

Color my World

by

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The morning sun languishes through the once verdant southern forest, now transposed to a morose insalubrious monotone of gray by the winter's lack of rain and the seemingly perpetual and unseasonable Florida heat. A persistent daybreak fog only adds to the ghost-like dawn. What was once a vivid burst of life now struggles in thirst and identity. Winter's death, even among the evergreen pines, offers little promise. The only hint of the day's fatidical brilliance is the sorrowful and lugubrious solar reflection off the razor wire that separates me from freedom. It is not the lack of liberty, or the theft of time, or even the demeaning stigma of incarceration, that eats at your self-esteem while in prison; it is the absence of color stripped from your world.

They paint these prisons institutional gray; aptly named. Time has worn them to a haze of pale, a cadaverous paste of etiolated alabaster dotted in rust—not quite dirty gray-white, but nothing Crayola would grace. It is almost the color of phlegm, but less vivid. Perhaps you might find it in the summer sky, after a fire has devastated a virgin forest—a reminder of death. What isn't painted gray is coated in brown—*bark brown* they call it—it represents the lack of hope, like the dirt piled upon a corpse—also an imagery of death. Even the guards don the hue, like an old coffee cup after years of neglect. It is the color feces—perhaps not by coincidence.

As for us inmates, we are clothed in faded wedgewood blue—too pale and drab to exert any assemblance of pride or self-worth. Time has stained it with a permanent layer of filth—a reflection of how we are valued. White tee-shirts, which might offer a source of freshness or

pride, have long yellowed. It is not a yellow craved for its spectacle—more like a dirty amber, like jaundice, or old urine.

They have long-ago stripped the compound of any vegetation. Spring's burst of growth offers an illusion of hope and that would be viewed as auspicious, propitious, or even promising. *Ye Who Enters Abandon All Hope.* Patches of grass effortlessly try to emerge between those spaces long-ago paved in concrete, but the sandy and acidic Florida soil, together with the lack of precipitation, even turns the most hardy ground-cover to a forlorn brown. *No color shall penetrate these walls.* Even nature abides by the precept.

Only the cover of a book, the glossy pages of a magazine, or an occasional Muslim prayer rug lowered reverently toward Mecca, things not of my captive world, hint of color still radiating beyond the wire. They only represent the illusion of color—a slight hope among the hopelessness. They vanish as quickly as the promise they foresee.

That verdant forest outside the gates—clear cut for half a mile but still surrounding the prison—a distant representation of freedom, even manages to shield the vibrant colors of sunset. What light does permeate the forest is marred by that same reflective razor wire. No color; at best white reflection. I strain to see what might still encompass the world beyond these walls, but the forest is too dark and too distant to offer true color—it soon fades to twilight and finally to black—the starry night even deprived from us captives by the ancient and perpetual amber lights illuminating the nothingness of the courtyard.

There is something immoral in depriving man of a world of color—something malevolent, revengeful, even sinister. Like old photographs of war-torn Europe, or the horror of the down-trodden survivors of Auschwitz, or any other image of death and destruction, lack of color diminishes, destroys, and degrades the human spirit. There is a word for a world without color—they call it *despair*.

Time itself is colorless. So why should *doing time* be any different? But despite the futility of it all, I still struggle to find hues in that distant forest. It eludes me; it berates me; it even laughs at me. Day after day, month after month, year after year—time moves without color. A slow countdown to the day of my emancipation. A languid passage to the day color returns to my world.