

HIGH SCHOOL AWARD

Bravura is delighted to feature work submitted by local San Diego high school writers. After reading many submissions, this year’s editor chose one winner – the short story "Everything is Blue" by Kristen De Pue, a freshman at Vista High School. Congratulations to all who submitted work, and keep writing!

EVERYTHING IS BLUE KRISTEN DE PUE

Sophie had never put much faith in soulmates.

Everyone around her seemed to rely on them, as if having a soulmate was the foolproof, direct way to a happy life. Of course, there were benefits to having a soulmate. They were supposed to be the one person who is guaranteed to love you. They are made for you, after all. But the main benefit, at least for Sophie, was finally getting your colors.

People could only see in monochrome, in variations of one specific color: the color of your soulmates eyes. Most people saw shades of brown, others in bright blues and greens. You could only see the full spectrum once you met your soulmate. It seems so simple: you meet your soulmate, and everything is sunshine and rainbows (literally). Unfortunately, there are still plenty of complications. One, many people never find their soulmate. Many soulmates live in separate countries, and even those who have spent years traveling don’t always find their soulmate. Two, if your soulmate dies, you can only see the color gray. Which means on top of the grief that you would surely feel, you also have a constant reminder of what you lost. Three, just because people are soulmates, doesn’t mean they don’t have issues. The reason Sophie doesn’t care about them? Some soulmates don’t even stay together. Like her parents.

Sophie watched her mother’s heart break when her father left them; it sent Sophie’s world spinning and shifting in and out of focus. She felt so much pain that after a while, she just felt numb. Sophie hated soulmates. What was the point of them if they could just leave, anyway?

Sophie picked up her messenger bag and slung it over her shoulder before leaving for school. She preferred to walk to school when the weather was nice, as it was now. Autumn was rolling in, the leaves on trees turning

darker (for Sophie, a darker shade of blue), and the air smelling of damp earth. Sophie looked around appreciatively, her black hair (though she saw it as indigo) swishing behind her as she turned. The rich fall air cooled her skin as she made her way down the winding streets, until she finally reached her destination. Springfield High School.

The building was old and needed a fresh coat of paint. But it was sturdy, and the school had good teachers, so that was enough for Sophie. Sophie wandered over to the secluded oak tree that had become the meeting place of Sophie and her best friend, Jean. Jean had her long hair tied up in a messy bun, and her aqua eyes glowed bright. She wore a thin sweater and held a cup of coffee in her left hand.

Sophie approached Jean and grabbed the cup of coffee without asking, a true sign of their friendship. Sophie took a sip and sighed.

“Long night?” Jean asked, her voice far too peppy for 7:00 A.M.

“Couldn’t sleep.”

They sat on the dew covered grass and talked about everything and nothing, all at once. Jean was

the one person who understood the stupid thoughts Sophie had and didn’t judge her for them; in fact, she usually said them first. With Jean, every moment was comfortable: silence, chatter, even their arguments were familiar. Jean was currently on a rant about how one of her teachers didn’t give her the grade she deserved on an assignment (they gave her a 96 when Jean said it should have been a 98). The bell rang in the middle of her sentence, and Sophie stood up.

“I am not looking forward to today. I have a presentation today!” Jean exclaimed.

“You’ll be fine. You’re always fine.”

Sophie and Jean walked reluctantly into the faded school building. Hundreds of kids pushed at each other on their way to class. The hallway buzzed with conversation, slamming lockers, and the pounding of feet on the linoleum. Vivid shades of cobalt, teal, and navy flooded Sophie’s vision as she made her way to AP U.S. History. Suddenly, someone rammed into Sophie from the left.

“Hey, excuse me -” Sophie scolded, turning towards the boy who ran into her.

That’s when the world exploded.

Or, at least, that’s what it felt like. Dozens of new colors and shades engulfed Sophie’s senses enough to give her a bout of vertigo. Sophie edged her way to the lockers to lean against them for support. Everything seemed too flashy and intense. Pinks, yellows, and greens screamed at her from all directions. Sophie vaguely heard a voice asking her if she was all right-it must have been Jean. But Sophie couldn’t look at Jean. Sophie was

staring straight at the boy, who was gazing back at her. He had blue eyes.

“Um. Hi.” The boy’s dark, curly hair was pulled back into a bun. He wore a black jacket over a button up shirt, and jeans. He also looked a bit scared.

Sophie stopped leaning against the lockers, and stood tall.

“Jean. Let’s go.”

“But, Sophie,” Sophie started towards their shared class, “Sophie, shouldn’t you go to the nurse? You don’t look good. You almost fainted-”

“I’m fine.”

“Sophie-”

“Jean. I’m all right. I promise.” Jean squinted at her like she didn’t believe her. Sophie didn’t

blame her. Finally, Jean shrugged.

“Whatever. If you pass out in history don’t say I didn’t try.” Oh, right. Class. How could Sophie possibly focus now? She’d just ditched her soulmate (oh, no, no no, why a soulmate?) and her new vision was beginning to give her a headache. She glanced sideways at Jean. Her hair was blonde, Sophie noticed, and her sweater a pastel lavender. In fact, everything she was wearing was a pastel color. Jean noticed her gaze and looked at her. Her eyes were hazel, and there was a glint in them when she smiled. Somehow, Sophie smiled back.

“What are you thinking about?” Jean asked softly. “Just...I’m lucky to be your friend.”

Jean grinned. “Damn right you are.”

Somehow, Sophie made it through three classes before the sweet one-hour refuge of lunch. Jean was waiting for her in the line, where they spent ten minutes sighing and yelling at kids who tried to cut them. Finally, they got their food and walked out to sit at their oak tree. Sophie was just getting used to the oranges and reds of leaves that glimmered in the sunlight, when Jean left to talk to someone about a project. That’s when he walked over.

“Hi...again. Uh. We didn’t really get a chance to talk earlier so-”

“That was the point.” Sophie replied snarkily.

“Well. I’m Jason. And you are?” Jason held out his hand for Sophie to shake.

“Not interested.” Sophie turned to leave.

“Wait! That’s-uh-that’s not really how soulmates work.” Sophie was fed up with this guy. She couldn’t take it anymore.

“Listen to me, Jason. I don’t need nor want a soulmate. We got our colors, and now we can go our separate ways. So get lost. Have a good life or whatever.” Jason looked miserable, and Sophie’s heart twinged. But she didn’t take it back.

“Can you at least tell me your name?” Jason asked in a voice barely above a whisper. Sophie thought about it for a moment.

“Sophie.”

“Hey.” Jean had found Sophie sitting at a bench near the cafeteria. “I saw you talking to that guy again, the one from this morning. Do you have a thing for him?”

“No!”

“Damn. Well I took the liberty of gathering intell about him anyway.

His name is Jason Carpenter. He’s a junior-so I’m surprised we don’t have at least one class with him-and he just moved here from another state. He’s a kind of stay-in-the-background kid, but of course people know him because he’s new. There was a rumor a while back about him being Maya’s soulmate, which I’m sure she spread herself. He does a ton of volunteer work and takes a lot of AP classes-so he’s your type.”

“Hey!”

“I’m just saying! Anyway, he loves Drama-he’s going to be in the next play-and he loves reading. His best friend is Jerry Perez, who’s in band. Jason lives downtown, has a dog named Shadow, and one older brother, Thomas. He goes to the river a lot, like you do. He-”

“How did you even get this much information?”

“I have my sources. But if you don’t like him I guess it’s all a waste of time. He’s really nice. He doesn’t have problems with anyone, and that’s surprising for Springfield. You should try to be his friend. A kid who manages not to get into fights with anyone at our school? He must be wonderful.

“Ha.”

“Sophie, are you okay? You seem off today.”

“I’m fine. Can we, just, not talk about Jason? Please?” Jean appeared confused for a second. Then her face cleared.

“Oh...Sophie! How could you not tell me?”

“What?”

“He’s your soulmate! Jason Carpenter is your soulmate!”

“Shhh! Keep it down, Jean. What makes you think that, anyway?”

“Oh come on. I know you. You’re a terrible liar. You need to talk to him!

Also, my information will prove useful after all.”

“No, Jean. We’re not going to talk. We’re going to live our lives as if nothing happened.” “Sophie. Hear me out. I know you...have your reservations about soulmates. But, Soph...he’s not your father. He’s an intelligent, sweet, funny guy. He’s a loyal guy. I talked to Jerry about him, because I thought you might like him and I wanted to make sure he was a good person, and he is just about one of the best boys you could have as a soulmate. Maybe you could give him a chance. I know, you don’t want to be hurt. But soulmates are really nothing more than over glorified best friends, right? You took a chance with me, and I could have hurt you in the same way your father hurt your mom. But I won’t. And neither will he. Sometimes you have to risk getting hurt in order to be happy in life. You put your heart

in someone's hands and trust them to keep it safe. You put your heart in my hands, Sophie. You put your heart in your mother's hands. And we gave our hearts to you in return. Maybe you could learn to give Jason your heart, too."

Jason sat on the riverbank looking at the water. He was glad he could finally see it the way it was supposed to look, with its bluish tint and murky depths. But the one person that he wanted to revel in the world's wonders with didn't want anything to do with him. Honestly, he felt like he should have expected that. Why would she want him anything to do with him? He had barely caught the girl's name. Sophie.

Jason stood up, preparing to walk back to his car and go home. Instead, he fell into the fast moving river.

Sophie was on her way to the river, one of her places to escape to, when her heart stopped. Something was wrong; something bad was happening. Her vision flashed gray. Then again, for longer this time. Jason. Something was wrong with Jason. Sophie pulled over, panicking. What was happening? Where would she go to find him? She couldn't just do nothing.

He goes to the river a lot, like you do. Jean's words echoed in Sophie's mind. The river. She was almost there; it was her only chance.

Sophie dashed out of her car and ran.

Her vision kept fading out more and more, making her feel sick. She ran along the riverbank, trying to focus.

"Jason! Jason!" Sophie called out. You idiot. He can't hear you. Still running, Sophie spotted something moving a few feet ahead. An arm. Sophie put on more speed, trying to keep up with him. When she was close enough, she jumped in.

The water was freezing, even with the sun still up. The gray vision lasted longer than ever, the color almost completely gone. Sophie fought against the current to reach Jason. She managed to grab his arm.

And he slipped out of reach once more. It's over, she thought. He's going to die. I'm going to die. What a tragic love story. Goodbye, mom. Goodbye, Jean.

But no, Sophie struggled harder and succeeded in holding Jason with a firmer grip than before. Seeming to move agonizingly slow, Sophie swam to the riverbank. At last, she pulled herself and Jason out of the river, where she spluttered and coughed while trying to catch her breath.

Jason.

Sophie looked over at Jason. His skin was pale, and his hair had come out of its bun from the exertion. Sophie moved towards him quickly, holding Jason up and attempting to force the water out of his lungs. It's too late. Sophie began to cry.

Jason coughed.

"Jason!" He struggled for a few minutes to catch his breath.

"Sophie?" he breathed out when he finally regained his voice. "I...what happened?"

"You fell. Or something. I don't know. And I...my vision started to go gray. Like you were

dying." Her voice caught on that last word. "I was on my way here anyway. So I came. I hoped you would be here."

"How did you know that I came here?"

"Um. My best friend, Jean. She talked to your friend. Anyway."

"But I thought you hated me?" Sophie stopped rambling.

"I don't hate you. I...I'm scared. I never wanted a soulmate. I never had that fascination all the other kids seemed to have. I guess I never really saw the point in soulmates, in having a 'destiny'. Having a life you didn't choose. And, well, even if I did hate you, I still wouldn't just let you die." Jason laughed weakly.

"I'm scared too, Sophie. I always was scared about having a soulmate. About not being good enough for someone, about letting someone I care about down. About hurting someone." For a moment, neither of them said anything.

"I was always scared about being hurt." Sophie admitted finally. Jason thought for a minute.

"Maybe we don't have to be. I don't believe all the stuff they say about soulmates, about how your life is instantly happier. Brighter, maybe, because of the colors. But it's people who have the power to make us happy. And that doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't have to be your soulmate. My best friend makes me happy. I'm sure yours does too. So, yeah, I guess we're 'made for each other', or whatever. But it's up to us to make it real." Sophie smiled, and for the first time, she felt something different about soulmates. Hope.

"So...friends?" Sophie asked tentatively. Jason beamed. His smile made his blue eyes appear lighter, and in them Sophie saw some of the same hope reflected back at her.

"Friends."