



Volume 26
Issue 1 *Planet Nowhere* (2017-2018 Issue)

Article 20

4-17-2018

Monochrome

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CU Commons Citation

Rothell, Kristin (2018) "Monochrome," *The Promethean*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.
Available at: <http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol26/iss1/20>

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Monochrome

Kristin Rothell

3rd Place

I grew up in a world of monochrome, clean cut and two shades. Black. White. Everyone spoke of vibrant color, greens and blues, purples and pinks. Splashes of paint on every surface, infusions of color beyond the wildest imagination.

My imagination was all I had.

I dreamt of a place where color was granted to me, the names foreign to the different hues, but beautiful in their mystery nonetheless.

I created every detail with an exactitude that surprised my friends, my family. I told them of the beautiful bluffs that roared a glaring pink, splashed with deep purple waves, rippling with bright blue grass, littered with lavender and pale pink trees. The dirt was green, the roots of the plants a deep, pulsing orange that bled a dirty red. The sky was a collision of aquamarine and soft yellow, intermixed with angry, roiling dark blue and brown clouds.

Rain fell like fire, bright oranges, yellows, reds, cascading down in seemingly endless torrents that graced my world with patches of their marvelous tones left behind on my blue grass.

The sun shone high above; yellows, blues, and a shade or two of orange intermingled and aided the incongruous world in its effort to survive.

The pages I drew came out in black and white, littered with smudges that to everyone else looked like amusing mistakes, great vistas drawn in stark contrasts. But to me . . . to me the sheets sprang to life, sung of a time when perceptions didn't matter and imagination ran free.

To me, this world was what I wished mine was.

I wished I could see those gorgeous cliffs, surrounded by every color imaginable, intermingled and mixed together into beautiful displays of abandon.

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Crayons lay before me, an expectant disbeliever eyeing me as he handed me one of the waxy sticks. I had never drawn in color, the concept as alien to me as the dreams I leapt into with anticipation every night.

BLUE

The grass.

A smile lit my face as my hand flew across the page, eyeing each crayon's designation carefully before putting it to work.

PURPLE

The waves.

PINK

Trees.

GREEN

Dirt.

The colors wove into each other as my creation came to life, uncaring of the disbelieving eyes that bored into my skull. I didn't have a care in the world as I spread my vision across the pages.

My hands ached.

My spirit soared.

I set aside the last crayon, a mere nub, its substance pressed and rubbed onto the previous white expanse of unused possibility. My heart was pounding, threatening to burst from my chest before I got the chance to meet the eyes of my curious onlookers. It was not fear that overtook me, it was an elated feeling of freedom, a freedom to share myself with those I loved and have them see what it was to live a life in monochrome.

Their faces were as I expected; my sister's eyes bulged in incredulity, my uncle's shone with barely suppressed tears of emotion I could not name. It was my mother's face that filled my entire being with a sense of relief; she looked at me as though I lit up her world, as though before she had merely existed and after having finally seen *me*, she could truly live. She looked at me with eyes so full of love, hope, and faith it made my colorless life well worth it to give her that.

It's amazing, my uncle said.

I can't believe it, my sister murmured.

My mother had no words. She gently took my hand in hers, a connection of fragility and love, and brought me to my feet. She pulled me closer until I could taste the dainty Safari perfume and eye shadow on my tongue, until my face pressed against her beating heart and my world coalesced into that one, pulsating movement. It never faltered, her heart, the steady beat pounding against my head and reverberating through my entire being until it lulled my own into its dependable rhythm.

I'm so proud of you, she whispered in my hair.

The words were everything I had ever dared dream I would hear, and I melted further into her embrace.

Thank you.

The words went unspoken, but I knew from the slight tightening of her arms around me that she heard, and understood them.

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The piece from that day hangs, framed and arranged together in a sort of collage, upon my mother's office wall. I have created others for her, drawn her things that existed, before, only in my imagination, and that I have dared to put to paper just for her. But the first remains her favorite.

She says it is because it was the first day I allowed her to see what she had known was there all along.

She says it is because it means the most to me.

She says it is her favorite because she would relish the fact that she had blue grass clippings on her shoes from mowing that overgrown cliff face.

I think it's because it was the day she saw my soul and she didn't blink twice at what she saw, and we have never once looked back.

I think it's because she loves me for who I am and those pages, preserved behind glass, represent the day I found my family.

I think it's her favorite because living a monochrome life doesn't mean I can't bring color into everyone else's.