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The Colour of Night

By Michael John Bertrand

All my preparations are complete. The latest round of rat studies produced rats with the fourth type of cone (what I call the “yellow” cone for now) in both eyes one hundred percent of the time. All the rats are strong and healthy and show no obvious signs of distress at their new condition. I therefore now consider my retroviral concoction to be a complete success.

Now on to Phase II. I have secured, by mostly legitimate means, the necessary anaesthetics, and I have turned both anaesthetics and retroviral cocktail into easy-to-self-administer eye drops. I have borrowed a medical bed to monitor my condition while I slumber and the eye drops do their job, and I have made sure I will not be interrupted during the procedure.

All lies in readiness. I have only to return home, put two drops in each eye, and settle down for good long nap.

This is the moment, Andrew. The moment when we step across the threshold of destiny and enter the pure clean light of glory, fame, and our rightful place in history as the geniuses we both are.

I could never have done this without you, dear brother. For that, and so many other things, you have my unending gratitude.

When next I wake, I will see the world as no human being has done before.

What a brave new world that will be!

February 22, 2027

Sorry if the length of time since my last message to you caused you worry, dear brother. Rest assured, I am quite well. My flawless formula did its job with smooth perfection and I awoke from my fateful nap feeling perfectly well rested, with no pain in my eyes or neurological impairment.

It just took me this long to update you on my condition because there have been a few minor complications.

When I awoke, I discovered that, to my bemusement, my carefully constructed “colour neutral” sleep room was now, to my fresh, eyes, a riot of colour and radiance. Curlicues and rosettes of vibrant, scintillating hues covered every surface, and the air seemed filled with a glowing fog of prismatic splendour.

It was all quite overwhelming, and I spent an hour just sitting there, letting my mind adjust to this new kind of input, and enjoying the show.

When I was ready, I took out my personal tablet, quite ready to write to you immediately and tell you of my success, only to find that my trusty tablet’s display was a riot of mottled, seething dots to me now, with no more sense or meaning than a multicoloured Rorschach test.

How silly of me to have failed to anticipate such a simple thing! I had to smile at my own foolish hubris. Luckily, as I slowly and carefully explored my apartment in order to give my new eyes fresh input to discover, I slowly attuned to my new inputs and today, after a highly productive adjustment to the color settings on my tablet, I am back in business and ready to document my findings, and of course, to write to you, my dearest brother, and tell you of my adventures.

Tomorrow I shall leave my apartment for the first time since the procedure. I anticipate fresh splendours anew.

February 23, 2027

I am a fool, dear brother, a damned stupid fool, and I have only myself to blame. How well I remember all those times you warned me that I was too reckless, too bold, too thoughtless, too prone to wild enthusiasms for my own good. How right you were, my brother. How I wish I had listened to your sage advice.

My life is wretched now, dear brother, and I have only myself to blame. My adventure in the world outside my apartment was an abysmal failure, a nightmare of disastrous revelations, and I know now that I am truly damn'd by my own hubris.

For example, you know how much I love the sunshine. I was always the skylark to your night owl, and for me there was nothing more glorious than a bright and cloudless day.

Well now, I loathe the sun. Natural light is the enemy, and its wide spectrum rays are evil itself. Anything lit by the sun now looks gruesome and frightening to me. The colours seethe and pulse in such a way as to turn everyday objects into menacing, dazzling blobs. The very air seems charged with violent menace when that harsh, disgusting light is in the room.

Speaking of disgusting, I now find it nearly impossible to eat. No food is its proper color in my chromatic hell, and even something as simple as a glass of milk looks like it has been used by a mad painter to wash a thousand paintbrushes.

But I can handle the food issue (one can always eat with one's eyes closed). But people...oh Andrew, the people.

People now look like blotched and diseased monsters to me. Shadows leap all over their faces and, thanks to my new eyesight, I can see their internal processes as glowing neon colours sliding across their skin like snakes made of mud.

I don't know what to do, dear Andrew. You cannot rescue me from my own folly this time. The process is quite irreversible. Any attempt to eliminate the new cones would leave me blind, eyeless, or worse.

But would that be so bad? I must confess to you, dear brother, that part of me wants to put out my eyes like poor Oedipus. Better to be blind than to live in this psychedelic hell, whispers this voice. It would be child's play to prepare a solution that would painlessly and permanently blind me.

And then I would be free.

Pray to Allah for me, dear brother. I need his guidance now more than ever.

February 24, 2027

Rest easy, dear brother. I have made my peace with my new condition, and will not be following Oedipus' example after all.

What saved me was the night. At the height of my misery, I looked out the window of my apartment into the night sky, and what I saw nearly froze my soul with wonder and awe.

I saw a sky filled with glittering, shimmering angels where stars used to be. They danced and spun for me, as beautiful and evanescent as rainbows, and there were thousands of them. The sky you see is nothing but a pale scattering of diffuse baubles compared to the splendours that now fill my night time. I can see stars invisible to the human eye, and I can see the visible ones so well now that I am almost tempted to become an astronomer.

To me, the stars are now beautiful beyond compare. The moon is as brightly colored as a child's ball. Even the night sky itself shimmers with delicate aurorae. What is too intense in the day is elegant and subdued in the night. Even the people look better under the light of the moon. And at night, there is no cruel sunshine to create foul phantoms out of thin air.

At night, there is only the cool soothing light of the moon and stars, or the wonderfully limited spectrum of electric light.

So now I am a night owl like you. I sleep through much of the day, and read in my bedroom for the rest. Through considerable experimentation, I have managed to make my bedroom once more neutral and calming to my eyes, though no doubt to you it would be quite jarring and garish. It is my safe haven, my sanctum, my island of sanity in a world driven insane by my foolhardy experimentation. In that room, with my colour-adjusted tablet, I feel safe.

And when the sun sets, I am free. I roam the streets, drunk on beauty and sensation, smiling at the flickering monsters that speak like human beings, and feel more alive and at peace than I ever have before. Sometimes I just sit on a park bench and stare up at the night sky, and drink in the wonder and the bliss that it brings.

I have passed through the eye of the needle, brother, and come out the other side changed for the better. Gone is that frantic restlessness that used to drive me. Now I feel serene and beautiful all the time. I feel like I am glowing.

I look forward to seeing you soon when you return to Earth, dear brother.

But forgive me if I can only meet you at night.