Colors

by vic fortezza

Frowning, loosening a purple tie, Tony pushed through the golden revolving doors of a skyscraper. He drifted into the crowded midtown street as if in a daze. He was roused to his senses as his cell phone sent out the melody of his wedding song.

Perfect timing as usual, he thought, shutting off the phone, his memory flashing back to the whiteness of his wife's gown that happy day.

She would assume he was still in the interview, which had gone so badly he was ashamed to speak to her. He imagined she was tsk-tsking at his having neglected to turn the device off in the first place. No doubt she pictured him gazing at his inquisitor with egg on his face. It was the lesser of two evils at present.

Suddenly he stopped and peered at the lapel of his suit. The pin was there, tiny pink feet standing out boldly against the blue fabric. Dummy, he thought, rolling his eyes heavenward, certain it accounted for the woman's coldness. Nervous, he had forgotten to take it off. He tried to tell himself he wouldn't want to work for someone so intolerant, but it wouldn't wash. There were always those with whom he vehemently disagreed, friends, co-workers, family, and he would never disown any of them.

He entered a bar, ordered a margarita, and watched TV. An hour and three more drinks later, he left, satisfied nothing disastrous had occurred in Iraq. No news is good news, he thought, amazed at the miracle that seemed to be taking place in that backward, bleached land. Just months ago all seemed lost, and he'd doubted his support, as a majority of Americans were waving a white flag. Goes to show, he told himself; never surrender.

He was hit by the alcohol the moment he stepped onto the sidewalk. He paused, gathering his wits. He sniffed contemptuously at a political poster. The senate's most liberal member was likely to be the next president. He shuddered at the thought. Would the economy ever shake its slump if taxes were raised and regulations

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tightened? Would the enemy be encouraged by an emphasis on diplomacy rather than force? Most states were trending blue. Citizens were fed up with red. Or is it the other way around? he wondered, suddenly confused.

Squinting, he moved from the grays of shadow into brilliant sunshine. It was a beautiful late summer day, no trace of smog, the sky a perfect azure, people sporting a summery bronze glow. Many were clad in bright colors, yellow or orange shorts. Tourists, he thought, amused. His spirits momentarily lifted, then plummeted. He'd been out of work ten months, after having been at the same company for almost 30 years. He hadn't been surprised when the ax fell, unlike certain colleagues, who'd been in denial. He'd seen it coming and cut back on expenses well before the arrival of that black day. Fortunately his children had finished college and were on their own. He was in no danger of missing a mortgage payment. Many were not as fortunate. He had yet to touch any of his buyout money, which he'd invested in a CD. Although his wife was working, and against his better instincts, he'd filed for the 13-week unemployment extension. The government did not even check if one were truly in need. It handed out money willy-nilly. He felt low, dirty, part of the entitlement mentality that plagued the nation. He tried to rationalize it by telling himself he was simply recouping the taxes that had been plundered from his check, but he couldn't fool himself. He wondered if it were time to leave New York for a state more hospitable to the middle class, as many were doing. Although he was terribly out of step here politically, he could not imagine himself anywhere but the place he'd always lived and loved.

He noted the silvery glint of the plastic bottles that littered the street. There were aluminum cans and glass as well, tons throughout the five boroughs. He wondered if he could make a business of recycling, become his own boss, use that good old Yankee ingenuity. Wasn't he being unrealistic in thinking anyone would hire a man of 55? Why not eschew the white collar world? A former colleague had taken a job as a security guard, another was driving a yellow hack. Maybe that was the way to go, or maybe to

use the internet somehow.

He entered the subway at Broadway. It was not yet rush hour. There was plenty of room on the train. As he sat, his brown eyes were immediately drawn to a dapper middle aged couple, arms entwined, seated across from him. They seemed so out of place. He wondered if they too were cutting back on expenses, eschewing cabs. Realizing he was staring, he looked away abruptly. The woman, seated left, had beautiful red hair that probably cost a small fortune to maintain. The man's hair, a full, shocking white, was equally well-coiffed.

Tony closed his eyes and opened them at the next stop to observe those coming and going. An attractive young woman sat beside the middle aged man. She sported several piercings and colorful tattoos, prominently green, in most places where her flesh showed, and her hair was dyed blue. Tony thanked God his daughter had grown out of that stage before it became ultra ridiculous. He began looking from one to the others in the odd threesome. He covered his mouth but was unable to suppress a chuckle. Soon he was laughing uncontrollably.

“What's so funny?” said the man, face not quite as red as his companion's hair.

“Forgive me,” said Tony, smiling, shaking his head in wonder. “I mean no disrespect. I've had a little too much to drink.”

“Obviously.”

“I couldn't help noticing — the three of you — your hair — red, white and blue. Only in New York.”

The older woman smirked, the younger beamed.

“Sorry,” said Tony, closing his eyes.

He dozed off. When he awoke the others were gone. The train had passed into Brooklyn. He would be home in minutes. He couldn't wait to tell his wife about the odd threesome. She would eat it up. Suddenly refreshed, he turned on his cell phone and checked his text messages. There was only one: “Love U.”

His eyes glazed. He knew everything would be all right eventually.