

Colorblind

Valkyrie Bradford

Aila lived in a world of black and white.

Growing up in a divorced family, separation was everywhere. Choices were everywhere, and the consequences felt world-ending. So, she sorted them, clean and neat in her mind.

There were black and white things in the world. Black things were soft, comforting—though sometimes, they were lies. Her warm blanket fort, however dark, couldn't keep her ears from catching the arguments outside.

There were white things in the world, too real, and harsh, and present, but sometimes too real to be seen. The sun peeking through the window of her mom's house that first weekend at a new house with a new window facing the east, when it really set in that dad is gone, I live here now, they're not getting back together.

She grew up, though, and she had to change. She had to learn about the grays of the world.

The dual tones of the universe turned gray one day when she sat at her desk, looking at the board in her 5th grade history class:

Colonization.

People fleeing, homes breaking, sickness spreading.... It was two colors, and that wasn't allowed. That wasn't how it worked. Friend or foe, good or bad, not this sick, twisted in-between.

But she had to learn some day.

However angry she was at her father for leaving, the searing white was always tinged with the black of knowing how much her mother drank, of that little urge of her own to run away.

The existence of gray was inconvenient, and it took her weeks to

put together her files again, to sort the world into its clean categories and shade-tabbed boxes.

She kept on living. She had to, after all. No one would live for her. The world was carefully sorted out, her desk always clean, even through the tumult of high school and the chaos of juggling two summer jobs to save for college.

And then, somehow, in *the first week* of university, a single person broke her beautiful, perfect system.

To call Kana “vibrantly colorful” would be an insult, in Aila’s opinion.

She was a watercolor of fireworks in the night sky, a perfect storm of pastels and neon, cool and warm and *everything* all together.

Black might be every color, but Kana was a whirling color wheel; the needle on every spot, hues layering higher and higher until it all became one, only for its billion shades to flurry out in a supernova, a force of raw, kaleidoscopic light. But this time, it felt so good, so safe, to let that vortex of color evacuate, being left with the lone, impossible emotions of every color, all far too complex to ever dream of a monochrome world again.

All of it, within those auric eyes, packed into every molecule of air around her. The ecstasy she brought was better than any drug, worth more than all the wealth in the world; it was fool’s gold in comparison.

No, nothing was worth her gaze, let alone her smile, her *laugh*—

Kana’s irises were an infinite chain of black and white holes that no one could escape, throwing her victims through a wormhole into a new world, an infinite dimension of vibrant emerald—and why would anyone try, when her every glance felt like heaven descending to free hell from the flame?

...or something like that, in Aila’s opinion.

She’d never seen anything like it, that girl in an apron in the school’s cafeteria. It was everything to her, everything worth having and living for. Her cold, monochrome nest was a pitiful prison to scoff at, as the world

felt alive in its own way then.

Kana's vibrant green hair was her favorite color now.

It was the color of their wedding rings three years later.

Sitting with those rings gleaming, fingers intertwined, and the sun setting her glorious streaks of joyous tears across the sky, bidding farewell, their dresses weren't white.

The world was too bright for one color. Paints and dyes still filled a room of their new house, the walls coated in Aila's new office, a studio of paint cans and canvas and too many brushes to count. They'd worn those painfully white dresses in and emerged the next day with hardly a sliver of silvery fabric to be seen amongst colors beyond words and love beyond colors.

Valkyrie Bradford is an English graduate student at UND, whose free time is spent with her dog Loki, cat Atalanta, or the animals she fosters for the local shelters. This piece was inspired by her avoidance of the romance genre, a friend's challenge that she couldn't do it, followed by the attempt at codifying the sensation of falling in love.