

## **The Road to Grey**

### ***Red***

The colour of our romance, your raging passion; mine more subtle - a magenta wash. The first flower you gave me was a long-stemmed red rose, with velvet-soft petals, that brushed gentle on my lips as I breathed in its heady aroma.

You had a smile full of promises and eyes sparkling with mischief. You bought me lacy lingerie, intimate, the colour of devilment. Whispers in my ear lit a fire that flushed my cheeks rouge.

Your first meeting with my parents, an endless litany of questions from my father, my mother's heated gaze. You, a master of evasion.

'They'll be fine once they get to know you.'

My mother's warning. 'Why won't he talk about his past? There's something wrong there.' A stop sign she waves - danger ahead. The first time I hang up on her.

### ***Blue***

A sapphire engagement ring; cornflower blue, pure and true. Unconventional, but it's my favourite.

'I'll never leave you.' I know you mean it.

We plan the wedding, my parents defiantly uninvolved. We mail invitations, embossed gold on ice blue linen. No reply. I've stopped talking to them; can't bear the confrontation.

An outdoor ceremony, where trees grow tall above a carpet of wild bluebells. Nature is a shared passion. I feel like I'm walking on air. Your smile envelops me. I see myself in your eyes, in your soul, and know that is where I will always be.

We offer our vows. Encircled by friends. Lost in each other. We look up as man and wife and there are Mum and Dad. An unexpected arrival, they bring gifts of reconciliation and support.

### **Yellow**

We live. We work. We play. Through golden-sunset summers and yellow-leaf autumns. Through winters warmed by flickering flames and through daffodil springtimes. We buy a house, paint every room a different pastel colour, and fill it with us. We walk hand in hand. We eat in restaurants to the amber glow of candles. We sing old songs, out of tune, and laugh at ourselves.

I teach children. To write, to count, to draw. To smile at the world. A morning-shift barista, you paint in chocolate dust on coffee flavoured milk froth. Come afternoon you lay textured modelling paste and glaringly vibrant colour on canvas. Splashed and rugged urban abstracts. Street sales spark a gallery invitation. You exhibit, make a name for yourself.

Proud parents, ours, connected by us. Mine have learnt not to question. Yours are masters of evasion. Mine have accepted you and yours. 'They're just a private family. Some people are like that.'

### **White**

A television chat show and you the art world's current darling. Out of your depth. Drowning. They've done their homework, don't want to talk about art. Their revelation shocks you to silence. Your anxiety attack takes the show off air.

The years are peeled away and you're seven again, an immaculate. In the old neighbourhood. Hard working fathers. Mothers chatting at the fence. Kids bellowing and bouncing; off to the park to play. 'Be home by dinner.'

The life of a young boy is simple. A frog hunt took you along the edge of the long brick drain. You followed the croaking and lost track of time. The sky greyed, and you were late for dinner. You ran, picked up the path on the wrong side of the park.

The toot of a horn. You looked up as a car slowed. You recognised the man from your street. He was in your father's soccer team. 'You're out a bit late, aren't you? Hop in. I'll give you a lift home.' He wasn't a stranger. You got in, too innocent to know better. He smothered your purity with his filth.

### **Black**

The media vultures feast on that tale. Just as they did back then. They open old wounds with their razor-sharp tongues. They devour your flesh and leave

nothing but bones. Just as they did back then. They take your smile and they don't care. The value of your artwork soars and we don't care.

You hide from the world. Our curtains are closed, our pastel walls dimmed. Your canvasses are bare, your paints drying. You sit listless on the couch. All you can hear is the black dog barking.

I wish I had been prepared for this. I wish I had known you could be so damaged. That you were so damaged.

Your parents ring. You don't take the phone. You have chosen silence. They fight their own demons. What should they have done all those years ago? They thought they could make it go away. A new town. A new school. A new life. They didn't realise it was just packed up, a devil itching to spring from its box.

My mother brings casseroles. My father sits beside you talking sport, politics, world affairs. A one-sided conversation. He's doing his best.

I go to you when I hear you crying. You lay your head on my shoulder, weep your tears into the crook of my neck. That's when I know you're still here.

## **Grey**

I drive you to your appointments. Sometimes I'm asked to stay. We're in that space between the dark and the light. You've learnt to step out of the silence, but you're guarded about what you say.

Those who loved you did not know the seven-year-old boy shouldered the blame for that night and all that came from it. That it was shame, not fear,

snapping at your heels. If only you'd ignored the frogs. If only you'd headed home in daylight like you were supposed to. If only you hadn't got in the car.

One day, you will look that small boy in the eye, tell him none of this was his fault. You will forgive him for the frogs and the late hour and for getting in the car, because he was a child, too innocent to know better.