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Life of Crayola

My life in Crayola starts with Carnation Pink, the color of my flush newborn cheeks under constant baby tears and toothless gummy smiles, and the small pad of my tiny tongue slurping at one of my cherished Wild Strawberry pacifiers. My parents paint Tickle Me Pink on the walls of my first bedroom because “It’s a girl!” although altered to a soft Salmon by the sun’s morning light. By the time I am three, the fleshy Melon of my fists are big enough to curl around a felt-tipped marker, one of Flamingo Pink, a few shades off from that of my bedroom, and stain the walls with it. One line—full of squiggles, of breaks, of curves, of loops, of swirls, of jags—travels the entire circumference. My Pink halo, accompanying me during sleep.

Preschool justified my rights to coloring again. We start the first day with a basic eight pack of Crayola crayons for a self-portrait using only the three primary colors. The three primary colors are as follows: Red—that’s when I stop listening. Stop with a bright Red octagon on the streets in front of my first school, on my papers when I begin to learn of shapes, and in the margins of my storybooks of Clifford the Big Red Dog because I must spread this newfound knowledge. RED’s boldness is mine to harness and when Santa’s Christmas magic pulls a doll from the deep pockets of his Red suit before I get my picture taken, I claim Ariel as my favorite princess for her flowing Red hair. People sometimes tell me I have such beautiful, Red hair. They are wrong; it is not Red. Silly them.

My hair is the color of Macaroni and Cheese, or at least somewhere on the Orange spectrum, but certainly not red. Orange is a branch of red though, I have to remind myself after learning about this from my new teacher at my new school in my new town, miles from the last. Red Orange like that of the Spaghetti-Os sauce I eat at Auntie’s house and the way it swallows the colors of anything it touches—the white napkins, my pink skirt, the pale gray carpet—they all become Red Orange eventually as the sauce slides off my spoon before it gets to my mouth. Yes Jesse, but your hair falls on the orangeish branch of yellow, and I nod at the reminder. Yellow Orange like Velma’s sweater in every colored page of the Scooby-Doo activity
book I keep in art class for free Fridays. “Daphne is my favorite,” a classmate says to me one day as we share a box of Crayola markers, so I tear her a page of the colorless character from my book and hand her an Orange marker for Daphne’s hair (which is much more like my hair than Ariel’s hair is). And this is how we spend every free Friday.

Too soon, art class is swept away from me altogether now that I take the bus to a place with locker rooms and periodic class changes. Its big Dandelion shell, chugging and fighting and dragging me to school day after day, where recess is for the young children and the bright, Yellow sun must be only a myth, for I never get to see it. To make up for my loss, the sun is always always always Laser Lemon in my drawings, like the swirling slide on the pebble padded playground that I miss from my flat middle school desk. My world strives for more brightness where reality seems to be empty of it recently.

That’s why my trees’ leaves and shrubbery are mostly Inchworm and Yellow Green; the pictures help smile for when the reasons that gave me smiles in the past grow more unreachable day by day. But when I am outside on the lunch periods that eating at the picnic tables is permissible, each blade of fine grass is Green. A plain Green. A simple blue plus yellow, the other two primary colors I’d come to relearn years back, and most of the trees outside the high school windows follow suit. Unless it is my favorite tree: the Christmas tree, a dark and obvious Pine Green, giving me smiles for the duration of the month, and on the twenty-fifth I wear a Forest Green Christmas sweater, all knitted together in a way that forces you to guess if there is a pattern to it at all.

I only ever wear sweaters with Denim Blue jeans, unless it is my tightly-knit pullover, one covered in planets of Periwinkle and Midnight Blue, and oddly enough not the Turquoise or Robin’s egg blue that so obviously serves as the perfect blend for the planet Neptune when I decide to recreate the solar system on thick white card stock or recycled canvases in the art classroom instead of the freshly white ones I used when I believed any painting I made would be worth seeing. But when I do wear that spacey sweater, it’s accompanied by a nearly Sky Blue eyeliner and darkened lashes, and sometimes I’ll feel confident enough to post a picture of myself in that sweater wearing that eyeliner on tumblr, whose Midnight Blue homepage keeps me awake far longer every night than I think it will. Sometimes people there will tell me I have pretty eyes, and for those seconds I’m back on the clock-shaped rug of my daycare, hand-in-
hand with all my friends, and no one was afraid to say anything that came to mind, least of all friendly compliments, which helps me feel less alone.

But nothing is more lonely than the color Purple. It’s the loneliest color in nature in a vast sea of grass blades and tree leaves, or swallowed by the sunlight of midday and meadows of weedy flowers polka-dotting the Earth in cozy warm colors similar to the season’s change, when leaves tickle the space with a liveliness even in their death. Yet still, Purple is lonely, occasionally shining through the cracks of an orange-dominated sky when the sun sits on the horizon, mixing with the pinks and blues, never being alone, but so often lonely, like my sole Wisteria pillow, placed amongst all the other pillows, yet completely mismatched from the rest. So I begin making a point of putting Purple in every piece of art I trouble myself with making, and instead of forcing Purple subjects on myself, I force Purple on the subjects. Purple leaves alongside the rest, falling gracefully to the ground before the winter snow. Lazy, Purple waves of the ocean lapping at a sandy beach before slinking back to the source. Deep Purple flames swallowing the Earth, one painful lick at a time.

Maybe that’s how Black will feel, painful and dry and harsh, but I tend to think otherwise. It might be peaceful and quiet, a place absent of clutter and voices and worries. A piece of Black lives in me, a shadow in my head, at first a slight whisper echoing through the walls of my mind, soft enough to escape. But the shadows grow deeper, resting in my hollow bones, weighing me down and filling all the empty spaces with a swarm of whispers, building and growing until they become a deafening roar. There is only one Black; black is absolute and irreversible.