

On Black

By Harrison Sheranian

WHY WE LIKE IT: *Literary grinchers will tell you not to start a short story/essay with paragraphs of description because you will lose the reader's interest. Okay. But we couldn't STOP reading the extended opening in 'On Black'. Technically, black isn't a colour. It's defined as 'the absence of light'. And for this reason—as a word—it comes loaded with symbolism. A beautifully written panegyric in a nuanced voice on the many literal, imagistic and mytho-poetical footprints of humanity's favourite non hue. Quote: In the summer, Black gets hot. My body gets too warm under any black clothes, my feet burn on the black tar of the road in my black shoes and the black mop of hair on my head cooks my scalp.*

On Black

Watching the sun slowly inch closer to clash with the moon, I marveled at the change to the earth it created. The shadow of the leaves left crescent dots on the warm cement and the fairy ring of mushrooms seemed to stand a little taller, ready to engage with the mystic forces in the sky. The sped up sun set shifts the colors on the grass, greens turning yellow turning red turning blue with the false night. The minutes pulled into hours. The time slowed to a crawl as the euphoria of the celestial bodies met, plunging the world into their dark passions. The toadstools glowed near the sleepy square-eyes of the goat and the chickens cooed, ready to roost. Nearby, the farmhouse breaths in relief from the moon blocked heat while the horses waltzed lazily towards the barn, confused and sleepy despite the morning chimes of the clocks. The explosion of ecstasy in the sky sent fiery rings of color to the horizon. Yellows, golds, reds, and greens surround the nighttime sky as if the Northern Lights migrated south. Billows of leftover sun ringed the dark hole that now stands in its place, giving Atlas a moment to stretch his overworked arms. The blackness spread from hill to hill all around me and I felt comfortable. I'd always felt comfortable in blackness. Light made me feel seen; in everyone's way. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not obsessed with black despite what this sounds like. I don't wear eyeliner, don't paint my nails black, I just like the ability to dissolve into the background. Avoid the attention. Hide in the black.

I've always liked wearing black. Shoes, Socks, Underwear, Jackets, Shirts, Scarfs. Everything; black. I used to think that it was mostly for the sake of being "cool" or "different" than the other brightly colored clothes the kids at school would wear. But I soon realized that I used it more as an invisibility tool. I wanted to melt into the back row of class, hide in the shadow under the tree when all the athletic jocks ran around in their tight, white wife beaters. I used to scoff, thinking that I was a deeper person than these guys. That I was more intelligent and more focused on

academics than on physical success. It was only after I started to realize I would stare at those toned, tanned guys that I realized I didn't hate them, I wanted that, wanted to be like them, wished desperately that white could look good on my chubby frame rather than looking like a marshmallow mascot. My motivation to actually change never worked. I would always fall back to the tasty breads and sugars that kept me round and covering myself in black clothes. The boys would grow taller, their muscles larger, their faces sharper, and I, I would be tall sure, but I would stay round and my cheeks would mirror my middle. The lack of facial hair couldn't hide any of the chipmunk face that I had and scarves could only do so much and only when it was cold. I think that's why I like winter.

In the summer, Black gets hot. My body gets too warm under any black clothes, my feet burn on the black tar of the road in my black shoes and the black mop of hair on my head cooks my scalp. I couldn't see attraction in my own body like the toned physique of the other boys. I felt like a malfunction on the processing plant. That after making the perfect and pretty cookies cut into the thin shape, I was the leftover dough plopped in the corner of the tray just to avoid going to waste. My misshapen personal image didn't help when I started to realize that I was attracted to those same boys that I couldn't look like. I feel that it might be different for men that are interested in women. Women's bodies are so different and interesting to me because no two look the same. I felt that a woman could be a twig or thick without causing any harm to their beauty. Women are strong and powerful and I also wanted to be like them. Damn, I wished that I was interested in women. It would have probably helped my feelings of isolation. But there I was, little gay boy wishing to look at all attractive compared to those male classmates.

Black made me feel smaller. I'm not the tallest person I know nor the heaviest but being in my own skin sometimes made me feel like I take up the room. I look at some of my family and friends, petite and short as though you can sit them all onto one chair without so much as a thigh touching another person. There's a story I always fall back to. Someone asks the question "would you rather be able to fly or turn invisible?" This is usually split pretty evenly in any room you ask. Personally, I always say flight. Shocking. You probably expected me to drone on and on about the power of invisibility and the way I've been saying I want to disappear into the shadows. Wrong. Flight. Oh, just imagine. Carried into the sky like the Eagles from Tolkein. Cascading through the deep blue of the night, being in such a large, empty space where I can't feel trapped or in the way. Not having to hide but instead performing like a phoenix or some mystical cherub. No one thinks that cupid is ugly or clumsy. But the daydream of flight must always come in to roost. I'm placed gently back onto the earth, my wings clipped and wrapped back up in black layers to try to hide again.

Recently, my eyes were opened to a new kind of role model. Ursula. The sea witch that tricks and traps the little redheaded mermaid might be an unusual role model but let me try to explain the raw power that I've realized she holds. This woman so commands her space that she fills up any scene she is in. She doesn't hide her body or use any black to cover herself up, rather she uses her darkness to take up even more of the space around her. Her massive tendrils wrap and weave throughout the cave we first meet her in. She is horrifying but commands the viewers awe. Her personality doesn't match the darkness she uses, rather she embraces the flamboyance, the charm and glee that surrounds her. Her hearty laughter rang through me after watching the film with a new lens. Her power, not including her magic just her raw, personal, fat power of

blackness really hit me and I realized that I should try to be more like that. More outgoing, more confident, more sea witch.

Of course, another role model character has appeared in my life. Leia Organa is a fierce and dedicated fighter in the early Star Wars films and that has not changed with the newer ones. Her character, now aged and more plump, is just as much of a fighter; just as strong of a character as she was in the eighties. One scene struck me in particular. When she is blasted into the darkness of space her willpower and family magic gives her the opportunity to pull herself back into the safety of the ship. Flying. She looks like Superman here. Oh, to fly and not have a care in the world. General Leia may not be as young and thin as Princess Leia but the way that she commands the empty space she's floating in, is the exact same way that Ursula commands the sea. No one I've ever talked to has ever complained about Carrie Fisher's weight or age in the new films. No one has ever said that she is not beautiful or that she is weak. In the film, Leia is a fierce and commanding presence that gave me another figure to look to and try to be. Maybe I don't need to be more like Ursula, flamboyant and improper, perhaps I need to be more like Leia, calm, wise, quiet but not because she is hiding, because she doesn't have to speak to be seen and respected.

Ironically, I grew up scared of the dark. So petrified of the empty silence of the black that I filled it with the hum of a muted television or the cracked door to a lit hallway. That darkness would drive me to nightmares. Reading stories that were innocent enough in the light, petrified me in the dark. The form of Golum, written in Tolkein's novel, with his flabby legs silently rowing his unblinking eyes towards me; the woman in the bathtub with her watery, bloated corpse, smiling and laughing at me in the dark. Creeping ghouls that felt more at home in the shadows than in the light were the bane of my sleep and I would start myself awake, cringing into the light. This like the ghosts that haunt Ebenezer Scrooge followed me and I was just as deaf to their whispers and lessons. These dark loving figures were not demons waiting to pounce. Rather, they were showing me the solitude and comfort of the darkness. As I got older, and started to understand the call to the black, I ventured closer. Walking past the two goblin figures, I'd encounter beauty in the night. The grace of a bat, nearly invisible as it acrobats through the air. The chill against the skin and the warmth of someone lying next to me. The steady beating of my heart, never exposed to the light, is thought to be red but without the light, isn't it only blackness.

No better time in my life did I feel so fully hidden in darkness as when that eclipse cast its shadow down on top of me. The prying eye; the judging eye of the sun was sent away abruptly. The cool breeze of the fake night pulled at my skin and I became extremely aware of my surroundings. The mushrooms a few yards to my left and beyond them the goat and chickens. The barn and horses to my right and the family surrounding me that I felt I needed to hide from too. In the moment, I was happy. Content and enthralled by the celestial shift. Only months after did I realize how excited I was to be able to disappear into the shadows, to shrink down like Alice going into Wonderland. Or perhaps the eclipse is giving me my chance. My chance to jump up and fly. Fly into that minute long night and control that dark sky. Spread out and feel comfortable. Be like Leia. Explore those same mushrooms and horses from a new angle. Untethered to the smallness and crampedness of the Earth and fly into that dark, magic sky.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I was inspired to write this work by Alexander Theroux's essay "Black" that goes in depth into the color black and its history as well as other connections. I noticed that it did not have much emotion or personal experience and I thought it would be unique to dive deep into that view of the color. My essay in turn is much more personal and has much more inner dialogue about black than Theroux's.*

BIO: *Harrison Sheranian is from Orem, Utah and is a senior at Utah Valley University studying English. His usual writing is in fiction but he has recently been expanding to other genres of writing.*