

Fifty Shades of Blue

By Andrea Kim Roach

Violet was feeling blue again, although saying it out aloud made her laugh which was a bit of a contradiction. Laughing and feeling sad were incompatible. "I am more a Bluebell than a Violet" she thought, "there is definitely more blue in me than red, in fact there is no red at all". At 25, she lived, and had her entire adult life, in varying degrees of sadness. Being blue had become an intrinsic part of who she was. Perhaps that muffled sense of sorrow had always been there, even when she was a child, lurking in the shadows, ready to obscure any tiny ray of joy? However, when asked, Violet always said it had really started when her cat "Azul" died, on the eve of her eighteenth birthday. He had died in terrible pain, fighting an invisible aggressor, right in front of her eyes. It had been the saddest thing to watch.

Azul means blue in Spanish. Since then, everything in her life was blue. Blue is the only colour with a very similar name in many European languages (apart from Spanish) blue, bleu, blu, blau, ble. Violet was convinced this fact was significant. After Azul had died, she had spent a whole evening researching the origins of the word blue and why we use it to mean sad. She read a lot of conflicting theories of where and when the concept originated, but a nautical influence seemed the most probable one to her.

"When you are at sea the whole world around you is monocolour, albeit fifty shades of it" she had reasoned. "Day after day in the middle of the ocean, with only blue water and blue sky to look at, that would surely make anyone feel melancholic!"

There was something very poetic and almost pleasurable in feeling blue. In some unconscious way she kept looking for reasons to be sad. She never had to look very far. She had no real friends, no boyfriend, no money, a solitary rented flat that she hated and her career was non-existent.

Violet found it difficult to maintain a steady job. Her sulky expression and lack of enthusiasm was one of the main reasons they always gave when "having to let her go". Restaurants, shops and cafes apparently couldn't cope with sad-eyed staff. Her latest job however was going better than usual. She had started working for the charity Wateraid as a street fundraiser and strangely enough the sad look in her eye seemed to work in her favour. Her sign-up rate was by far the highest in her team. Possibly her sad demeanour made her less threatening so people were more inclined to stop, or maybe they just stopped out of pity. Whatever the reason, perhaps this time she could make the job last longer than a few months?

Today, however, wasn't going so well, she could feel the blues making the corners of her mouth sag more than usual. She hadn't managed to sign-up anyone the whole morning. "I must try smiling" she thought and forced a smile just as a tiny old lady was approaching. The old woman smiled back and stopped. She wasn't the kind of

client they had taught Violet to target. She was too poorly dressed, too frail looking and far, far too old. But the woman had stopped so Violet could hardly just ignore her.

“How are you?” she asked.

“Oh, I am just fine dear” the lady replied in such a quiet voice that Violet had to move closer to hear what she was saying. “Isn’t it a beautiful day! My name is Indigo”.

“That’s a nice name” said Violet, “Indigo is my favourite colour. I just adore that rich, deep blue that verges on violet. My name is Violet you know!”

She smiled, this time a real smile, then they both laughed and started chatting with such ease that Violet soon found herself opening up to this kindly stranger. Before she could stop herself, she was telling Indigo about her dissatisfaction with life in general. She told her about her solitary childhood; she had been an excellent student which meant she wasn’t popular and as a consequence, had had very few friends. Although she was good at maths and science, her real passion had been art. She had wanted to go to art school but her parents had discouraged her, they wanted her to go to university and have a career. They had argued violently, as they usually did. Nobody had won that argument; she went neither to art school nor to university. Instead, she had left home straight after college and since then lived alone in this big city, drifting from one boring job to another. Indigo was a good listener and said all the right things. It felt good to talk to someone.

“But that’s enough about me” apologized Violet, realizing she had been speaking about herself for far too long, “you look happy, tell me your secret”.

“Well, let me tell you a story” replied Indigo, so they sat down on a nearby bench. They continued talking for just over an hour but those sixty minutes changed Violet’s life forever.

Indigo was Italian, she had grown up in a little village on Lake Como, both her parents were teachers. She had done well at school and gone on to study law in Milan. By the time she was thirty she had become a well-respected lawyer. She met Aohito who was half Japanese, born to a noble family that owned a big house on the lake, when she was still at university and had loved him her whole life. Aohito was an inventor, a dreamer, a man who spent his nights playing the piano alone in his family villa and his days locked away in his study inventing things. Interesting things, but he lacked any of the practical skills required to commercialise them. He was an introvert, a man of few words but of great intuition and intellect.

Indigo had thought they would marry, have children, travel and explore the world together but her dreams never materialised. He wasn’t the marrying kind. They went for dinner every Friday evening and for a walk every Sunday afternoon. Year after year the same unchanging routine. She started to refer to herself as the eternal fiancée when anyone asked. It was not the life Indigo had imagined for herself. She clung to her love for Aohito and the rare moments spent together but, in the end, it wasn’t enough. As the years passed depression became her daily companion, insidious and unabated, it slowly worked itself into every fragment of her life. She withdrew from any form of social life, avoiding people and conversations she didn’t

want to have. In time, she lost her well-earned reputation and then later her job. For months she didn't even have the energy to get out of bed. In the end, Aohito intervened and made her go to a psychiatrist. They prescribed her anti-depressants, so she was able to function again, albeit cocooned in a drug induced monotonous existence of daily routines and solitude. Life continued.

Forty-three years later, at 68, Aohito finally decided he was ready to move in with Indigo. Three weeks later he died of a sudden heart attack.

Among Aohito's belongings Indigo discovered notebook after notebook filled with haiku poems (a Japanese form of poetry that consists of short, unrhymed lines). Some of these poems he had written himself, but most he had carefully copied, with his perfect calligraphy, in Japanese and in English. It was a passion she had never knew he had. She spent almost two weeks after the funeral sitting alone in her garden reading the contents of the hundred notebooks. As she read, slowly the beautiful poems filled Indigo with a feeling that had eluded her all these years. A feeling of unconditional serenity.

Life is full of joy

Live in the moment and appreciate it

Every day is a gift

From that moment forward Indigo resolved that she too would fill her life with joy. She would take the time every day to notice and record at least three reasons to feel happy. In the years that followed she filled her own notebooks with daily lists of reasons to thank the Creator for another day upon this Earth. Her lists were a kind of haiku in themselves.

An unexpected phone call from my niece

Cappuccino with a chocolate heart at my favourite café

A rainbow sunset

“Today I have already found my three reasons” exclaimed Indigo at the end of her story, with a joyful twinkle in her eyes. “First, I saw a swift fly to its nest and feed its chicks this morning. So sweet! One of the chicks was hanging out the nest with its mouth so wide open I thought it would swallow its mother! Second, my hydrangea bushes are in full bloom, the flowers are the most amazing colours you can imagine. Each one is a slightly different hue of blue. And last, but not least, Violet, I met you and have had a lovely little chat!”

Large tears started to roll down Violet's cheeks but of delight, not sadness. She no longer felt blue, instead she felt inspired. Inspired to change her life too, to fill it with love and to find her own reasons for joy each day. She would transform her ultraviolet existence into an infrared one, full of passion and excitement. Step after small step she would move her life along the spectrum of a thousand colours and finally start living the life she wanted.

Violet never saw Indigo again but the memory of that tiny stranger, and her enthusiasm for life, remained forever with her. True to her word she too started making lists, not just daily lists of reasons to be happy, but also bucket lists of exciting things she would do.

*Roses are red, Violet is blue
Blue throat chakra, calm self-expression
Blue-sky thinking, creative and alive.*