

The Colour of Love

by Oscar Windsor-Smith

Sleep on, George. Sleep through the storm, you always could, and so you shall this time. Remember how I used to wake you up to watch the lightning? You were never afraid of the bangs, not like me. We'd sit together wrapped in blankets watching hailstones dancing, rattling on the roof. You said, Tom, if you can count your fingers slow from flash to bang the thunder's one mile distant for each hand.

If it's true, that one was close. Not even one finger that one. Too close. We'd best be getting back soon as dawn breaks and I can tell which way's home.

It's like the old times, George, you and me in the dark, our heads pressed into the wet earth, hiding from the gamekeeper, a brace of rabbit in one hand and our little shotgun in the other. Do you recall the time he let loose with his 12-bore, and the shot whistled about our ears?

There's another of them bright moving lights, shooting stars you called them, floating through the fog and flashes. The wind has come back too, rushing overhead, and the hail dancing in the mud.

That wind. I'm thinking how we used to run through long grass, Ben barking at our heels. And the day we found him half-strangled by a rabbit snare. You held the gun to his head, said he wouldn't feel no pain, if we loved him it was the kindest thing to do.

I carried him home, all blood and brains, and set him in the ground. Is that love, George?

When I look up the sky's a circle, not stretching on forever like it did when we were boys. Back then, you told me they've got names, all those little stars, and God lives up above, and He can see everything. Is that true, George? Did God see our father beat our

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mother 'til the blood ran down her face, and me throwing him out in the lane like the animal he was?

They say God loves us, George. The priest says: This is the body of Christ; this is the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ. The love of God. Do you believe it? Does He really love us, even when we've done bad things?

I've something else to tell you while you sleep. Before we left I saw you in the meadow with Alice. I crept up when I heard her pretty voice, and watched you mount her like bull on cow. I saw the colour flow between her legs and stain the grass. I did a bad thing. Did God see me then, George? Will I really go blind?

You know me, George. I believe what you say. You told me our guns have names and I believed you. Yours has the same name as mine, Tom, brothers like us, you said. What was that name? The side of a hill and where we keep chickens... Lee Enfield, that was it. But these Lee Enfields are heavier than our little shotgun.

The sky's brightening. No more night to mask the bloody truth. Forgive me George. For I could not bear to see you suffer. You'll feel no more pain. Forgive me, God, for I did so love my little brother.

There's the first daylight shining on the crater rim. Head away from the light, you said, that's west, the direction of our lines.

Listen to that storm now. There must be a thousand gamekeepers on our tail this morning, George, all firing at once.

So it's over me shoulder you go, my pal; us both smothered in the colour of love, yours and mine. We'll be off home to Mother presently.

Ready!

Set!

And over the top we go, into the wind and the dancing hail.

I can see the wire.

We're almost home, George.

Is it true, what you said? There's nothing to fear; you never hear the one that kills...

