

Shades of Blue

by [Lucius Falkland](#) (October 2023)



Night Crossing, Matthew Wong, 2018

Even Under Fire

I see you in that Café Rouge in Winchester;
Your face like a crimson pear,
You wheeze with laughter,
Collapsing into joy which spreads to everybody there
Like some life-affirming mass-contagion.
Your captain wrote as much on the record that we found:
“Imperturbably happy, even under fire.”

I caught it, so did everyone around.

Only once did I see you tearful:

Saving Private Ryan, the beach landing in France;

Were you thinking of your pregnant, widowed sister?

You stopped yourself when you saw my glance.

I'd ask for a "war story" when you'd visit.

You'd sit me on your knee; a comic version of your strife:

Being shot at in North Africa, killing unknowingly,

You did the thing I yearn for; you brought History to life.

Sadness pierced me like an ice-pick at that bus stop

As you told me we'd see each other no more.

You thanked me for the time we'd spent together;

The exhibition on the Home Front and the War.

Two days before you died I saw this in a dream.

You were Churchill; it was all so very clear.

It was time for you to go now.

I watched you shrink to black and disappear.

I broke down on that red, plastic bench,

At the age of twenty-nine, that boy you knew,

Wanting "war stories" and playing up at bedtime,

Had returned and was weeping over you.

Two days later, I couldn't stop myself, beside my baby
daughter,

"Be British!" but I couldn't. I don't think you'd quite see:

An hour it'd take to walk down your cobbled High Street,

As you joked with "all them old boys;" imperturbably happy.

Shades of Blue

A week after our meeting, you had such a dream

That you lay in my arms on a shingly beach

On a darkest blue night; sea-whispering, serene;
A World War II watchtower just beyond reach.

You wrote that you'd found all you'd ever desired:
Ontological double, by you set aflame.
As you read me your diary; my face, tears mired,
I wished you'd known when you typed it, I'd felt close to the
same.

But it was when we returned to that Lower Marsh pub
Where we'd felt it, those moments, that resonance, each clue,
I was transported back; plus seventeen months of love.
Across a turquoise-squared table, I gazed into you

As if into my soul; your eyes of blue fluorite,
Aventurine, mine, only slightly more blue.
I'd spend my life by that watchtower that sapphire night.
Back where it all started, I finally knew.

Man's Intuition

We didn't find many new things in common.
We understood all we shared and we hadn't forgotten.
We submerged ourselves in the history, as though a summer
pool:
Norman churches, derelict mansions; until we felt we'd felt it
all.

We exchanged little that was new and intimate
About school playground exclusions or fair weather playmates.
We'd done all that; there was little left to say.
Our childhoods were clearly the same way.

But there were overloaded senses, so arguments did arise,

Though they never escalated. You saw you in my eyes
And I me in yours; so no personal attacks, no air turned blue,
And that is how I knew.

The Road from Great Budworth

In the shade of the birches, in the oily marshland,
I watched a mallard duckling,
A few emerald flecks on his tawny head and neck:
Maturing, deepening in green; nearly ready to face the forest.

Then I saw us in the Forest of Delamere
And, again, as I drove us there
From Great Budworth,
Or, actually, nervously operated the machine,
As you – air traffic control – exasperated, talked me down,
The real pilot dead or, rather, only trained to fly
In a world of cloudless, empty sky.

“You’re *too* close to the hedge!”
“You’ve got to be *confident!*”
“The *real* danger is braking like that!”
“I *can’t* be your eyes!”

Like expecting the smoothest of woodland walks,
To find pines uprooted on telegraph poles,
Lightning crackling and smoking:
The spindly twigs of self-control
In both of us snapped again and again,
Splinters flying fast enough to graze,
Near misses, alders almost hit,
But, somehow, never quite set ablaze.

Your staccato jolts at me,
Or my petulant swearing at a mum driving home,

Your humiliation at my parking at Tarporley
And my response, heart racing: "Just, please, leave me alone."

I think we knew we both felt the same
For the same precise reasons in those winding streets,
And would react along the same exact spectrum
If in the other rented Vauxhall Corsa seat

Such that what could've been a tempest
Was, instead, the summer rain
We felt at the Twemlow Viaduct: The act,
But never the person, attacked,
For that would just be hurting oneself.

I'd walk a few paces behind you for a while,
And we'd both apologise; varied who first,
As if saying "Sorry" to ourselves,
Such that I'm glad our tryst in Cheshire
Was peppered with little fights.
Somehow it made us closer,
Never torrents, only Harvest showers,
Through whose petrichor we could scent the future.

I didn't know being in love can mature,
Can grow emerald feathers,
Begin to prepare
For the copse to come.

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