

CONSTELIS VOSS VOL. 1:
COLOUR THEORY

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K. LEIGH

k. **LEIGH**

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Content Warning

The following story contains abuse, trauma, PTSD, sexual assault, bigotry, and explicit violence. It is not a piece of fiction that engenders contemporary realities gently, including marginalized identities such as sex workers, LGBTQIAA+ individuals, and people of color.

Please consider this your warning for a work of fiction that exists as a metacritique of the politics of power told through a space opera through one vector of a reality-painted dystopic.

I ask only one thing of you, should you find yourself skimming its pages—enter this self-aware living landscape and question everything.

I hope it teaches who it must, and comforts those I wish to reach. I aim to let my readers know I see them in all their complicated inner paintings.

Good luck, and know that I love you desperately.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kira Leigh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

THE CANVAS:

"The strategies of the politics of the image has to take a very different and much less guaranteed route, in my view. It has to go *inside* the image itself – inside the image – because stereotypes themselves are really actually very complex things. It has somehow to occupy the very terrain which has been saturated by fixed and closed representation and to try to use the stereotypes and turn the stereotypes in a sense against themselves."

— STUART HALL, "Representation and the Media," Media Education Foundation, 1997

I



God, it must be lovely being a pretty, wine-mouthed little thing, if only for the hell of it.

I remember when even that was tied to a primary job function; armor in metal bangles, in velvets, in reds, in indigo, only to be made into nothing, and then to unmake someone else.

The paint was my favorite part, but it was always removed in the gnashing of teeth. A smear like the blood on my hands after the job was done.

The lipstick was always red because it's a trick for men.

I'd rather have worn black, but dark colors send the wrong signals. Pretty wine-mouthed little things always paint their roses red, and so too, did I.

These traits are certainly boorish stereotypes, and yet, they *are* stereotypes certain men seek. Certain men who were certain marks, that certainly sought me, that I certainly killed.

It's easier to pull off than you may think, biology notwithstanding.

Especially if you're curiously beautiful, shorter than some, and know how to move like prey animal.

But I was not, and will never be a prey animal.

I am a predator in specific geometry, just like before, just like the rose painted lips, and the smear, and the blood on my hands.

The space between the trick and the repeat job function, too, will be the same.

An evaporation in black waters because time never moves forward. The play is never truly different. We all come together at different acts, but it's always the same because I wrote the script that way.

I wrote it that way because I lived it. And because I lived it, this is my fault.

I'm still the villain with my mouth full of blood, smiling crimson at the mess I established by merit of existing and solved, in black this time. It will be black.

Before that, it will be faux indigo.

We always start with an absence of light, and therefore, color. Then, there's yellow, and at some point, the gold rushes in—not so subtly—until we stretch from hue to hue, get stuck repeatedly on pink, and maybe...

Maybe this time, true indigo will stick instead of black. I haven't decided.

I haven't decided the order in which we all die. Or if we die at all.

It may not even be up to me.

Even if the play is the same, the actors might forget their lines and torch the script with actual fire.

Truth be told, I'm counting on them to do just that.

Because all their fucking lives depend on it.

THE PLAY'S credits performed in reverse. Laughter woven in spliced tongues. Sobs were shots of vodka mimed backward in still-frame memories. Today was the day he was born.

At first, there was a void of nothing. Then, the man was alive. He was alive, standing in a space that smelled like antiseptic. The room was large enough for a swept arm to feel no chairs, no walls, no people, and he was blind.

The tremor of a frenetic pulse in his ears was the beat of a song he knew too well; fight or flight, do or die, the time is *now*.

Then, the sound became a sizzle.

Naturally stumbling, the man placed his hand on a flat surface and followed it up with searching fingers.

He was a slip of a shape, crawling like a bottom-feeder until he reached a notch. He pushed his hand up between the space he felt and grasped what he imagined was silver.

That white-knuckled hand meant he was alive.

He used the handhold to follow the wall and found a seam. He felt the seam with his fingers and plastered his face

to a slick surface, his mouth fogging the space in front of him. It was wet on the skin of his cheek.

Finally, after what felt like hours, words found shape in his mouth. If he could speak, it surely meant that he was alive.

"W-where the *fuck* am I?!" he spat against the slick surface near his mouth.

"We had a problem booting you," spoke a muddy voice.

"...booting?" the man replied, voice foreign in his ears.

"We're sanitizing you. We're unsure if contaminants infiltrated your system, so we are making sure there's nothing...wrong. Ok?"

"...no. Not ok. Why the fuck can't I see?" the man asked as the panel shifted away from him with a soft hiss. He fell, fawn-legged, into someone taller than he.

They were a girl, he assumed perhaps foolishly, as his head had connected with their chest. He could smell soft perfume and hear a click, not unlike hooves. He remembered that sound.

"You're talking about me like I'm—I don't fucking know...some kind of Star Trek bullshit..." he blurted out, pushing away from the woman he was braced against.

She caught him and held him to her body. She was breathing, she had a heartbeat, and she smelled like lavender.

"...I had to pull an emergency protocol," she replied as she held him as if he might shatter in her arms.

"Fucking pardon?" he blurted out.

"...you're the last one there is. I had to remove something—a block," the woman said in nothing-words, "I also had to add something in," she admitted with more nothing-words, "though I'm not sure how much it will grow."

“What the fuck does that mean?”

She sat the man down on a lifeless stool after much cajoling. His skin told him that it should be cold, but he felt vaguely anesthetized. He shivered anyways.

“You aren’t supposed to be able to shiver...” she said.

“Am I supposed to be able to see, too?” he snapped.

“Sorry about that.”

Her heels clicked as she pressed something into the back of his neck. The pressure pulsed up through his jaw into his teeth. His senses screamed into being, birthed in violent indigo.

“Better?” she asked as he heard her step back, the telltale clicking sound grounding him in the here and now.

The man’s eyes adjusted, pupils dilating and shrinking in time. The cold white room was bright enough to burn his retinas if he stared long enough.

“Yes,” he said, popping his jaw to release the pent-up pressure. It sizzled.

He looked around the blurry room. The metal he had clung to wasn’t silver but an unassuming white. Clear glass tables and matching displays filled the room.

All was painted in pales and glass, except for a little green plant in a geometric gold pot—a familiar shape—situated on a far desk. Something lived in a place that seemed so sterile it thwarted all biology.

He looked at the girl before him, as tall as he was but with heels—far taller. A searing blue gaze swept her face; flaccid blond hair, crepe-paper pale skin, with an expression just as brittle. Her lab coat was, however, noticeably tinted.

It was so faint the human eye would ignore the detail. It was hard for him not to notice.

At the far end of the room, a swath of lab coats hung like

bodies on a line. All the color had been bled from the fabric. Her shoes, however, were the color of riches.

"Gold," he said, his mouth impossibly dry.

"Yes. Gold," the woman replied.

"...the plant's yours too, then?" he asked.

"Yes."

The woman looked down at him with large, deep-set brown eyes. The painting of her skin had been covered in makeup, yet the spies of imperfections remained.

She grasped a clear clipboard at her high waist and was fiddling with what looked to be a pen.

"You...don't seem to fit in here. With...all this," the man muttered, accompanied by a vague gesture, "what a weird fucking dream..."

"A120-P, I need you to work with me here," she huffed. Her long fingers tapped on the clipboard.

"...that's not my name," he replied bluntly.

"Then, tell me, smart-ass...what is your name?"

The moment she insulted him, the man's vision flickered to black. Colors hummed behind his eyelids as he squinted to force himself to focus through the mire and the pitch.

A face came into view; the woman he'd fallen into moments earlier. Her rectangular face, her sitting across from him, her eating noodles, her loud slurping; this, he saw, and felt, and smelled.

"You're such a smart-ass, or whatever. You bought, like, two bowls for yourself, and you knew I was on a diet, and you knew you weren't going to eat the other one..."

She still ate despite complaints, twirling her chopsticks to whisk a clump of thick noodles into her bright magenta mouth.

He smelled the food. God, it smelled good...where were they? His thoughts raced, but no answers came.

"Al. Alex. Hey, are you, like...OK?" asked the woman.

"Yeah, Percy. I'm fine. Just thinking about..."

"You need to, like, get over it already. What's done is done."

A pair of fingers snapped the man back to the present. Gone were the slurped noodles. Gone was the banter. Gone was the quaint, slice of life moment from a time that had slipped through his fingers.

The woman before him was an impatient teacher, and he, a young student who was failing her lesson.

"What were you doing? Where did you go? My readings flat-lined..."

"I'm...Alex," he parroted back the name he'd been called in this dream within a dream.

"And where did you go? Come on, you stupid hunk of metal, I am going to be late for my meeting," she insisted.

"...a restaurant? Alright. I'm ready to wake up now. Sci-fi is something Olive likes, so if she tried to use her pixie magic on me, I want the fuck out..." he joked, looking at 'Percy', expecting a caustic retort.

"...who?" the woman asked, arching her brow.

"...Olive?" he insisted.

Alex eagerly awaited Percy's rebuttal, her joke, her smile. The laugh he knew she had that creased at the eyes and showed her too-large teeth.

"No, sweetie...no..." the shrapnel of her words stopped his breathing.

Had he even been breathing?

The tall girl bit her lip. In that instant, colorful shapes,

lines, and text clouded his vision. Her heart rate had increased; the numbers leaped.

When she shifted, he saw her weight dispersal; he saw her physical stats, her rank, and her permissions. His sensors painted his vision with the overflowing, fluorescent geometry of...*her*.

He didn't remember ever seeing shit like this before.

Then again, he didn't even remember what 'before' was, either. All he knew was that he was alive, he had been someplace else, and where he was now, wasn't it.

"...so...this isn't a dream?" he asked.

"No," she replied, his vision lighting up with superfluous data the more she moved.

"And, I'm...not a human," he asked.

"No."

"And...I don't know you..." Alex continued, screwing his eyes shut as her data was exploding all around him.

"I'm your technician," the woman insisted, looking over his face.

"But you look like Percy," he argued, eyes flicking open.

"...that's one of the girls from your memory? Like Olive?" she asked.

"Yeah."

The man sat forward and combed his fingers through his hair.

"I have to be fucking dreaming...are you sure we're not knocked out back at Olive's flat, and you're not snoring like a chainsaw?" the weight of his words slumped his shoulders.

"That's why they assigned me. They were trying to be kind—it's an adjustment," she replied with the tap of her pen, "I don't even work in this department."

"They?" he asked, looking up beneath his brows.

"Your..." Not-Percy fidgeted on her heels and tapped her pen again. The metronome of sharp sounds cut his ears.

"Employers. Coworkers...I don't know. I just do what they tell me to," she admitted.

The man smirked, a coy smile playing at the corner of his mouth. His eyes searched her face looking for the girl he'd known.

"God, you even sound like her," he marveled at the painted sunrise of her features. She didn't marvel back.

"I do? I do. Don't I?" she replied.

"What...what's your name?" he hesitated; he already knew her name because her data was blocking his view at the moment.

"Andra. Andra Polly Verdane."

"Polly it is then," he'd decided with a smirk.

"What? No. Andra..." she protested, but it was a feeble effort.

The silence fell thick, with the man smiling and the woman frowning. As he smiled, he focused enough to cut some of the garbage data he saw out of his line of sight. As she frowned further, he managed to store it away altogether.

"Polly, can you get me some fucking pants?"

"It's An—fine," she relinquished her bickering with an eye-roll strong enough to throw planets out of orbit.

Her gold heels clicked like daggers as she walked. She grabbed a pair of standard-issue colorless pants from a drawer and tossed them his way.

A120-P stood and looked down. He was anatomically correct. This, of course, made him snort. Polly wasn't at all amused.

"Hurry up! I'm going to be late!" she spat.

He pulled them on and fastened them with a sticking sound. There was no zipper, and that idea alone made him uneasy.

"Polly?" he asked, fiddling with the strap of his curiously fashioned, colorless pants.

"Yes, A1...Alex?"

"What...do I do here? Why am I...I don't really get it just yet."

"It's expected. You're adjusting," her words sounded as sharp as her heels to the man.

"How...what year is it?" he posed a question for this bright nightmare.

"5352...What year do you last remember?" Polly replied, shifting to favor her right leg.

"1980 or 90 something...at least I think so?" his words were fragile nothing-sounds.

"Oh."

Polly's eyes fell, and her heart rate elevated; he saw the read-out. She grabbed a shirt from a drawer near her knees and tossed it to Alex. He put it on, catching a stab of his face reflecting in a clear display.

He sprinted to the reflection, jostled the table with his hip, and lurched to see himself.

Alex twisted his hair, examined his ears, his jawline, and the curve of his neck with frantic fingers trembling at the foreign canvas.

"...I." his words were drowned in thick, acidic solvents.

"Do you think you're malfunctioning?" she asked.

"I—what?" he stuttered out, head snapping to attention.

"D-do you feel very distressed? Distressed enough to... do something?"

She tapped her pen rhythmically on her clipboard and stepped back on one high heel. Click.

“N...no. Why? Why would you ask that?” Click.

“Well,” Polly’s large eyes rolled to the right as she stared at a crease in the floor for a bit too long, “That’s why...”

She shot him a look and held his gaze. After a moment, her eyes screwed shut. They opened as she spoke once more.

“That’s why you’re the only one left.”

THANK YOU FOR READING

If you enjoyed this excerpt, please consider purchasing the full eBook or Paperback from www.shop.constelisvoss.ml. Your support goes a long way to helping a trans indie author get their work out there :)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

K. Leigh is a 33-year-old once-painter, sometimes-freelancer, forever-artist living in Providence, RI. They write hopeful-tragic stories full of funny, horrible characters, in various genres.

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