzburg writes about in her book *The Little Virtues*. My walks became the lens to view life here: on its toes, moving with urgency. I was beginning to identify the patterns in the kaleidoscope now. They are never the same and yet carry a sense of knowability.

For a reader, spotting another is a moment of unsaid kinship: an old woman intently turning her pages, a young girl torn between reading and being on her phone, and a man catching up on a few pages from a yellow vintage edition after work in the tube. Annie Ernaux's white and blue *Les Années* peeked out at me, and I googled the English title of this French one. I smiled broadly at the joy – of having read it and seeing another reader relishing it probably for the first time. It wasn't just the sight of readers that cajoled me towards building a keenness for the city, even though it might look like I carry a bias for observing them longer. At times, it was just a mere sight of a grey-fat pigeon crossing the road ahead of me. A fine man smiling and indicating my shoelaces had come undone. A woman with a bright pink scarf exclaiming to me how cold it was today as we waited for the orange bus. I agreed. We rubbed our hands and hid them in our jackets. As the rest of the world passed by, the view of two old women soaking in the golden sunlight in each other's company, sitting in a park, amplified the emotion of fullness and slow life; of what it is like to pause and reflect. It was a respite to see a woman from my country who spoke my language, even though we didn't exchange words. And as always, when I would fail to find balminess in people, I would find it in books. They would become my travel buddies, or I would feast on them in bookstores.

In the coming days, there will be another green train I will run to catch, another morning I will wake up with a sliver of grey in my soul, and yet another day when I will stand at the crossroads of belongingness, looking for a crimson proof of being in this vast landscape, even when I know this city has accepted many. My kaleidoscopic viewings will some days reflect my mood or London's. The humdrum of patterns anew with colour; a colourful door, just like the houses in England have, of opportunities, experiences, and learnings that I will knock at or open. A few will invite me in, or I might look from the outside. I have lived the nomadic life of moving cities, living and knowing them. At times, writing epiphanies; how they gave

back more of myself to me. What will London be to me? An eulogy, lament, or just a kaleidoscopic gaze? An amusing gaze that ends after your turn is over, and it is time to place the kaleidoscope down, pay the stout man, and leave.

The outline sketch of the city I began is still incomplete but has a hint of colour now; from the rust-bricked buildings to the blue sky and a mustard door. And my grey heart, beating to Plath's song: I am, I am, I am.



picture by Monali Guleria

Eunice

Aris Jernigan

You sit cross-legged on her bed, your fingers gripping the soft, pale pinkness of her comforter as you watch the flurry of her, the way she gusts from one end of the room to the other, filling the large black suitcase on the floor with clothes and trinkets and toiletries and shoes from the closet, the desk and underneath the bed.

Where is she bound this time? Cambodia? Argentina? Senegal? Knowing her, it might be all three. You'll ask eventually, but for now you are enjoying the way she takes over the limited square footage of her dorm, and you don't want to interrupt.

She leans over the luggage, assessing her work so far, a few strands of the dark, chin length hair, now tinted copper, falling across her face. Tucking them back into place behind her ears, she draws your attention to golden silhouettes of a woman's body with little shiny pearl nipples dangling from her earlobes. You turn your head to the mirror mounted on the left wall and imagine wearing those earrings yourself, but the image is all wrong.

She is kneeling on the floor now, folding and arranging her collection of personal effects to a snug fit. Pausing, she smiles up at you apologetically.

"You always catch me at the most inconvenient times."

"I don't mind."

And you don't. The last time you saw her was the last day of her summer break, just after she'd stepped, hungry and sleep-deprived, off a ten-hour flight from Japan. Pulling her hair into a shoulder-length ponytail, she had complained about her greasy skin and the bags under her eyes, but you hadn't seen any flaws in her pristine Korean features. You had spent the afternoon helping her move her belongings into the room.

You recognize the ceramic pineapple you placed on her bookshelf, the corkboard above her desk where you pinned her polaroid pictures. Some of them are new, but you can still spot the one

that captures your smiling face next to hers from the last summer before college, when the two of you went on a road trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles. At the time, Los Angeles was the setting for the daydreams of mid-twenties pseudo-adulthood she told you about. Even though you remember putting it up, seeing your picture there among the snapshots of her college life, you can't help but feel warm with the knowledge that even with all the places she's been and people she's met in the past three years, your high school friendship still matters to her. You still matter to her.

She asks you whether she should take her snakeskin, stiletto-heeled boots, just in case. Of course she should. After stuffing the shoes into an internal compartment, she sits on the suitcase, asking you to help her close it.

As you struggle and sweat over the zipper, she, from her perch, begins to recount her escapades from the previous quarter, which marks the ten-week span since you last saw her. The night she was so deliriously drunk at a party that when her dress straps broke, she continued dancing, tits out and all. The editorial she wrote for Stanford's MINT magazine on the complexities of East Asian womanhood. Her spontaneous decision to spend Thanksgiving week in Budapest. The application for Harvard Law School she started, and the LSAT she has scheduled for March.

When the bag is finally closed, you reclaim your spot on the bed and she begins the work of putting the rejected clothing items back in their place. She throws a navy-blue University of Michigan sweater in your direction.

"It's yours, if you want it."

You clutch it in your lap, letting the smell of her that still lingers in the fabric reach your nose. Between the sweater, the shirt from the last visit and the dress from the time before that, your wardrobe is incrementally composed of her remnants.

You wonder if she remembers when you came to visit during her first year. A text from her that read *You have to come, my friend thinks you're cute*, brought you to the threshold of a room only illuminated with pink string lights. The bass of a song you didn't recognize vibrated under your sneakers.

Decorated in glitter and an off-shoulder top, she emerged

from the tumult to pull you into the uneasiness of unfamiliar figures. She deposited you at the back wall, in front of a fold-up table littered with red solo cups, boxed wine, and glass liquor bottles. The friend in question, who leaned coolly back against a lofted bed immediately to your left, asked, “Do you want something to drink?”

Stubbornly fixated on where his neck met the collar of his dark t-shirt, you nodded. Red cup by red cup, you attempted to reach the point where you might be able to sustain eye contact with him. Always, you were dimly aware of her trajectory through space, a comet bringing fleeting splendor to each person’s night until she returned to yours. She wrapped her arms around your waist as she looked at him with a wide, intoxicated smile. In reference to you, she asked him, “Isn’t she pretty?”

You turned your face to hers as she did the same. Dizzy with hormones and boxed wine, she brought her soft pink lips to meet yours. But she was already letting you go and fading into the universe. She bestowed the same affection on at least five other people, including him. So when he asked if you wanted to go to his room, you went. And in the confusion of mutual first intimacy, when he mistakenly murmured in your ear, *I Love You*, and instead you heard *I Love Eunice*.

You pull the Michigan sweater over your head as Eunice props the suitcase against the wooden doors of her school-issue wardrobe to await her early, next morning flight. Finally, you ask.

“Where are you going, again?”

She beams. “New Zealand.”

“When do you get back?”

“January seventh. When do you go back to New York?”

“The fifth.”

She considers the adventures that will occupy her next few months, most of them unplanned. “Summer, then?”

You smile, with gratitude and disappointment, knowing a few hours during a school break are all that will really be yours.

A Whirlwind of Colour

Zakiya Rouabah

Ruby lips capture his gaze,
Blush pink cheeks set his passion ablaze,
But the honeymoon period soon fades to grey,
He can no longer keep his darkness at bay,
Blackened with rage, his eyes see red,
Blood on his hands, a heart left for dead.

Her face like slate, a neutral expression,
The light has gone, replaced with depression.
Eyes that once sparkled with dancing gold flecks,
Now black and empty like ghostly shipwrecks.

Grey turns to blue as time moves on,
The stony expression, finally gone,
Replaced by sadness, an indigo soul,
Her eyes, a picture of pain untold.

But brighter becomes her state of blue,
As the light blue sky uplifts her mood,
And the turquoise sea brings a sense of ease,
And the navy night sky, a calming peace.

The years go by and she's a rainbow again,
A mixture of happiness, contentment, sadness and pain,
The cracks that once perforated her heart,
Filled with gold and silver, like Japanese art.

Baptised In Neon

Effy Kousteni

Church silent. Sherry enthusiasts dazzled by the electric signs and fluorescent lamps somewhere between Bethnal Green and Shoreditch. Watching the city move in all its separate stories, we step on broken beer bottles and call it a fright night. We keep our heads down to avoid glasses and bubble gum, but as an overthinker, I'm convinced there's more to it. You call me *honey* just when I'm about to challenge you. You know me too well, you say, I like baby blue and sunflowers. Meanwhile, you are angry, all you see is red and dead ends. We don't say *I love you* because it's cliché and you are the bad-boy type social media glamourises. I don't love you anyway, and I don't know why I'm here, and I'm Gen-Z but millennials like me. I'm very cross about making an aesthetic out of not doing well, though it's trendy and you love the vibe. You put on your expensive hoodie, hands in your full pockets, and drag your feet towards chic hopelessness. If anyone asks why, you point at all the things you have never tried for.

Perfectly vacant. You are looking for a face and a name and a picturesque view. I can only give you a cigarette and an eye-roll. Your life follows an arcane ritual of self-contemplation. You go online to check if your black and white Nikes are still cool, but you discover they are the safe option everybody goes for, so you switch to rust-brown Dunk and feel incredible. Suddenly you identify as the love child of Travis Scott and Colin Kaepernick. Your friends call you edgy and the internet *alternative, mysterious* and *brave*. You find yourself somewhere among those characterisations, high on the like count and acceptance. Your insecurities are dressed in sage and copper, all while I'm meant to write poetry about the way your narcissism allures me. You don't compliment my eyes because we are not starring in a rom-com, and you don't express emotion because, you believe, it's *démodé*. It also shows vulnerability and vulnerability equals weakness.

Church silent. I'm getting dragged down and think I'm going places. You say you'd leave this city in a heartbeat, but the clock runs

faster than us. Lyrical. Emotional. Adamant. If you don't stare at me a little longer I'll become a memory that often breaks through the cracks. My ego chases yours across London. I want to get words out of your mouth you have no intention of saying. You are enigmatic and I'm dark academia. We are moving, but not moved. My disinterest in your facade grows, so you tell me about the time you woke up late and labelled your tiredness 'depression' with such blasé positivity. You tell me about the time you got nervous about missing the bus and started popping anxiety pills like they were orange tic-tacs. You call me *honey* again and thrive on romanticised misery. I smile and say, you are okay and that I am, indeed, golden.

We catch a glimpse of Kanye West graffiti and talk about cancel culture. I define democracy and you interrupt me with a sarcastic comment. I laugh because people don't know how to listen and you remind me of that friend and that ex and that customer I dealt with at the bar, who I never want to see again. I laugh because you are many wonderful things, but a blind follower. You know what's wrong because somebody told you. You know what's right because somebody did it first. Popular opinion excites you, so you raise defence reciting overheard conversations, never questioned, in a show-off, original manner. I described you to a friend as *bad news dominating the headlines*. Appealing, snappy, capitalizing on tragedy, introducing a derivative story in mute colours, urging me to turn the page, change the channel, and scream into my lilac pillow. In this war of words, we lack logic and suspicion.

One block away, a homeless woman in a torn violet jumper begs for change and I reach for my wallet. You whisper that living on the streets is her choice and she's going to spend the money on brown sugar. I suggest you start questioning the grand narratives. There's a dramatic encounter where she tells me her life story. She migrated to London a year ago from the warzone. She's witnessed more death than her brain could handle. She teaches one or two things about loneliness and survival, the fear of birds and conservatism of military green. She calls me *peach* throughout her narrative while you impatiently tap your foot on the ground and think of Adderall. Your apathy is enthralling. You've got no space for somebody else's misfortune and suppose I will treat you with the same kindness.

Perfectly vacant. You say, *I'm going to be transparent, I sort of like you* while lighting the wrong end of your cigarette. I harshly step on cupid's shadow as my vision goes chemical pink. I only like caramel cappuccinos and car rides, I outgrow myself every day. This is meant to end in disaster so you can post about it. You like me in a way that's going to drive me mad, I'll have to guess it every other day when you drown in self-pity and cry. You represent Tumblr, though I'm no longer into it. There's a pattern in sad culture that leaves me cold. Advertising mental illness is collateral; your validation is informally assured.

Seeking attention and exaggerating a situation, you bought my bipolar neighbour's self esteem. The world already deals with drama and sin and you are trying hard to locate yourself in it. Your BeReals sell bits of yourself and I'm scrolling through hell. You are baptised in neon and I'm glowing ultraviolet. Sunlight and yellow sunglasses. Protest signs and outrage. Puff pass and Aperol Spritz. You explain, opposites attract, and I shake my head, *oh no, no honey*.

Church silent. We come to a standstill. There's a car speeding by and a fight around the corner. A complete mayhem nobody attempts to break. Two people in the middle, one with crimson-coloured knuckles and the other with broken everything. A literal example of fragmentation in society. One of them pulls a knife and I suddenly believe in amethyst crystals and God. Silent spectators waiting to see who will be the last one standing, pull out their iPhones because recording violence is en vogue. Whimsical. Sensational. At the sound of police sirens it becomes social. Racial. Political. The victim falls on the ground and gets kicked. I shout *stop* and you pull me back. I shout *stop* again as the dying victim screams for help and iPhone users ask him to turn his face a bit more to the right so they can get the incident from a better angle. The police run towards the circle and separate them. You take off and I hesitantly follow, only to land on your post-traumatic stress disorder. Your parents once had a fight about dinner reservations that horrified you. They were shouting and you were seventeen. I remind you, a person almost died back there, and you insist, you know the feeling. Constitutional. Important. Brilliant.

Red

Habsus Nak

I love red,
The little girl said to her mother
Red is the colour of
Strawberries
And apples and cherries.
Red is the colour of roses
When they bloom in the spring
The colour of my nose
When I play in the snow,
The Sun when it sets,
My teacher's hair when she smiles.
Red is Daddy when you kiss him
And Granny's cheeks when we visit her.
Red is love, and light, and happiness;
Red is the colour of life.

I hate red,
The little girl said to her mother.
Red is the colour of
Blood,
When daddy was shot on the streets
When he cried from the pain.
The dust-covered sunlight,
The baby's hungry mouth.
Red is the colour of the streets,
Stained with our soldiers' lives
The buses,
Carrying our prisoners away.
Red is pain, and heartbreak, and despair;
Red is the colour of death.

This Is How I Remember It

Brigid Cooley

the house was tall and white
the wine: dark, deep, and red
you were content living in greyscale
but the twinkle in your eye
was golden

this is how i remember it

my hair and skirt were short
holes in my shoes intentional
you asked me to sing Ella Fitzgerald
right before leaving

the stumble in the stairwell was an accident
we were always on purpose

when you recall the story
there are less details
more negative space
you always said the silence between notes
is what makes a melody beautiful

tell me: was i better
kept a secret?

this is how i remember it

your bedroom was a snow globe
translucent and fragile
we considered setting the mattress on fire
during the freeze

but chose to argue instead

flinging words, “selfish”,
against the window
and feigning surprise
when we shattered the glass.



picture by Jeya Keerthi

The Red Envelope

Fatima Latif

A dying fire. Yellow and blue. No, no. That's not right.

Red.

Yes, red.

That's what she saw. That's what was most visible. What stood out. Red of old blood stored in a bottle hanging around someone's neck. Red of burnt skin. An angry sunset. That's what Reign saw.

Her raging fireplace – an accomplice in getting rid of the evidence. The attestation of her ruin. This is what's right. This is what had to be done. It has gone on for too long now. Her mind was a kernel of wreckage. She knew it. That damned red envelope.

She remembered the exact day too. It was grey, with furious clouds cursing and denouncing her presence. The street light under the night sky resonated with the contrast of how she looked and felt. Her feet skipped over puddles as she made her way to the bus stop. She couldn't afford to miss this one. Her carefully contained auburn curls spilled over the coat as she crossed the road flagging down the red bus.

Two more steps and she'd have saved herself from bashing her own mother for missing her twenty-fifth birthday party.

The murky clouds roared, enveloping the city with darkness as lightning struck. One flash and she had a man in his seventies kneeling at her side. His frail, wrinkled hands outstretched towards her, holding her fate. She didn't know that then. It was merely a piece of paper and the old man had clearly mistaken her for someone else. Now that the story had already unfolded, with nothing but nostalgia and remorse filling every pore of her as she sat in front of the fire, Reign could easily recount the happenings of that day – naming everything that pointed towards how things had panned out sixty years later.

Those withered hands of a man on his knees, with life ready to be sucked out of him any moment, bore a ruby-coloured envelope. The

Red Envelope. The bus beeped, doors to her one out from this closed and she was left to deal with this alone. Not a soul to be seen anywhere near. Thinking back, she wouldn't have hesitated a second about getting on. Escaping this hellish fate.

Reign acted on her intuition, trying to get the man up on a chair at the bus stop. She grasped his frail elbows and pulled. With no energy to carry his own weight, Reign struggled. His body had been glued to the footpath, it seemed. The man still had the envelope spread out for her to take. She hesitated. Looked into his eyes to see a glimmer of hope. A tiny tear slipped from his crinkled eye, and he stared at his hand and then back at her pale face. The paper crumpled from his strong hold, and he was unable to speak. He whimpered and Reign couldn't help sliding down on the rocky pathway beside him.

"Do you want me to take it? Is there someone you would like me to give this to?" Reign's words glided off her tongue with urgency. She couldn't help her furrowed brows, worry enveloping her like the lightning had mere moments ago. Clearly in need of assistance, she thought it could be anything. Her mind raced to different scenarios. She looked at him again to see if he would at least nod his head at something. Respond and tell her what was wrong, what she needed to do.

He blinked once. A sign. She extended her hand and grabbed the envelope from the other end. Her pale complexion was a complete contrast to the bright red of the envelope. A flash of lightning. This time louder than before. A gust of wind made her lose her footing for a moment. She couldn't focus; everything spiralled around her. Things started feeling weary all of a sudden. Moving an inch hurt her knees in a way she couldn't describe. Her back, a bit hunched, Reign couldn't sit up straight, couldn't for the life of her figure out what was going on.

A moment later, her surroundings started to make sense again. It seemed like an eternity for her or at least a couple of years. Time knew no end. A blur of her memories and a strong sense of déjà vu crowded her and her knees buckled. She instantly looked over to the old man, to see if he too witnessed what had just happened. If he was okay.

He blinked a second time and that was it. Another tear made its way down his freckled cheek as his soul gasped out. The light vanished from his eyes as his head made contact with the pavement. He was dead.

Reign couldn't believe her eyes. A swarm of questions blended with anxiety and confusion swirled in her mind with no answers to be found.

Reign, completely in shock, glanced at the envelope enclosed in her wrinkled hands. Wait... wrinkled?

The world was a little blurry after all she had witnessed. It was going to be fine in a while, she hoped. Maybe her hands were just an illusion. She tried crawling towards the lifeless body sprawled two feet away from her, and she screamed at the agonising pain seeping through it.

She whipped her neck to see if someone would help. Anyone who would know what was happening. But the bus station was as empty as her fridge when she left half an hour ago. Looking around, she stumbled upon her reflection in the passing bus's windows. The earth sneaked out from under her feet. She looked old. Her disbelief made her look twice. Her face – covered with worry lines. Scattered freckles on her droopy skin contrasted with her white hair. Her sight was not stable, and bounced back to the old man. Only dust awaited her glance. The man out of sight. Nobody to vouch for all the craziness that has ensued. The red envelope was still enclosed securely in her hand. She tried throwing it away but it wouldn't budge. A remnant of lunacy remained attached to her.

Reign Walker opened that damned envelope with trembling hands. Maybe it had the address of someone. A clue to what this bizarre happening was and how to reverse it. Something. Anything. She was desperate.

The crumpled scarlet envelope enclosed three words. A flicker from the burning fire in front of her brought her back to reality. Reign shivered visibly in the scorching room to let go of that day. Her plan was laid out in front of her. These past forty years had been enough. Twenty were stripped away from her. Closed in on themselves. Folded into an alternate reality perhaps, she could never be sure.

Spending the last forty in the search of answers had been enough. They had to be. What hadn't she done? Reign had tried tracking down its origin. Read thousands of books on ancient mythologies, looked for the old man's family through tireless days of standing and begging for facial recognition from memory, and tried

to pass it on to someone else. Nothing had worked. She was done. Physically as well as mentally, exhausted. She was going to end it right now.

Burning the Red Envelope, making sure she could see the red ashes in the fireplace, she opened the gas from the stove and laid herself down to sleep. Going out peacefully.

Her last words were the three words from the envelope. 'Take me back.' Her last sight was that of the red envelope fully intact right beside her head without the energy to fight back and burn it again.

She was gone.



A Parisian Affair by Yesha Dave

Colourful Emotions at Holi Festival

Hélène Ezard

You shall not be killed during day or night,
So fear neither the dark nor the light.
Neither inside nor outside a dwelling,
Will be your life's quelling.

You will not find your demise,
On land, in water, or in the skies.
Neither animal nor human will deaden,
They will use no projectile and wield no weapon.

So the legend goes and the celebrations roar,
Because the demon king was defeated, done for
At dusk, on a doorstep, by a half-man half-lion whose paws
Took him on his lap and delivered death by claws.

Around a bonfire, the festivities start,
Gulal powder is thrown, skin becomes art.
Orange like saffron, yellow like marigold,
A joyous kaleidoscope to behold.

Water fights and kids laughing,
Music and groups dancing.
Delicacies and drinks abound,
It's an explosion of life all around.

A couple with cheeks tinted a rose hue,
Leaves an observer feeling blue.
She misses her beau,
She's green at their love's glow.

Family Blues

Sarah Kamil

I love my family, as I suppose most people do. I have a pretty big family, by most standards, with several cousins and second cousins all around the same age as me. We've grown apart as we've gotten older – literally and metaphorically – moving to different ends of the globe. I'm not exaggerating when I say I could throw a dart on a map, and as long as it doesn't land in the Pacific, I will very likely have a cousin living wherever it points.

But when we were younger, it was a crowd of us living in the same country, the same city, the same village. We were best friends, all of us. We spent most of our time playing outside so our exhausted parents could make a start on cleaning up the riotous mess we would make during our weekly sleepovers; rushing back inside the minute it started to rain to play any of the million board games we'd collected as a group.

These board games, I think, are one of the brightest memories of my childhood. My cousins and I were very competitive, as is to be expected when a group of ten-year-olds spend hours with only each other for company. Any game we played at all, from Snap to Monopoly, was guaranteed to end in fistfights and accusations of cheating. I'm pretty sure that it's these 'gaming' sessions with my cousins that are responsible for my impossible need to be the best at everything as an adult.

This competitiveness didn't just mean winning the games themselves – we fought over who could have the 'best' tokens, who would be the banker, which chair was the comfiest. We'd particularly fight over who could be the red token when we played Candyland, Snakes & Ladders, Ludo or anything similar – because red was 'a lucky colour'. Why was red given this special honour? Because my cousin said so; he was a boy, and two months older than me, which, of course, meant he had access to untapped wisdom that I would never understand.

One time, after I lost a rock-paper-scissors battle to have the red token, my all-knowing cousin told me I couldn't play the game at all. "Because the only colour left is blue," he told me smugly, knowing I wouldn't argue with the authority that our two-month age gap gave him, "And blue is ONLY for boys."

I don't know why I remember that one day and game so clearly among the millions of times we must have played the same game, in the same room, having the same conversation. What I do know is that, as a way of rebelling against the leader, I only ever chose to play blue in our games afterwards. I made sure to always wear a blue item of clothing, had my parents paint my room navy blue, and made sure my life revolved around the colour – all in defiance of one sentence that my cousin probably has no memory of. It was 10-year-old me's adorable way of trying to break gender stereotypes. Good for her.

We're all adults now, with so many jobs and children and spouses that I can't keep track of most of them. When I meet my cousins, it's on the rare occasions when we're all in the same country and have managed to find babysitters for the next generation of our already large family. It's usually for a family wedding (which there are a lot of) or a funeral (which are thankfully rarer). We always manage to make time for each other, however, and ditch our responsibilities for a couple of hours. We talk, and fight, and play a few card games, for old times' sake. And when we're together, I always make sure I'm wearing blue socks.

Iris

Katie Baker

The church pews heave with mourners dressed in black. Our family, friends, neighbours; everyone who loved you. As our son begins his eulogy, telling the story of your life, the church begins to spin on its axis. Without you, I feel so precarious, so frail. I clutch onto the pew in front, resting my eyes on the bouquet atop your coffin. Pastel pink chrysanthemums, white lilies, pale blue forget-me-nots. Sunlight streams in through the stained-glass windows filling the sanctuary with light.

It was sunny the day we met, do you remember? The bright blue sky over Hampstead Heath, the first sign of spring after a long winter. Your friend introduced us but you were far more interested in the crocuses. After inspecting the delicate purple flowers for quite some time, you finally turned to me. How brave it is, you said, to be the first to bloom.

On our first date, we went stargazing on Primrose Hill. Through your telescope, you showed me the stars from Orion's belt to the North Star. It was a cold night and we sat underneath a blanket, sipping hot tea from a thermos. You were arguing with me about God. How can you think that all of this, you said, gesturing excitedly towards the sky, that all these marvels are a coincidence?

I didn't have an answer for you, I was too busy wondering how someone like you, who knew all about stars and flowers and the meaning of the universe, would be interested in someone like me. I thought I must be dreaming.

After the birth of our son, as we stepped out of the hospital for the first time, we were greeted by a dazzling sunset, bright orange with swirling streaks of pink. It was as if the sky had been set on fire. You turned to me then with a tired smile. There are miracles all around us, you said, just look at our son. Over the course of our life together, you found so many miracles, big and small. On holiday in Greece, when we looked out at the golden sand and the brilliant blue water and were sure

that we'd somehow ended up in paradise. Years later, when we returned to the city, older and slower by that point, our joints heaving with every step. We stopped to look out at the river, mesmerised by the lights. The blues, purples and yellows, bright and enticing amidst the backdrop of the night's sky and the sliver of light from the crescent moon. You slipped your hand in mine and gave me that same knowing smile.

The organ roars back into life, jolting me from the past. As the congregation sings the final hymn, I see the pallbearers begin to gather. Tall men with solemn faces, preparing themselves to carry you away. The trip to the cemetery is a blur. Our son squeezes my hand as the world flashes by. Before I can gather my thoughts, the priest is speaking again, reading a prayer as they lower your coffin into the ground. He sprinkles soil onto your coffin as he reads – earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Someone hands me the bouquet. I run my fingers over the soft petals before tugging one of the chrysanthemums free to tuck it into my shirt pocket where it rests by my heart. The congregation has begun to disperse, making their way to the wake.

Our son and his wife wait by the oak tree, their hands clasped together, silent in grief, strengthened by love. They will soon welcome their first child, our first grandchild. I know how much you wanted to meet her. I'll tell her all about you. How you saw the beauty and the vivid colours in the world, with eyes so much brighter and kinder than mine. In the first throes of spring I will show her the crocuses and point out shooting stars and remind her that there is magic to be found if you choose to believe. They are going to call her after you. Iris. Greek goddess of the rainbow. The connection between heaven and earth.

The Consolation of Time

Lani Lovett

In the dewy land of the east
lies candy

Endless mounds of chocolate, taffy, and licorice
rainbows of sour and sugar gumdrops
Lollipops so pink cotton candy hides in shame
turning blue at the thought

Swirling beneath the stars
lies a land of hunger

Eyes so crimson the vessels seem to grow
and expand, bursting like a red giant
in its final flight of life

A land
collapsing in on itself
green with envy*
 *and money
golden with sunshine
scarlet with shame

(and sin)

In the east lies a land
I called home.
Watch

each explosion, bullet, and car crash
Sip the honey, suckle every sweet

in that grey area
between love and hate

lies a land
 in the east
lies a land in the east
 lies
a land
 in the
 east



Printing Error by Jay Tee

Finding My Colours

Amber Siddiqui

She was born in Spring.

Life was pretty pastels, lilac flowers, baby blue butterflies, rose pink dresses and peach hair bows.

She was a tiny bud taking in the warm soft yellow sun rays. They gave her warmth. The fresh blue water which glistened in the sun rays giving her strength to keep growing.

She started to bloom into a small lily.

Life was Neon. Her life was suddenly full of an array of new bold colours. A colourful new world, but it wasn't for her.

The hot pinks were too loud. The neon greens too bold. And the bright yellows gave her a headache.

It was all too much for the small fragile flower she was; but as time went on, it made her stronger.

She blossomed into a pure white and yellow daisy.

Life was warm neutrals. Calm, chocolate brown candles, crispy golden yellow and red leaves, dark green knitted jumpers and burnt orange coffee mugs.

This was by far her favourite season of life. The season in which she matured and flourished the most.

It brought out all her inner colours. The warm cosy brown, deep maroon and terracotta shades radiating a calmer more, welcoming atmosphere.

The tiny daisy finally flourished and suddenly turned into a big golden sunflower. She finally found her colours.

She wasn't at all like the loud neons and pretty pastels of the world, she was a warm neutral. She finally found peace and solidarity within herself.

She was ready to face the cold Icy blue ahead.

Afternoon Tea

Sophie Harris

Ada strolled through Ciudadela Market with a grin on her face and joy in her bones. This was her favourite market to visit in Mexico. An array of different reds, oranges, yellows, blues, greens, pinks and purples flashed before her as she navigated through the market, creating a bright mural of colour. The smell of freshly carved wooden furniture filled her nostrils. Sparkling jewels shone from earrings and bracelets spread across rows of stalls. Sellers were jubilantly enticing people to buy their products. She loved being here; it made her feel alive.

She wandered through the loud, busy market, seeking out bargains to take home. Ada came here every Sunday. She bought a new Alebrije each time. Her collection was becoming a small replica of the colourful Alebrije market stall she frequented. The kind owner, Camila, would beckon her over each week, her chocolate brown eyes lighting up with excitement to show Ada her new stock. Camila was one of Ada's closest friends and they would chatter while Ada ran her eyes over the bright Alebrije's. Today, she looked at the cat, the elephant and more than once she looked at the dragon, before finally deciding on the Lynx as this week's choice.

Alongside the Alebrijes, Ada always brought a new scarf, always different in length, colour and style. She picked out an exotic aquamarine one with gold, hand-embroidered owls. She put it around her shoulders as soon as she had purchased it, glad to get the sun off her burnt shoulders. Anything else that Ada found was a bonus buy. Sunday was her favourite day.

She continued her way through the forest of stalls. She watched the array of people milling around her, all with their own agenda. A little boy kicking an empty can, a young couple buying baby furniture, an old man standing under a canopy, drinking cold lemonade to cool down from the midday sun. Tourists collecting souvenirs of Mexico to take home. Ada smiled warmly at each person she passed, weaving her way through the narrow market rows.

With the sun bearing down on her, she began to feel tired and the desire to sit down and rest her feet became more appealing. As midday came and went, she continued at a slower pace, seeking refuge from the heat, under the makeshift canopies of the market. It was mid-afternoon when she arrived at the tea stall, situated next to a cart full of pinatas. The vendor, a sweet man with glasses too big for his face, and a beaming smile, greeted her with enthusiasm.

“Buenos días, señor, which tea today?” He asked.

“Buenos días, señor, let me see.” She looked at the different flavours; there were so many to choose from, and sometimes it was hard to choose. Today, Ada struggled – she was really tired now and she began to feel the usual feeling of being slightly disoriented that she always seemed to have when she came to the tea stall. She found herself getting lost inside the manic mix of colours from the piñatas being swung around by intrigued children and the intense mix of smells from the tea leaves in front of her. Unlike the rest of the market, the combination of intense colour and intense fragrance here seemed to clash horrifically and caused her an instant headache. It was always the tea stall that did this to her. She took a step back, frantic and sweaty, and scrunched her eyes closed against the bright sun, welcoming the darkness that lay behind them.

“Ma’am,” the man said. *“Would you like some tea?”*

Ada’s eyes snap open. Confused, she looks around. She is sitting in a faded armchair in a large, warm, open plan room with hideous magnolia walls. A door to Ada’s left is open, a gentle flow of air coming in as birds chirp in the summer trees.

A young woman is stooped over at Ada’s eye level and is mouthing something to her, *“Mum, would you like a cup of tea?”* Ada remains silent, frowning.

The woman checks her watch. *“Time for our afternoon tea, don’t you agree Mum? I’ll make us a pot now, give you time to decide if you want a cup.”* She smiles gently as she moves towards the kitchen at the end of the room.

Ada was confused. She didn’t have a daughter and when did she come to be here in this room? Whose house is this? Tea? Yes, she wants

tea. She stares blankly at the stranger's back. She doesn't know this woman, or why she is making her tea. There's a lovely market man in Ciudadela Market who sells her tea every Sunday, and she buys a new Alebrije each time from the kind lady with chocolate brown eyes.

The woman reappears with a tray of tea and digestive biscuits, Ada's favourite. She looks at the woman as she sets the tray down and asks Ada again, "Would you like some tea, Mum?"

Ada stares into her kind, brown eyes that wrinkle as she smiles at Ada with warmth. Ada smiles back and says, "Yes, let's have some tea. There's a lovely market man in Ciudadela Market who sells me tea every Sunday."

The woman sits down and pours two cups of tea. "I know he does, Mum."

Ada sits eating a biscuit. She stares at the woman who sits beside her drinking tea with her as they chat. Suddenly, Ada turns to face the woman. "Oh, I knew I recognised you," she exclaims.

The woman has a flicker of excitement cross over her face.

"You're the lovely lady who sells me my Alebrijes at the market. Will you have new stock this week? I really do think I'll get the dragon this time, I keep coming back to it, you know. You will be there on Sunday, won't you?"

The woman's smile falters slightly as she sits back again, a small flicker of sadness in her eyes. With a gentle, loving squeeze on Ada's arm, she says, "I'll be there Mum, don't you worry."

Ada grins at her and gives her hand a gentle squeeze back as they continue to drink their tea together, basking in the afternoon sun shining through the open door.

Summer Prayer

Bijou Antony

And then,
Summer white days began,
As banana leaves,
Bursting in silhouettes of all possible green,
Gazing up at the blue hot sky and,
Fanning the arid ground below.

Then,
I had that this eluding conviction,
That,
Life was beginning all over –
This,
Blazing summer.

And when night came,
Below a revealing sky of golden fireflies,
I began to store the summer of our love,
In flowered whispers and stubborn beliefs.

As the moon emerged above the waves,
I felt the salt,
In his mouth, ears and limbs.
The salt red eyes, the shiny sand skin,
And this night,
I cannot, *cannot* forget;
A night that will have no end.

His kiss was like monsoon rain.
It grew velvet green mosses over my othering.
The brown summer earth,
Soaked. Restored.

It felt,
Like the memory of a never-ending prayer,
Of hope.

In the garden
of red flamboyant desires,
I realised,
I had learnt to kiss – eyes closed.
Perhaps,
All beautiful things happen,
In the mystery of unlit silence.
Black. Away.
Like the bliss of love,
Like a sleepless night of hope,
Like a summer prayer.

A Colourful Absence

Sid Menon

AUTUMN

I arrived in London for my MA at the start of October 2021. It was a very unique time to arrive. There were some fragments of summer still remaining whilst the onset of autumn was evident. The trees were almost all barren and the onset of winter was in the air. The mighty Thames, the intricately preserved architecture, the cobbled streets, the gorgeous parks – these were all just some of the countless facets of London that left me spellbound. There is a certain fragrance of freedom that this city emanates that is its distinctive charm. As the nights grew longer, the city seemed to be enveloped more by darkness than by any sort of light. As I sat in my house, speaking to my folks back in India, I was asked a question: “What are you missing the most now that you are in London?” I thought about that for a minute, and I said “Colours.”

India is a land that is deeply immersed in colour. From the dresses and jewelry, to the billboards on streets or the vibrant wedding processions; every single crevice of that country is a riot of colour. To rightly quote Kiran Millwood from her book *The Girl of Ink and Stars*, ‘India is a place where colour is doubly bright. Pinks that could scald your eyes and blues you could drown in.’

While it did not strike me right away, I noticed that there was a certain vibrancy in the surroundings that I missed. As I sat in the packed tube going home from my classes, I would notice the sea of grey, brown, and black coats and jackets. If anyone wore a hue that strayed from the dark colour palette, they seemed to stand out. Even when I walked along the busiest of streets, it felt as if everyone were camouflaged into the sea of greys and blacks. Thus, strangely it was not the people or the food or the milieu that I was missing, but the infusion of colours around me.

As I was settling into this new world, I yearned to see colours that would help infuse some excitement and joy into the world around me. Through the immaculate roads adorned with leafless trees and a

beautiful mélange of grey, white, and brown buildings, the bright red buses operating on the street were like little pockets of joy to me. In December as I strolled down Hyde Park, a beautiful assault on the senses came in the form of the Winter Wonderland. The glimmering lights, the shimmering decorations and the dazzling smiles; all of these infused some much-needed colour into the usual monotone humdrum of my student life.

SPRING

Months passed by, days became longer, and the sun became brighter, giving way to the arrival of spring. Flowers bloomed in every possible nook and cranny of London. As I walked through Victoria Embankment Garden, a sense of joy overpowered me; the lush green grass, the manicured dark green bushes, thick leafy trees and a brilliant clear blue sky were roaring gloriously. There was not a street in sight that did not have a beautiful leafy green tree reminding us of the co-existence of nature and the concrete. The spring flowers paved the way to a beautiful summer that shimmered ever so brightly. Kew Gardens in the month of May transported me to a paradise like nothing I had seen before. But the most wondrous sight of colour in London came in the month of June.

SUMMER

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in June, as I walked through central London, I saw the Pride parade serenading London in its full glory. That was the day I saw the true celebration of colours in London. What enticed me the most about the Pride Parade was that the colours were not just there for posterity or decoration. Instead, they were there with a purpose; the colours stood for love, for independence and above all for freedom. As I watched the joy and happiness on each of the faces that adorned the parade, it dawned on me that somewhere intrinsically, the vibrancy of the colours seemed to emanate from each of them. Just like colours shine bright regardless of their surroundings, the people in the parade were unapologetically and unabashedly being themselves.

AUTUMN

Soon September came and I decided to head to India for a short break. As I landed, the mutiny of colours caught my eyes once again. Perhaps the distance from the colours seemed to help me appreciate them more. Perhaps a certain alienation from them made me realize the true value they hold and the subconscious power they yield. Perhaps this lack of proximity to colour over the year resulted in an enhanced adulation for it. These colours continued to amaze me. Their constant sighting never unfazed me. I wanted to revel in the joy of the colours around me and my cacophonous surrounding. Be it the streets illuminated with festival decorations or the colourful flower markets near the temples, everything seemed to be more beautiful than I remembered it to be. Did I ever appreciate the existence of colours in India before I left? Had I taken them for granted? Was I so consumed in their being omnipresent that I never truly appreciated the impact colour had on my life? Did the distance from them allow me to appreciate them more?

As I was reading, I came across this quote by Robert Morgan: ‘Distance not only gives nostalgia, but perspective and maybe objectivity.’ This got me thinking that perhaps some distance from your most cherished memories and moments is a good thing; that perhaps we see and value even the most mundane aspects of our life with increased admiration from a distance. And, that some distance is always a beautiful requisite, that things we take for granted, in fact, have a much more profound role to play in our lives than we realize.

WINTER

When I returned to London after the break, I did not seem to miss the colours as much as I had on my first arrival. I wasn't sure if it was my mind being subconsciously prepared for it; or if I had actually started to seek joy within the colours that were available here, instead of seeking something that was perhaps not even there to begin with. And then it struck me; I appreciated the colours and the hues more when I was in the UK rather than India because colour is celebrated here. It is enjoyed with a purpose – rainbow for pride, red and green for Christmas, the dark shades for Halloween, golden leaves in autumn. Perhaps the lack of colours in the months from October to January helps us appreciate it even more. Since colour is stitched into the cultural fabric of India,

I feel that somewhere along the way, I had forgotten to appreciate its relevance. Seeing the joy on people's faces during the pride parade made me realize that colours are a vessel to display the innermost aspects of how you are feeling. There is a tincture for every sentiment, and there is a shade for every emotion. And so today, if someone was to complain to me about the dull colour palette that London has throughout the year, I just ask them to wait; because, like a butterfly waiting to bloom, there is an eruption of colour waiting to happen in this city. I tell them that colour is quite omnipresent in London, if you know where to look for it.



picture by Vruchi Desai

Artificial Blue

Vlad Krutikov

Artificial Blue, I'm obsessed with you
For soundness of mind, you control the time
I'd give everything to you, help me make it through
Another red line will cost me a lifetime

Artificial Blue, now I finally have you
Dopamine fills my brain, what else will I gain?
I'm affixed with glue,
But the seconds of pleasure are just too few:
Such moments leave only dark stains,
Now I'm shaking with fear and pain

Artificial Blue, I thought you were true.
I wish I'd divined that I was totally blind
What should I do? My thoughts form a queue
And I eventually decide what I crave to find:
Real Blue, I'm ready to see you.

Crimson

Erin Jamieson

I paint the walls crimson and marigold yellow, leaving behind the faintest fingerprints you won't see, maybe for weeks after I leave.

Autumn leaves, the changing of seasons, the inevitable elegance of transformation, dissolution of death. Vines crawl from the ivory carpet to the ceiling, passing by your dusty bookshelves – most of them books I hoped you'd enjoy.

I add pops of green – a final remnant of summer, just above the bed. A bed that was always too small for both of us, neatly made as it always is, my pillow already gone.

The paint and the colours crawl into my head, my chest. I crack open a window, remembering, when we first moved here, how we decorated the nursery.

I don't want it to be blue or pink or yellow.

We could leave it white, you suggested.

I should have known.

Our baby was the pop of warmth – the shocking crimson orange sunset on a cloudless evening. The splash of colour that bound us, that paled when I started cramping, when you insisted I was overreacting.

After, we stripped the lilac paint. You painted it beige. Not even white, like pasty, anaemic porridge. A colour someone accepts, one who does not love life, or perhaps anyone or anything.

I leave you this room. Not as retribution for not weeping with me, for growing silent when I needed words. I leave it, knowing you will paint over it, knowing this house will be swallowed by various neutrals.

I leave it to say we did have something, for a breathtaking moment. We were all the colours of fall: crimson red with ephemeral passion, sunkissed aging yellow with hope, and walnut brown – the dying edges of a season we could not admit was coming to a quiet end.

Taming of The Matador

Addison Williams

While struggling with his sheets on a humid August evening, Marcel was touched by what he believed to be the finger of God. The brutal vision of a bullfight flashed in his dream.

The *matador's* agile figure thrust the red muleta as an extension of himself into the face of the black bulk of death as he danced a satanic flamenco. The bull's unflinching trunk-like muscles moved with deft precision despite its size. The silver horns glistened in the sun's scorching rays, its hooves kicking up sand in glistening shards that reflected the tension in the air.

They danced with such beastly elegance until the sword plunged into the shoulder of the black mass, causing blood to stream from its shoulder. The bull's head thrust up in retaliation, impaling the *matador* below his breast causing a wound that gushed down his torso, dripping onto the sand at his feet. One white-knuckled hand gripping the sword, the other grasping the horn as the bull hunched low and pushed its head heavenwards. Two gladiators entwined in the fatal situation, to be frozen and captured on canvas. The winner of the battle to be argued by admirers for the rest of time. Marcel awoke sweating profusely, and began to paint the image that burned his retinas onto the biggest canvas in his studio; this would be his masterpiece.

For weeks Marcel locked himself away, refusing anyone entrance to his studio flat, even his partner, who had grown used to these sudden bursts of inspiration. He painted every detail with the precision a poet uses to select each word, giving painful attention to every muscle, grain of sand, and flourish of the cape-swept air. Even capturing in fine detail the *matador's* clothes with garish lilacky blues, sprinklings of gold, and feet fluttering in dance as if they were two birds courting in mid-air.

Once completed, the painting became a tremendous and imposing feature of Marcel's studio. All his other paintings trembled; their subjects demolished by its existence. It was perfect, he thought,

except for the reds.

Marcel avoided the colour as fervently as he avoided conversations on foreign politics. No matter how long he spent painting, he could never capture it as he wanted. The muleta lacked lust. He craved the blood on the canvas to depict the last explosion of life, but instead, dribbled dully. No matter the subject, the style or approach, he could never get the reds how he wanted. Marcel covered it out of dismay, unable to bear the painting as it mocked him in his sleep.

A distraught Marcel eventually allowed his partner, Sofia, admittance to his studio flat but forbade her from seeing the painting. It was a white monolith imposing itself into every corner of the room. Sofia stared at it, seeing not the potential of a masterpiece but Marcel's negligence and the blank sheet of their fading romance.

While lying in bed, Marcel scorned the monstrosity hidden away as Sofia toyed with his chest hair and reminded him of their friend's event.

"Remember Maria's exhibition next week. Some new artist who's colour-blind. Anyway, it'll be good to see some new art. Especially by someone who can't even see colour, or however it works."

Marcel tried to think of excuses not to go, despising seeing other artworks lately. When he did, it felt like a wrench twisting up his guts. *Why not mine? Why?* Marcel tried to reciprocate Sofia's attention as her lips pressed about his neck but failed. The beast and the *matador* stood peeking, staring clandestinely from behind the curtain, their eyes burrowing into his core. He apologised and immediately regretted it, wishing it was the first time it had happened.

"Next week," he said under his breath. "I'll come. Next week."

Marcel flicked through the brochure at the entrance to the exhibit, which stated that colour blindness was sometimes so minimal that many individuals didn't even notice until later in life. The colours were usually offset but not grey, as many people still believed.

Most of the works were postcard-sized landscapes of forestry and pastures. The most curious aspect Marcel found was the colouring of the faint pastel reds alongside the obscure turquoise, and azures upset him. He decided the colours and subjects were arguably wrong,

especially the reds, and walked into a corner to sulk as he listened to the familiar polarizing voices often heard at exhibits.

“It’s so brave, such colours. It really says, I am here. This is what I see.”

“It’s tacky. Just because the man can’t see colour, so what?”

Marcel looked for Sofia but couldn’t find her. Giving up, he stood staring at the white space between two paintings when a voice caught him off-guard.

“Marcel, isn’t it?”

Marcel turned to face a man taller than himself, with a slick stream of jet-black hair, sharp jawbones and a generous mouth. His broad-shouldered body looked taut in a navy t-shirt.

“Yes,” Marcel said. “I’m sorry, you are...?”

“Millard,” the man said. His right hand gestured at the room. “Maria pointed you out. A fellow artist, I hear.”

“Yes,” Marcel said, extending his hand to greet Millard’s. “It’s an inspiring collection. Very... fine.”

Marcel tasted the bitter words in his mouth, feeling curiously insecure standing in front of Millard. He fought any inclination that his feelings were due to jealousy and decided he disliked him immediately.

“You don’t like the colours,” Millard said, his eyes looking directly into Marcel’s. “It’s fine, that’s art. Maria tells me you’re working on a masterpiece right now?”

Struck by the comment and Millard’s off-hand tone, Marcel stuttered for a second. Every one of Millard’s words and gestures appeared self-assured, as if he had anticipated this meeting and rehearsed for it.

“Yes. Uh, it’s close. I’m close. I’m struggling with the reds.” There was a brief pause that forced Marcel to realise he had just stated he struggled painting a colour. He was sure Millard had done it on purpose to provoke him.

“We’ll meet tomorrow. Sofia was mentioning your problem to Maria earlier. I have a few days to spare before I visit my family. I’ll come over and see if I can help. I find an extra set of eyes help facilitate my mind when I’m stuck.”

Without thinking, Marcel agreed to a time and gave his address. Millard shook Marcel’s hand and disappeared into the crowd of people.

On his walk home, Marcel struggled to understand why he accepted the stranger's offer, repulsed at the idea, yet he grasped no conceivable answer to his submission. He'd decided to give up looking for Sofia, wondering at what point she had met Millard, and what gave her the right to talk about his work to a stranger. Locked inside his mind, he imagined her laughing and jeering at his work with Maria and Millard. At the thought of Millard's mouth in particular set Marcel on edge.

That evening, Marcel drank as he worked furiously on the piece. He slashed at the *matador's* wounds and stabbed where the sword impaled the bull. He wanted to force Millard to admire his work and turn him away for his ignorance at the door. But his attempts faltered, and Marcel collapsed on his bed, staring at the monstrosity until his eyes dried out, ached and grew too heavy to keep open.

Millard's knocks woke a still-dressed Marcel, who admitted him before fetching two glasses of wine from a bottle he'd opened the night before. When he turned around, he was surprised to see Millard had moved two chairs without a sound and placed them in front of the painting.

"I hope you don't mind," Millard said. "It was a hot walk, and I'd rather sit as we talk."

Marcel approached Millard silently, handing him the glass of wine before sitting next to him. They sat for a while, Marcel trying to think of a conversation starter as he glanced furtively at Millard, attempting to guess his thoughts.

"When did you realise you suffered from colour blindness?" Marcel said, regretting the question immediately.

"I realised my difference around the age of twelve, but I don't suffer." Millard's eyes remained fixed on the painting. "Not in the least... magnificent. The strokes, the hard features of the bull, the elusiveness of the *matador's* body. The sheer power of wills. I love it. I can see why you're so distraught over perfecting it."

Marcel was taken aback by his compliment. "Thank you. It came to me in a dream. I woke up and knew I had to paint it. I hate the barbarianism of the so-called sport. I've never actually seen a bullfight, and yet I couldn't stop my hand. It slashed and slashed."

"Slashed indeed. I can tell by the fresh brushwork you worked

some more last night. And as much as I agree that it's a relic of a sport, there is something fascinating about it, the man armed with so little against such a dominating hulk of a creature, man's ever-lasting struggle to dominate all. Maybe your intention? Or maybe there's something else. A secret you're fighting, inescapable, something you can't outrun anymore. Some obscene dark mass you're struggling with? Your subconscious speaking through dreams. Maybe that's it. Freud always said dreams contained the secrets to wishes suppressed from childhood, no?"

Marcel shrugged, unable to answer with a mouth full of wine. Standing up, he tried to think of an excuse to end the conversation. He didn't intend to listen to Millard speak what he believed was crap about his painting. It was art, a spark of brilliance, not some deeply suppressed secret. But Millard also stood and simply bent closer to the painting, so he could better examine it.

"Let me watch," Millard said. "I want to watch you work. I want to witness your fine technique."

Before Marcel could protest at what he believed to be a rude and contemptible request of an artist, he found himself taking up his tools, his ego getting the better of him.

Marcel tried to ignore Millard's presence, but could feel his towering presence close behind, watching him work. He thought of different shades of red, allowing words to flash into his mind. Red. Crimson. Brick. Fire. Destruction. Conquer. Blood. Berry. Flesh. Orgasm. Torment. Revenge. Kill. His hands flourished in the air as he painted. Sun. Flames. Kill. Blood. Red. Bloodbath. Kiss. Lips. Ruby. Red.

Completely lost within his mind's fury, Marcel didn't notice Millard's hand slip around his wrist until he tried to move it. A feeling of shock struck Marcel as he tried to pull away.

"What are you doing?"

"Are you happy with it? Look at me, are you happy?"

Marcel stood contemplating the painting. He wanted to scream, to tell Millard to leave him with his bloody misery.

"When was the last time you saw blood?" Millard said, tightening his grip on Marcel's arm.

"What does that matter? Now let go!"

But Millard gripped Marcel's entire arm underneath his own, using the free hand to pull a small knife from his pocket. Marcel's stomach lurched as he panicked, causing him to drop his palette and brandish his brush as a weapon. He jabbed Millard in the ribs, but his bulk appeared unphased. Marcel attacked again but was interrupted by a sharp flash of pain across two of his fingertips. Millard released Marcel, who turned to face his foe.

"What's wrong with you, huh? Are you fucked in the head?"

Infuriated, Marcel thrust his bloody finger into the stoic Millard's face as he continued his cussing reproach. Millard said nothing, a strange countenance on his face. Before Marcel realised what had happened, Millard grabbed his wrist again and guided it forcefully towards the canvas. Using the fingers like a brush, Millard began painting the gushing wound of the bull. The faint strokes glistened crimson before turning darker. After a couple more strokes, Millard released Marcel's hand.

"Now paint," Millard said in a deep, murky tone.

Marcel used his finger, the other hand squeezing it gently to relinquish more blood. He could see it. Red. The red he needed. His movements gained speed. His mind lost consciousness, painting as if possessed.

Eventually stopping, Marcel witnessed shades of red he had never seen before. At some point, without realising, he had switched back to paints. Stepping back, he bumped into the hard chest of Millard, who stood silently staring during the frantic ordeal. Marcel, dumbstruck by its magnificence, struggled to contemplate the fact he, and not some imposter, had painted it.

"Congratulations," Millard said. "It really is incredible."

Marcel hugged and thanked the artist who, a few hours ago, he had considered an enemy.

"It's just a shame," Millard said. "I will never see exactly what you see, not the same colours. No matter how long we stare, we will always see a different masterpiece."

Marcel turned back to the painting, feeling easier about Millard's presence behind him. He wanted to ask why Millard had helped, who he believed to be the winner, the bull or the *matador*. But turning around, Millard had walked to the door.

“I’m afraid I’ve other plans,” Millard said. “From back here, I can’t help but wonder if the bull reminded the *matador* why he stepped into the ring. To compare his artistry against the brutality of life, to see if he still bled like other human beings despite any... grievances he felt about himself. Then again, just another interpretation. I still have a couple more days here. If you want me, or have an interpretation yourself, call Maria.”

Millard waved goodbye from the door as Marcel spotted a fleck of blood on the back of his shirt. Turning back to the painting, Marcel replicated the shade of the blood exactly, and added a drop onto the bull’s wound.

Later that night, Marcel recounted the story of the afternoon to Maria as they celebrated, drunkenly dancing in front of the painting.

In bed, Marcel struggled to take his eyes off the masterpiece. Sofia’s hands wandered about his body as his focus lapsed back to when Millard wrestled and impaled him. He tried to suffocate them by making rough love to Sofia. But while his body surged with passion, Marcel couldn’t tear his gaze from the painting of the noble *matador* and the brazen bull locked in conquest, struggling to decipher who he was making love to. Was it to the painting, Sofia... or someone else?

An Awakening

Alexie Diakite

There's a darkness growing in my chest –
A black hole sucking the colour –
The life – out of me.

I sit frozen in the backseat,
Wary of our destination,
Feeling like Pluto on the edge of everything
Cold and forgotten –

My eyes pearly white
My lips grey
My fingernails brittle from the halfhearted
Scratches against my coffin.

And then we've arrived
And I'm putting up a hand –
Blocking the light
As they wrench the door open.
My instincts screaming at me
To avoid the burning glare
Reflected off the pool before me.

I'm forced to take in the scene
a cascade of colour –
the lake an iridescent aquamarine
the houses a mosaic of toasted orange and sun-kissed yellow
The startling greenery and the well-worn sandy stones.
Threatening to pierce my heart
The way the noon sun does its best
To strike through the densest of clouds.

We eat beside the shore
Beneath lemon drop awnings
Where masterpieces appear
One by one
Across the enchanted scarlet fabric
Covering our table
As if Circe herself waits on us.

Afterward, we rest
Patting full bellies
In a Limoncello summer haze
And glistening heat.

All the while
The soft laps of the lake
Whisper in the background –
Calling me –
The lull like a lullaby
Sung by sirens –
Summoning me –

Sweat beads on my upper lip
My fragile hands gripping the arms
As I push my chair back,
The urge becoming irresistible.

My feet carry me to the water's edge
Until suddenly I'm thrust into the lake.
The frigid water an electric shock
Returning colour to my cheeks.
The abrasive stones beneath my feet
Rubbing them raw –
Yet still slippery enough
To force my uneven steps
Quicker as I lurch forward
Walking until my feet can no longer touch.

I float in the water,
The sun above a spotlight,
As my lips turn periwinkle blue
My wrinkled fingertips violet
And my cheeks burnt rose
As my skin warms to chestnut.

A shudder moves violently through my core
Along with the realization
That there is finally enough life in me to belong
As part of the lake and its surroundings.
I've become one of the many colourful additions
To this work of art.

Life is a Colour

Igwe Ejikeme

People talk in colours. In that infamous inferno that caught us all within its fangs, all for the veins. Drop by drop it hits and shatters the tender knitting of a saintly realm. The red liquid pushes its way through the thick weaves of a superior intelligence.

I am in the midst of it because she speaks in colours. Perhaps, I rushed out too soon. Quickly to the stones blazing stare, life drained from its nomenclature, from dreams of futures untold, lies, of days spent in reds and purples and sometimes in black. Is it anger? Sadness? I should look again. I see it like I stared into water. Everything it wore to infest the catchment, dreadlocks like an octopus who chameleon-ed into excess.

Green is our colour because people speak in green. Green is our way of consent; the earth's sign of habitability. Instilling its gaze on our blazing ecosystem until it dries up the blood lines, setting up the abscess of a yellow fall. Shrinking it to dryness, rot and food for the other little ground flies. In the countries of yellow leaves.

People whisper in black. That colour so attached to my dark burnt skin. Settled in the predator's mind as an eternally speaking curse. It speaks to them even in the reasonable illuminations of blackness of darkness. Silently calling emotions out of slumber until even quietly, loudly, and then forcefully in fractions, wholes, and forms and faces appear.

Firstly, the hand speaking in colours with a fiery white Mascot ushering the hopes of dying men, yet unseen, of their strength buried in everything living and dead.

Lastly, of their inferno-like eyes. It assumed the colour of white and black, then it disappeared gradually until suddenly, like a magical wand it became a burning yellow. It sat in that gaze, so unquenchable, buried in that intent so unknown. In the valley of decision our colours are known.

We speak in colours, this time, our time and their times are

the songs of sky's bow drawn without a dart, thundering never ending.
Come quickly, the voice whispered. There and here, they ran.

Colours are for us, of something far from death, something colourful and hated. Something glorious and labouring within the balloon of a woman's new gown until the rain of easement is poured down from the words of spectators.

She smiles in colours, tensely she fingered the fragile products the way customers touch goods at display shops. Curiously her hopes in colour of man rises, so innocently, gently and lovely. Quickly the colour of worries appears, apparently, she has forgotten the way of the earth, that things swirl in circles, in bits of ones and twos... tomorrow is the colour of hope.

They speak in colours...



picture by Jad Charaf

Where do Stars Go When they Die

Pat Chan

“So what’s it like?”

“Hm?”

Two figures perch themselves on the edge of a broken dock, long ago neglected and left to rot. The elements, those expected to weather and erode away the abandoned construction, play along the surface of their skin and leave salt on the smoothness of their cheeks. The world is gentle under daylight and calm waters. It’s as if nothing lies turbulent below their dangling feet, as if their legs are not suspended over a precipice of gradual, steady dissolution into nothing.

The one on the right tucks strands of vibrant, violet hair behind her left ear as she glances at her companion. She almost looks real. Tranquil rays of sun shine overhead like a minute hand pointing to twelve o’clock. The pool of darkness that rings the one on the left could be mistaken for a shadow, and she, someone of substance. With hair as unseeable as night, continues to stare off into the distance somewhere short of the horizon.

The one on the right braces the heels of her palms against the dulled edges of the dock and leans forward to elaborate, “You know. What’s it like, being dead?”

Her hair falls forward, obscuring her face. The one on the left moves to fix it for her, even though it makes her disappear. The colour is too bright to be seen through anything but periphery. She drops her hand back into her lap, pursing her lips.

“I can’t really say,” she confesses, finally, after the sun shifts slightly to the left.

The one on the right hums a tuneless consideration. Harmonizes with the swell of the ocean, rolls and takes up space like a name on a tongue: the distance between them.

“Then what’s it like?”

“Hm?”

“You know. What’s it like, dying?”

Dying is different for every being. For the one on the left, it is what precedes her every step; it is lingering at the edge of a forgotten town, a near placelessness, or a constant void beneath her casually swinging feet. It is a maw that does not threaten, does not beg to swallow. It is slipping into shadow but never quite unbecoming. It is this dock.

For the one on the right, dying is burning, a duty revoked. Her form shimmers, and it can almost be mistaken for a body shivering under evening air. The one on the left watches the sun tick by out of the corner of her eye. Time passes differently for every being. For both of them, it is this dock.

“It’s a little like living,” she says, and seals her answer by shifting her right hand over the distance between them. She grips splinters made soft in the wind and waves, and when she turns to look to her right, there is only the violet moulding perfectly into the dark until it disappears. A whisper through the night.

The lone figure on the broken dock looks on to her left, after the sun. She blinks once so that the mirages left behind by the light are imprinted behind her eyelids. Without effort, she slips off of the edge into the tug of the tide, following the hint of colour in her periphery.

Prayer Of Whining Ochre

Vruchi Desai

Tint was the homeland I suffered in with silence,
a beige siren whispering toward shallow dreams.
Anxious heartbeats pump a hue of barren orange,
chapped lips murmur how saffron was the colour I eloped too quickly.
The sunburn of distant innocence reeks a beguiling cry,
marigolds no longer catch the silhouette of my tears lost in merciless
nights.
A footstep taken in aches of love leave me on the wreck of
unworthiness,
I wore a patch of tangerine the day before love grieved in my arms one
last time.
There, saffron became the purging water of the diaspora between my
birth and holistic romance,
I begged for forgiveness with eyes blazed in sage green.
Echoes of freedom barged when I searched for the sun in my lover's
eyes,
I paced away with the ceramic poems and century-old letters.
Preached siren counted the miles I summoned with wine flash bruises,
while my mother traded fouled pride with the vermilion flaming chest
of mine.
Amidst the exiled lands where my name was declared as the foreign
language,
saffron became the holy spirit who held the shades of my bleak
existence.

Market Row

Emily Duff

I sell Lies for a living. All sorts of falsehoods that you can imagine, trapped in little glass bottles, pretty colours in rows.

The White Lies are my bestseller. I can sell hundreds on Saturdays at the market, much to Jonny's dismay. He wants to believe in the best of humanity, but the way I see it, this was the best. A White Lie is one that won't hurt anyone, confirmed by its innocent iridescent pearl appearance. A White Lie is practically harmless. It could escape, be used, be told, and no one would be wiser at that moment in time. They ranged from excuses to cliches like "it's not you, it's me", and are so popular that people often bulk-buy them. Personally, I advise against this, suggesting instead purchasing regularly due to changing Topics and Lie Themes over time. Not that people ever listen; they always think they're right.

The Good Lies; they are the ones that I initially struggled with. Telling someone something good should have innocence with it. It should be a compliment, something that fills the heart with warmth. But a Good Lie seems counterproductive: you're filling a person but then deflating them with your deception, much like a brightly-coloured balloon left too long after a party, helium slowly leaking after not being claimed and taken home by a straggling child guest. I know Jonny would never use a Good Lie, and he initially protested at the name, explaining that marketing it as 'good' was selling it under false pretences. My response was that they make a person on the receiving end feel (initially) good, so I wouldn't change the name. He scoffed back saying that honesty would do the same thing.

It was Jonny's idea to use colours to distinguish between the Lies. I had offered a counter idea of different-sized bottles, but he insisted wholesale options would be easier if everything was the same size (and I will never admit this to him, but this has proven to be true). There were some back-and-forth discussions over what colour for each Lie, as I refused to be predictable with green for good, red for terrible

and so forth. Our Lies' colours were eventually decided through trial and error, tested over a few slow months at the stall.

A rich mysterious purple for Terrible Lies, recognisable from a mile away as one of our company's, which I'm very proud of. A yellow hue for our Good Lies, the kind of yellow a child would use to draw a cartoon sun in the corner of their picture. And the pearl-like white for our White Lies, speckles of purple and yellow merging to establish our branding better (that was Jonny's surprising idea – kudos to him!) The colours worked. Yellow, pearl and purple, each one was known in its own right, blending the lines between right and wrong in a beautiful array on a Saturday morning. Each Lie bottled up, shimmering in the golden sunlight, rays catching the Lies' glittering hues.

The Terrible Lies; this is where moral boundaries were crossed, and the one Lie Jonny had no part of. He refused to partake in something that could ruin a person's life, although I did contest this by saying that any Lie could be life-changing to some extent. He started rambling on about butterfly effects and unchangeable circumstances, but I soon zoned out and instead started meal planning for the week ahead. Sometimes you don't need Lies to settle an argument.

I had no issue with bottling the rich purple of the Terrible Lies, fastening their cork lids extra tight to ensure that they didn't escape – you could never be too careful. Most people prefer to buy these Lies under the counter as they were afraid of the judgement from fellow shoppers surrounding the stall. A few code words emerged from our regulars, something that has now become an implicit contract between seller and customer. Asking for the 'daily special' got you a White Lie in a blacked-out bag with an already-packed Terrible Lie. The 'catch of the day' was a similar set-up, but with a Good Lie instead of a White one. The only problem with these options is not knowing the topic of the Terrible Lie, which wouldn't be revealed until unleashed. Worth the risk to save your reputation though, I guess.

We, of course, have the bolder customers who openly buy the Terrible Lies with pride. These tend to be the people who are already on the lower rungs of society. They don't care what people think about them because they're already at the bottom of the food chain. I never ask how or why the Lie will be used, which must mean I have some sort of moral boundaries, but I sell them with an ease that Jonny could never

manage.

There will be a day when I stop this line of work I suppose. A day when the competition becomes too fierce, and I'm outpriced, or maybe a day when Jonny will grow some balls and offer up an ultimatum and makes me choose between the business and him; that I'd love to see! But until then, you can catch me each Saturday at Market Row, selling pretty lines of colourful glass bottles with cork lids. I sell Lies for a living, in a world that will never understand the true power and wealth of a Lie.



Concrete Ice Cream by Mario Loprete

The Black on the Pocket Watch

Carmen LP

Fourteen past two, is it now? Just one cigar more, and a beer, and I'll get to it.

I've been attending a help group, as requested by the lady-boss. "Might help work on my emotions," she said.

"And get some friends," Taylor added, "see that there are others suffering."

That I do know; in my line of work, everyone is suffering, everyone is a victim. The difference is how quickly or how late we arrive at the scene.

I'm a detective, by the way. Why do I need to clarify this? I'm reading myself. Breaking my own fourth wall, I suppose.

Anyhow, apart from a journal, which I'm working on for lack of other, more patient ears, or eyes, since this is, well, a text, the assignment given by the white coat in turn was to pick a colour, any colour, and to go from it to whatever emotion it brought. Good thing it was not a damn tree. Or worse, a portrait. Because just now I accidentally pictured myself as a typical detective of any cheap dark fiction story, drinking, smoking and cursing the world I had the bad luck to be born in. Whatever.

I doubt anyone will read this anyway, aside from me. Perhaps my therapist, too, and if so, still screw you.

But, if there is in fact someone else reading this piece of nonsensical crap, humour me: what do you think of me? What do you want to know? There's not much to see, I don't have much to say, other than to pick a colour.

Black is a colour; you can't change my mind. Like most of my shirts, and my trousers. If I had a cat or a dog it would be black. Same if it were a fish or bird.

Black, like the ridiculous bows my colleagues wore that day on their lapels or cleavages. It was meant as a memento; an homage to dearest, young partner, colleague, subordinate, friend, and brother,

Jonathan Reeve. But they weren't doing it for me. They know it as well as I do. I didn't wear one. Not that day. Not today. I don't need a sort of medal to remind me and the world about my loss. They can't kiss my ass, pardon me, my *rear*, enough.

I know what they all say about me behind my back. I've always known people's true intentions. It is instinct; reading their meanings between the lines. Had it since I was very little. I wasn't anyone's favourite person, not even my mum's. I was the most scolded, the most yelled at, and had the most severe punishments, while my brother was rarely in trouble. Nasty tattletale. Perfect child, little ray of sunshine, bringing a smile to everyone around him. Always there to encourage me to climb up that tree and steal Mrs. Johansen's berries for both of us to eat, and just as quickly he would tell mother I fell and broke my arm in the attempt. Had we worked together, I know he would have done the same bullshit with the lady boss. Just as he would have been there to back me up, like he always was. Always the hero. And yet, now he can't. Now that he's needed the most. Funny, isn't it?
Some superhero.

Black. Like the ashes of this cigar I'm squeezing on the handrail. Black like the clouds on the horizon. Like the cloud that burst from the gun. Black, like the hole that pierced his chest. Black, like his eyes when the light vanished from them. The blood on his shirt turned into a darker shade as it poured into my hands. Into Black. Black. It was all I could see as I chased the man who did it, the asshole that shot him point-blank, leaving the lights of the pub behind, as my brother faded into the darkness, lying on the black wooden floor.

My black 'low-way' to hell, for you don't fall upwards from grace, do you? It's been two months to this day. The images are so very clear, still, imprinted in my mind as if they were burnt into my brain. Coming to the City from the north, taking the bus, arriving late to the celebration because of an unannounced diversion, the usual. The familiar sound of a gunshot. The chaos of the screams, broken glass, the despair. Raise the curtain to show a naïve undercover agent out of service entering the place, thinking it's just another day on the job; one of those weird coincidences, for sure, just to discover he knows the victim a little too well. Hell, he even knows the shooter. Here's another cliché: you can't trust anyone.

My gun never felt more slippery, my arms so shaky, every fibre of my being shuddering, the hairs on my nape hardening as needles. I'm deaf, can't even hear my own screams, but can feel my throat on fire as I quickly lose my voice. My heart drumming painfully. My blood is racing like a fever. Next thing I know I'm on the highway, soaked under the rain, arm pointing nowhere with the empty gun, held back by someone before I hurt myself or get run over. Then, the worried looks of everyone at the pub and the street, my brother's former colleagues, friends, surround me.

I hate those looks of pity. I hate to see them from witnesses, and despise them even more now that they are directed at me. They still do, every single fucking day.

Not a good time to lose control. Kiss your perfect day goodbye. One more cliché: from that night to the day of the burial is a blur. Black like the ashes, and the urn, and my umbrella at the funeral. He's erased from existence. His name is blank. In the cases, and his old locker, in the postage.

But it is still on the screen of my phone. I know I can't call him. I can't stand listening to his voicemail, not again.

He's dead. He's gone. Dead as a door-nail, said some author, whatever that meant, and I doubt anyone knows. He's gone, buried and cried for. Not by me. By all those that cried enough, like they knew him. I thought I knew him. I thought he would outlive me. Neighbours bet on it, too. We were wrong. All I have for certain now that he's gone is the fact that I never really knew my brother.

"Taken from us so early," said the priest, "so young."

I'm no believer, you can tell, but that line of he had so much to live for, is true.

Yet destiny, in its twisted sense of humour, chose to take him and leave me behind. The cheap, wicked horse no one gave a damn for. Other than the face, we are nothing alike. You'd need to see both of us, if it were still possible, wearing suits to truly notice the resemblance. Same dark brown hair, tanned skin, honey eyes, big nose, bigger hands. Him just a forehead taller.

His favourite colour was blue, while mine is black, has always been. Wore it everyday, except on Christmas, when woollen sweaters from grandma were the fashion.

Aunties used to make fun of me because of it, and the nuns at school said I looked like I was attending a funeral, perhaps my own. Grim for a religious person, true. Or was it Jonathan who said that? No, it was definitely me, answering Mother Superior.

Those times seem so far away, as cliché as it is. I should do a cliché countdown. I did earn the hate, I guess.

Well, we are damned. The Department, at least. I'm all they've got, whether we like it or not. My colleagues know it. Behind the pity I can see concern, even dread in their eyes. It's not like I asked for the promotion. I always preferred working alone. I'm not a people person. Jonathan was. Deal with it. Yes, deal with it, the captain said far too many times.

Probably that was the same reasoning from the lady boss to assign me a nanny. A partner. Someone to deal with me. I wonder how they picked him, a person with the enough guts to attempt the impossible: handle the lost bullet that is Detective Ethan Reeve.

I tried to imagine the questionnaire, must have been hilarious, just one question: can you bare sons-of-a-bitch? Hired!

Detective Carmille, my better half some call him, although we're together only till work-do-us-part, also gives me that look of compassion, as if he found a lost puppy on his doorstep. Now that I think of it, it was him who was holding me on the highway that night, probably by order, probably because he was doing his job. I can't handle that guy; I can't read his intentions behind his perfectly lined smile, constantly getting on my nerves. Mostly quiet but when he speaks, all I hear is, to my dismay, truth. Not the sugarcoated crap everyone else gives me. I don't need Jiminy Cricket, thank you. My own mind has the role of the judge covered too damn well. I'll poke his eyes with a pen if he keeps looking at me like he could walk in water. I don't need redemption.

Lost I may be, but not because of the reasons everyone thinks. Rather, because I'm like a chess piece suddenly misplaced on a board that was not made for me, like I'm meant to fill the blanks on a pre-designed portrait, you see? I don't know who was the genius behind the idea of assigning me as late Detective Reeve's replacement; don't reckon it was the boss, or the captain, but whoever it was, what a sick joke. To me, it's like they didn't want to waste any time erasing the name on the

door or casting a new candidate.

“The best of us,” they said.

Definitely better than me, I can tell you that much. Black-less.

“You have your own kind of expertise,” said Carmille, “no point in comparing yourself, maybe you are what the Department needs.”

“Not like we have a choice now, do we?” I said.

“Everyone has a utility in this world, a purpose.”

“But no one is irreplaceable,” I replied. Smart-ass.

I hate how he sounds like a self-help booklet. A get-well card.

Last he dared to say to me yesterday was to imply I miss Jonathan. Why would I? The thought brings my blood to a boil.

Still, like I said, Carmille is right. He managed to make me write all these words about Jonathan with just that stupid phrase: “It’s alright to miss him.”

I do miss my brother. There you go, I admit it. As much as I’m jealous, arrogant and egotistical, I miss him precisely because he managed to do what no one else could, or even tried: to see the better of me, and that made me do better as well. The others at the Department don’t understand that. They believe I’m just the evil, bitter twin.

They don’t understand, I was never in my brother’s shadow. I *was* his shadow. And we worked nicely that way.

Until now.

Like the two faces of this pocket watch. His goddamn pocket watch. All I have left from my brother: two-faced, with its intricate pieces, one face silver, the other black. How fitting.

Four in the morning, is it now? How does it work, exactly? This side is a usual watch, I think, but the other looks like some other kind of mechanism. Why was it so important for my brother? I know grandpa gave it to him at our graduation party, but for whatever reason, it was kept secret from me. I received a gun, the very same one on the table behind me. I intend to use it when I catch the assassin; no other moment seems more perfect for it, since it’s an heirloom, and I’m supposed to only use it on special occasions. Can’t think of anything more significant than that moment of truth. My final moment, then freedom.

“Never misses its target,” Grandpa said with a weird wink, “and you do the same, my boy.”

I don't. I didn't. Miss the target, that is. At least, I never had. Damn my partner, I *am* lost.

On this day, while the City seems to glisten, wrapped in the everlasting fog as a greyish veil underneath my balcony, the one colour I can think of is black. And the only things I can think of are the clock with its black face, and the gun. All that's left. All I have. Yes, this clock, the infamous pocket clock he wore in every mission, along with the certainty my pockets will never be big enough to fit it. The never missing gun I've never used just yet. And a thirst for revenge, that prison will not quench, if justice ever happens.

And to deal with the fact that I do miss Jonathan. How do you do that? No one understands the feeling. As if this clock was torn in two, would it work? Why are my cheeks wet?

Maybe Carmille would understand. Maybe Carmille would read this. *Truly* read this. And get it.

May we burn in hell.

Revelation

Mia Choudhury

there is a little green in your eyes
 flecked against the molten brown irises
 i hadn't noticed before

red lips press against your neck
 to soothe the blue in your soul
 i hadn't noticed before

as we lie together
 my hands reach into your chest
 and rattle against the white bone cage to

LET ME IN

because i hadn't noticed before

i hadn't noticed my heart turning purple
 holding its breath to not say the words i love you

but now the pale yellow light of the morning sun creeps through the
 black of my curtains and i am tickled pink by the revelation
 that you in your favourite orange knit are my favourite

you pull me closer i flush crimson
 and i'm caught in that grey area between you me us

golden palms brush up my thighs
 finger paintings down my spine
 the silver in your tongue has me dazed

my body is but a palette for you to dip your hands into

blending and bleeding at every brushstroke

i spill no words when i speak
only my truest colours



Tower Bridge by Ratin Ara Raouf

Beige

Cleo Tunbridge

7 AM. John Doe is awoken by the piercing shrill of his alarm. Radar. The default sound on his iPhone 12.

He rolls out of bed, leaving behind the comfort of his linen sheets. They're camel-coloured, from John Lewis, chosen by his wife Jane, who he is careful not to wake as he pads out of the bedroom softly. John showers for seven minutes. He's trying to save on the water bill. He uses *Head & Shoulders* usually, but recently he's been trying out his wife's purple shampoo. In his old age, his hair should be a brilliant white, or at least a shining silver. Instead, it's tinged yellow. Maybe he should quit smoking.

John brushes his teeth for two minutes. Advanced whitening toothpaste. He's not sure if it's working; his teeth remain a buttery hue. Maybe he should quit smoking.

He catches a glimpse of his age-spotted hands in the spittle speckled mirror. His fingernails, once a petal pink, are also turning yellow. Maybe he should quit smoking.

Stepping into the walk-in wardrobe, John softly closes the door behind him. This room used to belong to his daughter. She moved out at 18. She stopped visiting for the holidays when she was 23. He gets two texts a year from her: *Happy Birthday* and *Happy Father's Day*. He only sends one, *Happy Birthday*.

Fiddling with the hem of a baby-blue shirt, his eyes scan the clothes rack before ultimately settling on the brown puppytooth suit, nestled between two others. One marginally lighter, one somewhat darker. His eyes drop to the shelf below, and he picks out a chocolate brown tie, a gift from Jane for their 31st wedding anniversary last year. He fumbles with his cufflinks – they're shaped like the West Ham United crest – as he perches on the edge of the sandy ottoman underneath a window that frames the lifeless view of the dismal brick wall of the house next door. He takes a moment to catch his breath – he's worn out simply from getting dressed. Shaking his head in

displeasure, he vows to check if he cancelled the direct debit on his gym membership, he hasn't been since the month he joined.

Glancing at his wristwatch he realises he has not left sufficient time for breakfast, again. He'll pick something up from one of the coffee shops near the office. He makes a second vow to set his alarm earlier tomorrow.

Plodding down the stairs it's hard to distinguish what groans under his weight louder, the hardwood floorboards or his left knee. The third vow of the day is to make an appointment with his GP.

Along the wall of the staircase, various IKEA photo frames are scattered in organised disorganisation. Ribba. Fiskbo. Lomviken. Maybe he should take up Swedish language lessons. Jane was telling him yesterday that language lessons are beneficial for people of their age. Supposedly, it helps prevent dementia, or maybe alzheimer's. He can't recall what the difference is.

The frames are housing memories that even John's own mind can't conjure up anymore. People no longer living, or no longer in touch. His favourite picture is the headshot of his grandfather who fought in World War I when he was barely eighteen. He was a real man. The singed sepia tone of the photo does nothing to dull his condemnatory stare.

On the train, John watches the bodies bob and sway in unison, like a single organism. Before he lets himself consider his own role (or lack thereof) in this creature, he pulls out a dog-eared copy of *Great Expectations* that he started close to three years ago, around the time he noticed the classic literature he had never touched collecting dust on the bookshelf in his living room, slowly tanning in the warm sun that beams through the window all year round.

It's a brief walk from Chancery Lane station to the edifice that houses countless identical cubicles. A cubicle on the sixth floor, six rows back from the entrance, and six rows in from the central aisle is where John will spend the majority of the next eight hours. The carpet is wheat, scuffed away where John's feet have repetitively pushed his chair back from the desk every hour on the hour for his habitual cigarette and cup of bitter coffee. There's a murkier wheat stain by the entrance of his workspace where he spilt a cup of said coffee a few years ago that the cleaning staff hadn't managed, or probably ever tried, to eradicate

“Hiya, John.”

“Hi, James.”

“It’s cold today.”

“Forecast says snow next week.”

“Ah... take it easy.”

The same tête-à-tête happens almost a dozen more times over the course of the day.

There’s a new employee, a young woman, a few cubicles over with unnaturally crimson hair. There’s an aura around her that John can’t define. People are attracted to her, not physically, but everyone seems to want to be around her. John does too, but he can’t find a reason to be. What would they have in common? She’d probably think he’s an old creep. So instead, he hunches in his cubicle, clicking and typing in a rhythmic pattern that could almost be described as melodic if it wasn’t so monotonous and offbeat to the mumblings of ‘report this’ and ‘figures that’, offset with the whirring of printers and the slight electrical buzz of cold overhead lighting.

“Any plans this evening, Johnny?”

He hated being called Johnny. “Not really. You?”

“Not really...”

“Have a good evening then.”

On his way home, John gives up with the novel. Instead, he untangles his earphones from his phone charger in his briefcase and puts them in. His daughter had helped him and Jane sign up for a Spotify account some years ago. He has a singular playlist with 2783 songs as he has not figured out how to create a new one. He hits shuffle, and *4 + 20* by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young begins to play. He admires the cover art as it takes over his lock screen. The men in the sepia picture do not look particularly cheerful. They do not look especially miserable. He wonders what he looks like to the people around him.

“How was work?”

“Good. How was your day?”

“Good.”

John and Jane won’t say much else to each other that evening. They’ll have dinner in front of the television; chicken soup and ageing

British soap actors being interviewed on *The One Show* ahead of a new West End play that he and Jane will agree to book tickets for, but never will.

In bed, they kiss goodnight. Jane tenderly strokes John's thigh but he's swift to turn away.

"Not tonight, darling."

Jane turns away too. Back-to-back, the inch of space between their bodies feels like a mile. It's not long before Jane's body noticeably relaxes, and her breathing slackens. The tension between the couple dissipates and John accepts sleep.

John dreams. John dreams so vividly he can't be certain what he sees is only in his head. The weight of the bedsheets furtively becomes the weight of thick robes of emerald and sapphire velvet that now cling to John's body. He begins down a stone passageway that is unfurling ahead of him, the scent of sandalwood and oudh trundles from his high and wide shoulders in a translucent haze of gold.

He steps through an arch that flickers and ripples at the end of the passageway and is greeted by a road. Along either side of the road are infinite rows of red-brick houses that have surrendered themselves to the crisp jade ivy that is swarming the walls. Fuchsia rhododendrons line the pathways to front doors, the fallen petals beckoning John to pick their house.

He picks one on the right-hand side of the road, the number above the door is 444. He reaches for the brass handle and before he makes contact the door swings open, as if it's been waiting for John to arrive for hours. He steps through, instantly losing his footing on the unstable ground beneath him and somersaults forwards onto his back. He begins to laugh. He laughs until his lungs are pounding his chest from the inside pleading for him to take a breath.

He gathers himself and opens his eyes, once they have become accustomed to the bright light surrounding him, he notices that above him is only blue. Realising he's still on his back he sits up and swivels his head round. He's on a boat, no not a boat, a ship.

John effortlessly pushes himself upright and the dock dips and rises underneath him, silently reassuring John that it's got him, it won't let him fall again. Trusting the promise of the burgundy beast below his feet, John races towards the bow of the ship. The wind around him

roars, waiting impatiently for John to silently tell it where he wants to go.

John knows where he wants to go. The wind begins to carry the ship through the ripples of the cobalt water below. John wants to go to another time, another world. Somewhere he is anything and everything. Somewhere he can laugh, cry, and shout. Somewhere he is truly known, understood, and loved despite it. Maybe even somewhere with his wife and daughter, but they'll be young. He'll get another chance to do it all again, he can remedy what went wrong. Maybe he'll meet his grandfather and he'll be delighted with what John has become. He wants to go where he can build, paint, and create. Somewhere, anywhere, John will be free.

7 AM. John Doe is awoken by the piercing shrill of his alarm. Radar. The default sound on his iPhone 12. In the curious space between wake and sleep, before the memories of his dreams thaw, and his emerald robe melts back into the camel-coloured linen sheets, he'll long to return. He'll beg and pray to no one in particular, to take him back. There must be more to this life. There must be more than this beige life.

Understanding Access to Education in an Environment of Colour

Imoh Uwem

It was the charismatic South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela who posited that ‘education is the greatest weapon which one can use to change the world.’ Did Mahatma Gandhi not say that ‘by education, I mean an all-round drawing of the best in a child and man in body, mind, and spirit’? Perhaps Albert Einstein had this in his thoughts when he said “education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.”

In contemporary times, training the mind to think is still increasingly becoming cumbersome, especially for minorities and coloured societies. Access to quality education even in developed countries seems to be segregated along ‘White’, ‘Black’ and ‘Coloured’ lines. Despite the end of legal segregation in the 1960s to 1970s in the United States and the rhetoric of American equality, and even more recently in South Africa, Black and Minority students’ educational experiences have remained largely distinct and unequal. Still, two-thirds of minority students attend predominately minority schools, the majority of which are found in major cities and get funding that is significantly less than that of districts in nearby suburbs. Society, as W.E.B Bois asserted, has been divided along colour lines and overwhelmed by unethical practices and moral decadence, which results in students consistently receiving distinctive learning opportunities based on their social status, thereby validating certain immoral activities our forefathers would have considered an aberration.

Ostensibly, the consequent results of educational inequalities only lead to an orchestrated disintegration of mankind through psychological warfare. In the aftermath, job opportunities seemingly favour the more educated whites more than the less educated blacks.

More so, the limited education of the coloured has become increasingly linked with criminality and welfare dependency since the US economy, which is ever-evolving as a result of rapid technological change, can no longer support a large number of unskilled people at fair wages. Accordingly, while black men are significantly more likely to be in prison, women who have not completed high school are much more likely than others to be on welfare.

Young Black individuals in the UK seem to experience an average of five racist events each day, like their peers around the world in the US, France, and South Africa. Black Caribbean children are as high as six times more prone to be excluded than their White colleagues, suggesting that racism is deeply entrenched in schooling. This can have a detrimental effect on academic achievement. As a way of escaping the emotional Alcatraz caused by social injustice and inequality, coloured youths inclusive of those who found their way into the 'teleguided' educational system are enticed to embrace all kinds of social vices which are usually deviant behaviours that lead to illicit sex, drug addiction, examination malpractices, bullying, and other criminal tendencies. Furthermore, lexicons like domestic violence, depression, drug abuse, ritual killings, cultism, and suicide increasingly become the most prominent discourse that dominates the hemisphere, especially in the social media space.

'The colour of Education is blue' is supposed to connote knowledge, power, integrity, and seriousness. However, it seems that access to quality education for the majority is highly predicated on the colour of their skin. Some obnoxious personalities by way of their 'game of thrones' activities are still surreptitiously stoking the Jim Crow Laws, instilling a fire of hatred among coloured people, and by extension urging the black youths to the valley of perdition. This assertion is aptly in tandem with the timeless words of the French prolific writer Voltaire who opined that 'those who can make you believe absurdities; can make you commit atrocities.'

Black, Asian, and Minority ethnic (BAME) students experience isolation and marginalisation once they enroll in college due to slights, casual racism, and prejudices from their peers and university employees. True racial fairness in higher education is offering students of all backgrounds access to and success in programmes of study that

are open and friendly to them.

Sincerely, if the world is serious about refining the characters of the citizens through quality, then there should be an evolution of the educational system. Issues of ethical leadership training should be on the front burner. Since the educational system is supposedly not conducive to learning, pastoral care is the way to go. It means offering your own life experience to your students in a way they will clearly understand the goals. It is a whole-school strategic and operational approach to enhance learners' attendance. It is a whole lot gambit that involves counseling, peer support, mentoring, empowerment, and supporting self-efficacy.



picture by Emily Duff

Meet Our Authors

Bijou Antony is an ex-banker and a content strategist with a leading production house in India. He is also a published author. His debut novel *Shadows Lie* has been selected for an OTT series adaptation. His second book will be published in the fall of 2023, by India's leading publishing house, Rupa Publications. His writings explore characters and places that collaborate to create their own flawed languages, unsure conflicts and incomplete joys. *(Page 48)*

Katie Baker is a history graduate who has dabbled in a variety of book-related jobs before deciding to pursue her lifelong love of writing. She hopes to one day turn her notebooks full of illegible ideas and characters into a novel. *(Page 40)*

Pat Chan grew up in Oakland, California. With a deep love of reading, and an eclectic array of interests, Chan explored a variety of fields academically and professionally. Chan's creative work seeks to explore both the surreal and imaginative. *(Page 68)*

Mia Choudhury is a creative writer currently working on her poetry collection while studying her MA in Art and Visual Culture. With a BA in Creative Writing and English Language and a keen interest in photography, art, language, and culture, she hopes to publish her work within the coming years and move towards a career as a professional writer and creative director. *(Page 80)*

Michele Clark has led YEP in Oakland, CA for more than 33 years, during which time she has grown YEP to become a highly successful youth education and employment training agency. In addition to being a leading advocate for teens and young adults, Michele has won numerous awards for her innovative approach. She was recognized by the Obama

administration as a Champion of Change. (Page 15)

Brigid Cooley is a poet, journalist and storyteller based in Georgetown, Texas. She is dedicated to highlighting the stories of others, while also carving out a space where she can share her own truths and experiences in her work. She previously served as co-host for the Sun Poets Society's weekly poetry readings in San Antonio, and currently hosts virtual readings on the Little Things Poetry Read Facebook page. (Page 31)

Vruchi Desai published her first poetry book *The Art Of Drowning* in the midst of her writing journey. She aspires to be an ascribed poet someday. (Page 70)

Alexie Diakite is an aspiring writer who enjoys writing children's books and young adult fantasy novels. She strives to share immersive and diverse stories with children in the hopes that they will fall in love with stories as much as she did growing up. Alexie holds a BA in Biology with a minor in Creative Writing from Hamilton College and a Master's Degree in Stem Cell Biology from Sorbonne Université. (Page 63)

Emily Duff is a full-time mother of one with a creative passion for writing stories that reflect the diverse environment of both her home and her city. Aside from writing and loving her son, Emily has an obsessive collection of shoes and books (colour-coded on the shelves), and can often be found in the kitchen cooking or baking away. (Page 71)

Hélène Ezard is a French-German alumna from the University of Westminster. She studied International Liaison and Communication. She enjoys writing novels, short stories, and poems. (Page 37)

Sophie Harris uses writing as a tool for exploring the world around her and living life's adventures. Through writing, She tackles life's challenges by creating fictional worlds which gives her opportunities to raise awareness and gain some inner peace. Sophie mostly writes screenplays, short stories and novels, but loves to dabble in all formats of Creative Writing. (Page 45)

Ejikeme Igwe is an author and creative fiction writer. His interest revolves around crimes, historic fiction, historic fantasy, thrillers and drama. (Page 66)

Erin Jamieson's writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, and her fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is the author of a forthcoming poetry collection (*Clothesline*, NiftyLit). (Page 55)

To embrace the wisdom **Aris Jernigan** got from the professor who supervised her portfolio for a Minor in Creative Writing from the University of Chicago in 2021, she works as a financial analyst at a big tech firm while still writing her novel. That novel is still in the early stages of development, but for now, she is content to write short stories (and the occasional poem) influenced by her identity at the intersection of Black and Vietnamese, and fascination with love in its various forms. (Page 23)

Sarah Kamil likes cats and writing (and possibly writing about cats). She wants to write things that make people laugh and distract them from the worrying mess that is the world around them, and her dream is to write the next *Crazy Rich Asians*. She also has a crippling addiction to books and theatre. (Page 38)

Carella Kiel is a writer and digital artist who splits her time between the ethereal world of dreams, and Toronto, Canada, depending on the weather. Her art has appeared recently in *Columbia Journal*, *Skyie Magazine*, on the cover of *Glassworks 26*, in *Existere*, *Chestnut Review*, *Door is a Jar* and *Grub Street*. (Page 17)

Effy Kousteni is a postmodern writer with a passion for creating stories representative of our culture, society, and political environment. Aside from writing, Effy is a devotee of vinyl records and backgammon, and can often be found at the airport running to catch her flight to Athens for another game. (Page 27)

Vlad Krutikov finds inspiration not only in literature and film, but also in painting, drawing, music and stand up comedy not even mentioning everything which surrounds him. He believes that the writing process and life have one thing in common – they both are an adventure, thanks to Jack Kerouac and Hunter Thompson. If you're intrigued, please, look forward to his first published novel. *(Page 54)*

Nupur Lakhe is a writer with her nose buried in a book. She is a mum, so adventures are a part of life. Hence, the mundane excites her – sipping tea and reading. She enjoys book blogging and photography. She likes going for runs and solo walks. *(Page 19)*

Fatima Latif is a stumbling writer still establishing her footing in the writing world by experimenting with various genres while accidentally creating and publishing short stories in fictional magazines. Her short story *Soul Searcher* is out for the world to read in Orpheus Magazine. *(Page 33)*

Mario Loprete is an Italian artist. In the last few years, they have worked exclusively on concrete sculptures. Using plaster, resin and cement, they transform them in artworks to hang. Mario's memories remain concreted inside, transforming the person that looks at the artworks into a type of post-modern archeologist that studies my work as they were urban artefacts. *(Page 73)*

Lani Lovett likes to take chances and decided to try her luck at creative writing for her MA. Eclectic to the core, she enjoys learning new people, places, and personalities and hopes her writing will bring a little warmth, a splash of justice, and a whole lot of fun. *(Page 42)*

Carmen LP is a writer and theatre lover, with a flair for the fantastic, the mythical and the supernatural. Her favourite colour since forever? Blue, the colour of the sky, the sea and the wise. Carmen dreams of creating powerful stories, printed or on stage and sharing this passion with others, just like her favourite authors. *(Page 74)*

Having worked in the corporate world for more than 7 years, the

cinophile within **Sid Menon** was just not happy with the screenplay up until then. In 2020, they quit the corporate humdrum to immerse themselves into the world of movies and filmmaking by joining an MA in Filmmaking. They are currently in London trying to explore the blurred lines between life, cinema and the magic that accompanies both. (Page 50)

Habsus Nak is a Turkish-Syrian-American student living in London. She enjoys writing poetry because it is a way to express herself, and tell the world about her experiences. Her poem *Red* is based on the lived experiences of her and her family in Syria. (Page 30)

Zakiya Rouabah is a full-time single mum working towards her Masters in Professional Writing. She has had a flair for writing since she was a child but only rediscovered her creative side in the last couple of years, which is what prompted her to take some short writing courses and finally the MA. Her hobbies include boxing, cooking and going on adventures with her little boy. (Page 26)

Andrew Scarborough is a nonfiction writer with an interest in all styles of writing. He has worked as an editor for the International Brain Tumour Alliance (IBTA) and has a passion for science communication. His writing seeks to inform the reader, whilst engaging them in subjects that naturally provoke deeper discussion. (Page 18)

Amber Siddiqui has had a passion for writing since she was in primary school, where her first poem *The Funky Monkey* was published in an actual poetry book. These days she loves writing short stories (mainly of the fantasy genre) and hopes to fulfil her dream of writing her first ever novel someday. (Page 44)

Jamson Tabernacle, who also goes by the name **Jay Tee**, works mostly with collages. They are a lover of comics and have been doing art since 1999. (Page 43)

An avid reader and writer since childhood, **Cleo Tunbridge** has always been a fan of the unusual and unexpected and hopes others find both in

her writing. Her favourite colour is forest green. *(Page 82)*

Imoh Emmanuel Uwem is a creative writer, and by default an acolyte of Voltaire. He is keen on purple and blue which connote justice, dignity, emotional intelligence, trust and freedom. His greatest aspiration is to tenaciously utilize fiction and nonfiction writing, entangled with satire to ethically depict social issues. He is currently hibernating in the House of Exile. *(Page 87)*

Marni Whiteley is an international woman of mystery. *(Page 10)*

Addison Williams is a poet, writer and musician from Canterbury, currently studying at the University of Westminster. His past publications include Gutter Magazine, Fireworks Magazine, and Acid Bath Publishing. He has also received radio play and been commissioned for spoken word pieces by the Marlowe Theatre. *(Page 56)*

Mehak Zehra loves to write romantic stories, poetry that doesn't make sense, and non-fiction articles. She does not want a genre or a format to define her and yet, with every passing day, she gets a reminder that she needs to choose one. Will she? That is a question only time can answer, but for now, she sticks to writing whatever comes to mind. *(Page 9)*

Meet The Team

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