

The Colour of Happiness

Red. It's the most beautiful colour, don't you think?

In a glorious sunset at the end of a hot summer's day. In the soft curling petals of a rose. In a Tequila Sunrise, or bowl of berries and cream.

In the blood that briefly forms a droplet against the skin, a half-formed sphere, then gently tickles as it flees down the side of your arm.

Red, so they say, is a cure for sadness.

It's easy, now. To take the blade, to move it slowly, steadily down the inside forearm, guided by the map provided by nature. Not too deep though – just enough to break the skin, to encourage the mass of red droplets to emerge from their hiding places. Bring bits of my inside to the outside.

My lines are pretty goddam straight, don't you think?

I like the butterflies of anticipation, the racing heart. The just-before moment, when you know that relief is about to come. That the escaping droplets will soon dilute the inner pain. Suffering washed away with one's own blood. I watch as droplets become patterns, little squiggly trails of translucent crimson that record the journey. Like snails on a moist dewy morning.

After the initial release, comes joy. Waves of peace and beauty enter the wound and flow through the blue tributaries, displacing negative thoughts, flooding the deep places where despair often hides and festers. There is a great cleansing, a sense of renewal, an awakening from a cruel spell. Others may prosaically call these waves endorphins, but to me they are love incarnate. A rush of pure affection.

I am alive.

Everyone has their survival strategies, don't you think?

Smoking, internet gaming, online shopping. Mum, hers is cabernet merlot. Just a glass or three of liquid redness to drown the stresses of the day. Some ways of coping are more acceptable than others, but most leave scars. You just can't see those that are on lungs, on livers, on kidneys.

I can see mine. I can feel their texture, gently trace their shape with a fingertip. They are little sculptures crafted from skin. They are history, etched into the terrain of my body. This one, the betrayal of a friend. Over here, the loss of first love. But don't be mistaken, they are not monuments to pain; they are the trophies of my survival. My collection is a secret reminder that I will overcome this, the latest of life-tests, as I have done many times before. They are therapeutic adornments.

I am an artist.

Yeah I know, I know, one day I will have to stop. Before the cutaneous gallery becomes nothing more than a visual massacre, a deformity and disfigurement. I will find a new way to survive this tumultuous, unpredictable world. One that leaves invisible scars.

But that day is not this one.

The ancients were on to something, don't you think?

With those leeches, I mean. Rebalancing the body through the letting of blood. I am the re-balancer now, taking control of the dark corners. I am the displacer of depression, the banisher of bereavement, the arbiter of anger. I acknowledge the pain, the challenges of life; wear otherwise intangible emotions and memories on my corporeal self. Psychological lacerations given the gift of visibility.

I am a healer.

Mum is calling me to dinner, a cue to conclude the ritual.

I lift my arm, and lovingly kiss the latest creation. Give thanks for its sacrifice, welcome it to the family. I lick the faint metallic taste from my lips. The blood is drying now, red fading to brown, its work complete. It won't be long before happiness recedes and is replaced by the rising sting of the healing. But that's good – the physical trauma deflects from the emotional one. And as the external wound gradually closes over coming days, I can dare to imagine the internal one is doing just the same.

I am restored.

In the bathroom I wash arms, face, hands. Blade. Am grateful the cool evening will not lead to questions about jackets at the dinner table.

I wonder what is for dinner, and dessert. I hope there are strawberries. I really feel like strawberries.

Don't you?