

The Color of Cold and Ice

J. Schlenker

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Chris, who continuously encourages me to
write.

*What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?
Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small
things brought together.*

*For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of
the stars makes me dream.*

The best way to know God is to love many things.

*I put my heart and my soul into my work, and have lost my mind
in the process.*

I dream of painting and then I paint my dream.

There is no blue without yellow and without orange.

*As we advance in life it becomes more and more difficult, but in
fighting the difficulties the inmost strength of the heart is
developed.*

Vincent Van Gogh

*Over time, we, as humans have developed a different
attitude towards nature around us and we actually forgot one
thing, "inner power." This is the relationship by our
physiological mechanisms to adapt and survive within our
natural environment, which is direct and effective.
Because we wear clothes and control the temperatures at home
and work, we have changed the stimulation on our body, thus*

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the old mechanisms related to survive and function. As these deeper physiological layers are not stimulated anymore we have become alienated from them, thus our bodies have weakened and we are no longer in touch with this inner power. The inner power is a force accumulated by full awakened physiological processes. It also influences the very core of our DNA

Wim Hof, *Wim Hof Method*

Black

AND THEN THERE was light, but something had to come before the light. That was me. I am so often swept aside, grimaced at, feared, as if all sorts of unfathomable things lurk in my being.

I am the absence of color, the void. I am nothingness, yet everything. I am a paradox. From me it begins. I am silence, the space between the thoughts, the sound between the chords. I am all things imaginable.

From me it all springs. I am a combination of all of the colors. I am the unknown, the mystery. I am the palette of creativity, the deep etched lines of the printmaker's hands, the quill pen stains on Jane Austen's fingertips.

Mystery is my demeanor.

I am the grim reaper that comes at death.

I am the stovetop hat that sat atop Lincoln. I am the mourning clothes of Mary Todd.

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I am the strapless dress at evening cocktails and the tie there as well.

I'm formal, elegant, sophisticated and dignified. I am the fashion that lines the streets of a big city. New York and Paris know me well. I am power and confidence. I am serious.

I am submission, the black lingerie of a seductress, or the robes of a priest who has renounced.

I am sorrow and lamentation. Beads of rain fall from me as I stand over a grave on a gray day. Gray is a different story, but all the color stories come from my story. I may be the end, but I'm also the beginning. I come full circle.

I hide. I depress. I strengthen. I exude confidence and power. I am aloof. I am a complete study of opposites.

I am somber, reflective.

I am powerful, energized.

I absorb. Wear me to a place where I can draw in what is good. But avoid me around anything bad. For I will digest that too. My empathy is too great.

I am the depths of the sea, the depths of a soul.

I am the opposite of light; yet, I am the very essence from which light came into existence.

I'm emptiness. I have no content. I'm what the Tao said can't be named. Words are inadequate for me. You have to experience me. Meditate on me. See what I can reveal.

I'm cold.

Meditate on cold. Experience cold. Turn me into warmth. Turn me into light. And, ironically, I will give rise

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to the palette of Vincent Van Gogh. I give hope.

Sybil

SYBIL AWOKE WITH a start, the sheets damp with her sweat. She stretched her moist bare arm from the heat of the blanket, the crisp cold air of the room striking it like pins and needles, to turn off the clock radio alarm. *Yellow* by Coldplay, echoed across the emptiness of the bedroom, a perfect acoustic chamber, a space that needed a chair, a rug, more pillows, something to add warmth, accessories to make the place more of a home, not the place she and Clark came to temporarily between the long hours they both put in at work. But the business, the coffee shop, had taken all her time — and her money. Also, Clark was climbing the ladder in his law practice. By some unanimous auctioneer's gesture, they had both put decorating on hold.

She released her finger from the clock radio's button and grabbed her faithful terry-cloth robe from the end of the bed. Being cold-natured, waking up in a sweat

in the dead of winter was something new to her.

She looked over at her husband. Flickers of gray hair were illuminated in the laser stream of light coming from the gap in the curtains. When had that happened? His face, erased of all lines and worry while in a deep slumber, was turned towards her. His faint snore settled into the fibers of his pillow. Her Superman. A new shiver took hold of her — the good kind. Still there was something missing, a type of void. It hung in the air she breathed and was like quicksand when she walked. It was the something that had been plaguing her mind for months — a child. Like the decorating, they had also put children on hold. The absence of a child had created a hole in her. Had she and Clark waited too late? Had she just experienced her first hot flash? *Couldn't be*, she told herself. She was still having her periods or had been. She had skipped one, maybe two. She couldn't remember. It was stress. Sometimes the dreams could do this to her. Her dreams, the ones that were important, could do strange things to her. This dream was important. She felt it in her gut.

Headaches had plagued her for weeks after the dream about Michael. And the one preceding 9/11 sent both dread and rays of hope through her. She found herself switching from dark moods to happy moods causing her to think she might be bipolar.

And now, this dream coming the night before Em's last day at the coffee shop. How could she cope with not having her sister by her side at the coffee shop and not seeing her nephew, who was like her own, before and after school? She was so used to seeing them every day. That wouldn't be the case any longer. They might drift out of

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her life. No, that could never happen.

Sometimes she was jealous that Em had Chad, the child she didn't have. But, then, Em no longer had her husband, and she did. She had no right to be jealous. It had been three years since Em lost Michael. Em showed no interest in even looking at another man, but the dream told her this would change. What if Em met someone and moved away completely? How could she cope? She should be happy for Em. She slid on her slippers and made her way towards the bathroom.

Warm beads of water cascaded down her back. In the shower she recounted the vividness of the dream. It was clearly one of the strangest she ever had. She stood alongside a canal where a multitude of boats all drifted in the same direction. She scanned her body to find she was dressed in an orange t-shirt and cut-off jeans. Everyone wore some form of orange, the people in the boats, and the people on the sidelines. It appeared to be some type of celebration or water parade.

Then things in the dream shifted. The place in her dream didn't change, but the weather turned cold. In an instant, it went from a bright summer day to a wintery day. Chunks of ice floated down the canal. Yet, the water had a serenity, a calmness, a spiritual feeling. She still had on her same orange t-shirt and cut-off jeans. Chill bumps covered her legs. Yet, she thought it was normal to be dressed this way during the dead of winter. But then all things seemed normal during a dream. It's upon waking that dreams seemed so totally absurd.

Unlike most though, her dreams meant something. So many of them foretold the future. But, the dreams could be fuzzy, or the events in them bizarre. Such was the

case with the dream about Michael and the 9/11 one. But in this dream, the events were crystal clear, like walking into a 3-D motion picture.

A man was swimming in the canal, in the freezing water in nothing but swim trunks. His muscular arms rose from the frigid water to stroke forward. His skin was perfectly smooth, no trace of chill bumps. She marveled at him and felt worried at the same time. In the dream, he was someone she knew, yet in reality he was no one she knew. She knew none of the people, except for one. She looked over to see Em, by her side, also wearing the same orange t-shirt and shorts. Like the man in the water, her sister seemed immune to the cold.

The man who had a huge smile on his face, one that conveyed a sense of accomplishment, pulled himself up from the water of the canal to the sidewalk. He raised his arms in victory and shouted, "Right on!" Em applauded and kissed his icy lips that turned upward into an even bigger smile. Frost glistened on his stubbly beard and coal-colored hair that dropped down on his wet neck like corkscrews. The man with sapphire eyes as liquid as the water, glanced Syb's way, and gave her a wink, while Em handed him a large white towel.

Sybil gazed upward into the soft sprinkling of snowflakes, which had just begun to come down. She lost her balance, causing her to stumble against the bare arm of the man. His arm felt warm, not cold, as she would have suspected when she considered he had just emerged from the bitterly cold water of the canal. Em handed the man clothes. The scene changed. He was dressed in jeans, a pale blue shirt and a brown leather bomber jacket. The trio walked towards a building, a house, narrow and tall

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with a forward tilt, three stories, which overlooked the canal.

Sybil turned up the hot water a notch as she reached for the soap while still recounting the dream in her mind.

The scene again changed abruptly, as often happened in dreams. A roaring fire crackled from a stucco and delft blue tiled hearth, illuminating the faces of Em and the man, although their faces clearly weren't in need of illumination as they had love written all over them. Along with them, eight or more sat on pink yoga mats on a wide planked floor in gray sweats, some donning hoods, all barefoot. They ranged from young to old, both male and female. The rich aroma of chocolate wafted from the mugs held by everyone except the man with the damp dark curls and liquid blue eyes. He was now dressed in the same gray sweats as the rest and playing a guitar. An orange emblem adorned his sweatshirt, something that was known to her in the dream, but something she couldn't place now.

He strummed, and the song was pleasant, tender, the melody soothing. Like the emblem, the lyrics that she knew so well in the dream, also faded.

Syb concentrated as she turned the hot water down a few notches, as cold as she could stand it, trying to bring back the mood of the dream. This action seemed lame compared to swimming in the dead of winter in a canal. Still, the cold water running down her shoulder blades made her sharper. It was something about smiling, about being there? About a bedroom? No, she wasn't sure, but the words were about love, about Em. This song was about her sister. She remembered looking over to see her

sister sitting cross-legged on the floor looking up at the man and smiling. Em was at peace, content.

Sybil thought over the past week's occurrences and couldn't think what thoughts or events may have prompted such a dream. Sure, it was cold outside, and it had been snowing. But, why water, and why skimpy summer clothes on a winter day? What could it possibly mean? In her gut, she knew it was about some future event, like the dream she had before 9/11 and the one before Michael's death. Of course she had had many others that foretold what was yet to happen, but the 9/11 dream and the one about Michael were major, and she knew in her heart that this one was too. She told herself not to worry. The dream was pleasant. Strange, but pleasant. Nothing foreboding.

Sybil stepped from the shower into the heat of the steamy room, toweled herself dry and grabbed her pink robe, the same color as the yoga mats in her dream. She wiped a spot on the mirror and struggled to smile back at herself. She was still young, not too old. A child could yet be in her future. Why wasn't she dreaming about a baby?

She walked barefoot back into the bedroom. The snow glimmered against the streetlights through the small opening in the curtain. She looked over at her husband, half of his face snuggled into the white duvet. She would wake him in another hour. Tonight they would talk. They had discussed children before. It was just that the time never seemed right. No longer. It was time. She was sure Clark would think so too. They must begin trying in earnest.

Without disturbing him, she grabbed the journal that lay on the table beside her bed and walked in a

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whisper toward the kitchen and the coffee pot. This was her quiet time, the time she used for meditation and reflection and for writing down those reflections in what she called her morning pages, something she had learned about in a book called *The Artist's Way*. The dream would definitely fill up her pages this morning. She snuggled deep into her oversized chair with her morning coffee, a rich textured Jamaican brew she could enjoy without a rush of people. Good coffee, one of the perks of owning a coffee shop, she thought, while warming both her hands against the mug.

On Sundays, her only day off, she enjoyed coffee with Clark. It was the day she brought in a plethora of sugar laden pastries leftover from Saturday. They both indulged while he worked the *New York Times* Sunday crossword puzzle, and she caught up in her journal, a weekly recap of sorts. She placed pen to paper and wrote, *This coming Sunday, the day we make love like tantric adepts, the day we conceive*. Would writing it in her journal make it so?

Looking up from her journal, she spied yellow from beneath the chair. She focused more clearly to see Chad had left his galoshes. Today of all days. He would need them. She would have to leave at least half an hour earlier to get them to him in time. Em would tell her not to go to the trouble, that he could survive one morning without them, but no, it was the mother hen in her, the older sister talking. It was no trouble. Helping Em and Chad out was her privilege, something to which she looked forward.

She left for work before her husband, usually going straight to Em's apartment before opening the coffee shop. She sometimes fed Chad breakfast and got him dressed for school, more so in the beginning, when Em wasn't able to.

Right after the accident, Em, in a fragile state, wasn't able to do much. As of late, Sybil noticed that Em was returning to her old self. Sybil sometimes walked Chad to school as well. This had been the routine for the last three years. Now, it was coming to an end.

Starting a coffee shop had been a long shot, with a zillion coffee shops on the streets of New York already, but it was her dream. She had the business sense, and she had been saving and scrimping ever since her high school graduation, living on cheap instant coffee, ramen noodles and Campbell's soup.

Maybe it was all that cheap coffee that made her decide on the business of a coffee shop. Or perhaps it was the distant memory of her first trip into the city with her father. Her father held her hand as they entered an enchanted shop. Aromas of what must have been hundreds of blends of coffee, or so it would seem to a child of five, all intermingling with the fragrance of breads and pastries doused with chocolate, powdered sugar and fruits, bombarded her tiny nostrils all at once.

They sat at a small round table, one similar to the one she had at home, where she had tea parties with her dolls. Her father sat cross-legged on the floor, at her level. He had given her a small sip of his own brew. She nearly spit it out. How could something that smelled so good taste so awful? She covered the taste with a chocolate éclair and a glass of milk, watching her father gulp the remainder of his cup down like it was heaven. It was heaven, the shop that is — a magical place, better than Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.

Her mom was at home with the new baby, Em. The

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outing was his and her special day, her father had said. She had felt like a princess. And somewhere along the line, before she had even graduated from high school, she had learned to adore the mysterious brew that she had once wanted to eject from her palate.

Her goal had always been to start a business, although she had once entertained the thought of college, mostly because her parents urged her to do so. But she was adamant about not going. They redirected their efforts of higher learner towards Em, even though Em was only in junior high at the time. Syb didn't feel she needed it to run a coffee shop. Besides, four years of college would be time wasted when she could be working towards her dream. What she needed was common sense, a business sense, determination, and dedication. She had all of those in abundance. The rest — details.

She worked odd jobs before landing a job in a law office, one of New York's leading firms, where she rose through the ranks. She ended up as a legal researcher. She had a drive, and she wasn't afraid of hard work or long hours.

Not having children helped in the beginning, although even early on, she sometimes worried about her decision to put off having children in favor of a career. Her biological clock wasn't ticking as loudly then. And, it was easy enough to play surrogate mother to Chad, an arrangement that both she and Em were content with. After Michael's death, Em needed her even more, as did Chad.

From her first job out of high school, she deposited as much of her paycheck into a savings account as was feasible. Then she met her husband, a new lawyer hired

by the firm. Clark literally flew into her life, like Superman. It was a month after 9/11. She had little time for dating. For him, she made an exception. He had been persistent although he wouldn't have needed to. He was the man in her dream. She knew he was the one. Before 9/11, she had made herself believe that she was content to spend life alone, just for her work, to build a successful business she could be proud of. Well, at least a good portion of her life. But then, the dream told her differently.

Clark was her protector, her biggest supporter. Most of all, he understood and tolerated her quirky ways, her interest in the mystical. When she first told him she had visions and dreams, things that came true, he didn't flinch an eye. Instead, he peered into her eyes, and laughed. "Your dreams could be a real asset in helping me win cases."

Like her, he was a hard worker. They hadn't even discussed children, well not seriously. Once, he told her he trusted her visions to tell him if it was meant to be.

She looked down at her hand that held the pen. No age spots — yet. She had just turned thirty-eight. Clark was forty. Although, it still wasn't out of the realm of possibility for them to have children, her baby-making machine was striking midnight. With both of their long hours, how could they manage it?

Shortly after marrying, Clark had encouraged her to go for it, follow her dreams, open that coffee shop she wanted. She signed a lease for a much in need of renovation ground floor space in Manhattan. Clark had even pitched in at nights, moving out the garbage the previous tenant had left and scrubbing the place down.

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Em leant a hand as much as possible, as well, giving the space her artistic flavor. She picked up Chad from daycare after work, entering the coffee shop all bright-eyed with Chad hung in a sling at her front, while Michael stayed at home making dinner. Em buzzed in and out like a bee, the possibilities of the coffee shop being her nectar.

Em loved the coffee shop, the whole idea of it. She saw potential where there was nothing but a stark gray concrete shell. Her eyes darted from wall to floor to corner to the front windows. An orgasmic, “Oh yes,” escaped her opened mouth expression followed by, “We can put the counter here. Art will cover this entire wall. And, oh yes, color everywhere. Magnificent, glorious color. A display case here. Nice comfortable chairs, the ones you can sink back into, and something for kids.” Her enthusiasm pulsed through the cold starkness melting through it like a welder’s torch.

Other than Clark, Em was her biggest supporter. In fact, they may have been tied with Chad running close behind as he clapped when his mom placed a colorful table with storybooks in the corner as a toddler section and then again when she came up with the idea of a doggie water bowl outside amongst the tables. A bright orange awning went over those.

Considering Em and Chad had made the coffee shop their second home, it hadn’t taken much urging to get Em to quit her job alongside Michael and come to work at the Java Bean Factory, the name, another one of Em’s inventions. She had imagination. Even though the accounting firm where Em worked had been where she met Michael, it really wasn’t her forte. The ambiance of an artsy coffee shop was.

Em chose the artists whose creations adorned the walls and procured entertainment for weekend nights. And her latte art was to die for; something she joked took the place of her neglected college degree in art. At first, Em had intended on putting her own art on the bold colored walls, but she hadn't had the time for it when Chad was a toddler and then, not the will for it after Michael's death.

Syb encouraged Em to return to painting. It was now three years after the accident, and finally, Em was ready to dust off her easel and retrieve her brushes from her closet. Her talent shouldn't be wasted on swirling pictures of cream onto cappuccinos, creations that would disappear down the throats of their admiring collectors.

Sybil didn't know how she would make it without Emerald when she turned in her apron. They were as close as sisters could get; Em being Sybil's rock with the coffee shop, and she being Em's after Michael's death.

Syb turned the page in her journal and took another sip of coffee. It was habitual that Syb drank from the blue mug, blue being her favorite color, the color of Clark's eyes, the color she looked the best in, the color she most liked to see in her dreams. To her, it symbolized tranquility. But today, she reached for the orange. Orange was Em's favorite color despite the fact she was named Emerald. Em didn't want to be labeled by the color. It was enough that she was teased quite a bit because of her name in grade school.

Sybil was also an odd name. She had been the only Sybil in her class, in her entire school. The same held true for Emerald. Their parents had told them to be proud of

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their names. They were unique. Sybil was beginning to appreciate that now.

Sybil meant prophetess or seer. Her parents hadn't known that at the time. They had heard the name from someone and liked it. By high school, after a series of coincidences, profound dreams, and serendipitous moments, Sybil concluded that fate had chosen the name for her. Her parents had just been the empty vessels that received the message.

And this newest dream. What did it mean? How would it unfold? Thinking about it sent a chill through her, a tingling sensation that went clear through her body, even to the top of her head, a strange experience indeed, but a pleasant one. The dream, although strange, was enjoyable. The last dream that had taken such a hold on her, the one about Michael, happened three years earlier. It was far from enjoyable.

Sybil had all kinds of minor dreams that came true. She might see a face of someone in a dream, someone she didn't know. Later, she would see that identical face out on the street. It was always something like that. But this was one of her major dreams as was the one that happened three years earlier. She always knew when the dreams were major. They would be followed by varying bodily sensations, chills or a dread in the pit of her stomach, or uncontrollable emotions like crying or laughing for no reason. The one before 9/11 was confusing since she was both crying and laughing. It had been her most profound dream. Next had been the one she had had about Michael.

In the one about Michael, Sybil found herself on the streets of New York, surrounded by grayness and fog.

Rain poured in heavy sheets. She looked up towards the gray sky and found herself peering down from one of the skyscrapers. All she could see was a blanket of black umbrellas moving in rhythm towards a freshly dug hole, a newly prepared grave. A loud metallic noise. Something fell from above. She awoke screaming. Clark sat up, startled. “Just a bad dream, go back to sleep,” she assured him. Of course, he knew better. He held her until she drifted back into a slumber.

She told no one about the contents of the dream, not even Clark. A few weeks later, Michael, Em’s husband, was hit by some object that came hurtling down from a crane while he and Chad were walking along the street. That dream or nightmare, in itself, had left her with anxiety, a sense of dread. Seeing it come true was devastating. At that point she wanted to give up dreaming. But then she would have to give up sleep.

She took a sip of the black coffee as she wrote this latest dream and thoughts into her journal.

She started a dream journal during her junior year in high school when the coincidences and dreams became too overpowering to ignore. She had learned to know which ones were imminent. She trusted her intuition, something else she had learned to do.

On her sixteenth birthday, her mother gave her a dream dictionary. By now, she knew most of its worn pages by heart. Water was incredibly symbolic in a dream. The type of water mattered. The water in the canal was crystal clear. That was a good sign. The water, the rain, in the dream three years earlier had a different feeling altogether.

Then there was the cold. People tend to think of

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cold as bad. Sybil sensed something different about this cold. She knew it was good, yet she didn't know why. She ruffled through the tattered pages of the book. *Cold, cold.* "Cold on a sunny day meant that poverty would be removed," she read aloud. She shut her eyes, trying to once again picture the dream. It was sunny, definitely sunny. The frost on the man's hair sparkled in the bright rays. Did this mean actual monetary poverty or spiritual poverty? Maybe both. The removal of monetary poverty was certainly true. Em was financially secure now; if indeed this dream was about Em's future. Sybil's gut told her it was.

The pink yoga mats. Pink symbolized young love. Yoga? A serene, calm love. Sybil skipped through the pages to find orange. It was all about balance. The meaning of that eluded her. It didn't fit. She conceded orange did have significance, but maybe orange didn't have any emotional or spiritual context at all. If this were some sort of vision of a future happening, everyone would be wearing orange. Sometimes, a cigar is just a cigar. Didn't Freud say that?

She had learned over the years not to over analyze the dreams. Analyzing too much often led her down wild goose chases that departed drastically from the dream's actual meaning. Once she had dreamed about losing her teeth. While a dream dictionary would give all sorts of symbolic references for such a dream, it merely meant she was long overdue to see the dentist.

Sybil finished up her journal entry, took the last sip of coffee, and went in the bedroom to wake up her husband. Clark had often told her to take up tea drinking, joking it might be easier if she just read the tea leaves.

She sat on the side of the bed, leaned over, and kissed him. "His eyes were blue, like sapphires," she said.

"What?" Clark groggily asked.

"Oh, something I just remembered about the dream I had last night."

He sat up in bed. "You were dreaming about another man?" One eye opened trying to focus on her while his other eye remained closed.

"No," she gave him a smile and ruffled his graying hair with her hand, something her mother used to do with her when she was young. "Not in that respect. I think he is someone Em will meet."

"That would be nice if Emerald would meet someone," he said with a voice as groggy as his eyes. Clark almost always called her Emerald. He liked the name, and green was his favorite color. "And Chad needs a father figure," he said while managing to open his other eye.

"Yes, it would. Of course, the right someone. You've been a good father to Chad."

"I try, but that usually just happens on weekends. He needs a real father, not a substitute one."

"I agree. I have coffee on. You sound and look like you need some. Get up and shower or you will be late for work."

"Did I ever tell you you're a dream?" He reached for her giving her a subdued morning breath kiss.

"Yes, many times," she said, not minding his morning breath at all.

Sybil stood in the corridor of the subway station, waiting for the train and gripping Chad's yellow galoshes against her chest. The concrete below her was wet with

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tracked in snow. She wrapped her scarf tighter to shield herself against the damp and the biting air that shot down the subway steps. She glanced at the map on the back wall out of the corner of her eye and looked back towards the rails. Something clicked. She jerked her head back towards the map and read, Amsterdam Avenue. Canals, the color orange, the royal color, the Queen of Orange. The tall slender buildings that leaned forward. She smiled as a pleasant chill rippled through her body. An omen. the dream was about Amsterdam or somewhere in Holland.

A slight wind stirred in the tunnel. She made her way onto the crowded car, getting the last available seat. She noticed a couple that would be getting off at her stop. She often saw them in the coffee shop. She gave them a friendly nod; the man acknowledged her with his eyes and then returned to his paper. It was Monday, the beginning of another work week for most.

Red

“PUSH! PUSH!” SAID the man standing to his wife’s side.

“I can see the crown. Won’t be long now,” the man in the green scrubs said, his hands positioned as if to catch a football being shot out from between the woman’s legs.

I am life itself, pulsing, flowing, oozing, erupting from inside the womb. It begins with me. I am washed off, but only the outer layer. I inhabit every organ, every fiber of being. At the center, I beat like a drum. I am the symbol of love. I am creation. The man and woman ooh and ah. I am the passion, the spark that begat this small bundle, this creature of joy.

The tiny hands push me along. “Vroom, Vroom.” I am the fire engine putting out the pretend fire. But bedtime disrupts the scene, and I am placed carefully in the toy box.

I look at the surroundings from my vase. My odor

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permeates the room. I am the heart shaped box that lay empty on the table. Beside me sit two empty glasses, my petals strewn about the bed. I am all lace and satin, the color of love, the forerunner of fertility, ordered from a Victoria's Secret catalogue. And so, it begins again. I am renewal.

I am the subdued light that makes the flesh appealing, an urban area of brothels, strip clubs, and the like, a district in Amsterdam.

A narrow piece of silk, carefully picked out at a fine department store. "This says power, strength, wealth — with this you can't go wrong," the over enthusiastic salesman, clearly fueled by commission, says. A fashionable noose. I'm flipped back at lunch. The power broker swirls a French fry in me. I am the wine in the glass to ease his nerves before heading off to his meeting. Once again, I am the Merlot. *Cheers*. A promotion is imminent.

I am the new shoes, the pair in the window. The woman has been eyeing me for weeks. Now, with her husband's promotion, the one I influenced, she can afford me. She wears me out of the store. I am bold. I am to be noticed. I'm Prada, devilish. I hear the catcalls, the whistles. I am sexy. I am lust. The moment is lost. My siren blares as I shoot up the thoroughfare. I am danger. I am excitement at every turn.

A loud bang. A gun shot. I pour from the wound. People don't realize how much of me there really is. I'm messy, sticky. I drench the body and its surroundings. I cannot be contained. This fact is covered up on television. It's not pleasant. Not so in a Coen Brother's production. I am anger, aggression, no longer love. I am the brutal aspect of war.

In whatever form I come, I'm not to be trifled with, downplayed, or trodden upon. I am courageous. I demand attention wherever I go. I am always energetic.

In the country, I'm a soft field of Poppies. I'm dazzling, ablaze with pigment, enough to excite the senses, unless one gets too close. For then, I intoxicate. I'm a drug. I seduced Dorothy into an almost deadly slumber. I am the ruby slippers that sent her home.

I am the sweet apple dipped in caramel. I am the lump in Adam's throat, his downfall, the temptation of Eve.

I am the cherry atop a sundae, the tree George Washington could not lie about.

But, I always come back to love. The most voluptuous of fruits, the berry that is heart-shaped, the fruit of Venus, the goddess of love.

Alluring, deceptive, cloaked and hooded, I flow with each stride making my way through the woods to Grandma's house. I am a bright cardinal perched in the snow, a shock to my surroundings, warning me to focus as I skip merrily through the woods. All is not as it seems. I chirp out a song.

I am portly, obese, *does my butt look big in this velvety costume*, as I squeeze my body down a soot encrusted chimney, after having endured endless lines of children, one at a time positioning themselves on my lap. I suffer through the meekness, shyness, fear, crying, beard tugging and greed as they each go over their never-ending lists.

I am the letter 'A' borne by Hester Prynne in a seventeenth century Massachusetts Bay Colony.

In royal vestments, I parade, like a prince ordained, only second to the Pope.