

Viridian Green

“My name is Samuel Fitz. I am 30 years old. I am immune to Orthohepevirus C. I can identify 437 standard edition pantone test pallets,” Samuel recited, pulling absentmindedly at a curl of his dark wavy hair.

“437, you really are gifted.”

Samuel shrugged. “I hope I can help you.”

“Maybe you even will.” I smiled at him, his narrow face dotted with freckles. He looked ordinary, but I knew better. I knew that he could see the secret layer that hung on the world, lost now, except in memories. My parents used to reminisce about tiny rainbows of ball-point pens, but I never understood. How could you see color? It was invisible. Sure you could differentiate the intensity, the way you could tell where the sun beat down against your face, but light came to you only in its presence or absence. Only last year, Dr. Strauss had explained to me the way his eyes were different. How his immunity allowed them to differentiate the wavelengths of light the way the inner ear could sense the frequencies of sound. His office was littered with the scattered notes, diagrams, and graphs his self-administered tests produced as he tried to search through the haystack of the human genome. Desperate to find what made his eyes special and bring back the world of his memories.

“What is your favorite color Samuel?”

“Pantone 1751-26 Viridian Green.”

“Why is that?” I scrolled through the ring of color strips, the edges tapping out a pattern on my fingertips as they brushed past. Looking down at 1751-26 I shrugged. Nothing but a slightly light midtone, the same as most sidewalks.

“It’s the color I see when I look up as I swim, the light illuminating the water above me.”

“Water is clear.”

“It distorts light, like the sky. It’s even more beautiful than a regular color, it’s a naked color, not just a reflection but a pure color. Like the highest note on a flute... I visited Greece last year, after my tour of Israel. I looked down off the side of the boat and all I could see was a glittering stretch of viridian green, twinkling in the light of the setting sun as it faded into the horizon.” He stared off into the distance.

“Israel, a spiritual trip then?” My parent’s relationship with God was limited to the pile of presents under our christmas tree.

“It was meant to be, yes.”

“Meant to be?”

“I have always been told, believed, that my colors are a gift from God. I thought that it was only appropriate that I use them to view the holy land in color for my people. I saw those lands, watched as the hills of Judea and Samaria faded in the light of a golden desert sunset. It was beautiful. But, so is the world. All of it. So were the boats drifting through the canals lined with rainbow shutters in Amsterdam. So were the flowers that bloomed along the sides of the light-rail speeding through Italy.”

“So what do you believe now? Are you like your friend Danny? Trying to remind us all of what we cannot see?”

“No... no, not like Danny... I don't believe in a cure,” Samuel bit his lip in thought. “I suppose I just wish that you could appreciate what I see.”

I smiled, “But we can't appreciate it Samuel. We're normal.”

“So am I.” He contradicted.

“But you aren't Samuel. You're different, special, you see what only a handful of people can.” I adjusted my glasses, American-flag red Danny had called them. Another favorite color I suppose.

“Special. You think that I'm special?” He asked, his joking tone laced with a slight chill.

“I don't think it matters what I think. You are.” I replied.

“Tell me then, Mary. If color is so special how come it took barely an instant for the world to rewire itself without it?” He leaned forward in his chair. “When is the last time you saw a color TV? How long did it take for the billboards to go black and white? How long did it take the world to get over the vibrancy and beauty I see and relegate it to the role of a college student's research assignment?” He finished the last statement with a pointed look at my manila file folder.

“I...” My breath caught in my throat and I leaned away, startled by his sudden intensity, “I wasn't born... I don't know how long...”

He trembled a moment as he sunk back away from me. His chest sank as he lowered his eyes to the black polished surface of his shoes. “Sorry,” he whispered to me.

I felt the cool air rush into my nostrils as I let my chest rise and fall in time with his. He slowly raised his eyes to meet mine and I watched the shimmer of light flicker around their translucent surface, catching in the water that pooled around their corners.

“It’s okay,” I comforted.

“It’s just...”

“Help me understand.”

“Imagine if suddenly, there was no music. If everyone just stopped caring. Everywhere you looked, symphonies closed their doors, and the memories of song seemed to float away even as you clung to them. You tried to sing a chord, but your voice was shrill and alone.”

I thought of my violin. The buoyant weightlessness that overtook me as I drew a melody from its strings, an endless melody, filling the room with overwhelming light as my body filled with pleasure and my skin tingled with goosebumps drawn forth from the vibrating air. My muscles relaxed as I let my eyelids slip closed, drifting backwards into the memory. I sighed. Exhaled. “I’m sorry.”

He smiled at me as he bent forward, reaching across the space between us to place his arm against my shoulder. I felt the warmth of his hand radiate across my scapula.

“It’s okay,” his whisper resonated through the still air, “you’re only normal.”