

## Colour the Mandala

by Ivor John

She felt a cold draught from the open casement window. She had opened it earlier, when she had gone to bed, when the humid, airless night had made her too uncomfortable to sleep. Now, with her duvet scrunched in a heap at the foot of the bed, she felt uncomfortably cold. She tried to focus through the stark sodium light at her alarm clock, on the dressing table. It was just after four. Swinging round to put her feet on the shabby bedside rug, she stumbled out of bed and took two unsteady steps to pull the window shut.

Then, the thoughts came back into her mind, as she remembered what she had heard earlier during the night. The feeling, indescribable, as the brief period calmness. Of happiness almost, evaporated almost instantly. To be replaced by the constant, nagging presence, awareness, that there was something worrying. Something which she needed to be concerned about was there, just out of reach in her mind. All the worse as she could never actually identify what it was. It existed in her mood and her thoughts. She felt, without looking, for the rubber band on her wrist. Pulling it hard and releasing it to slap against her wrist could, sometimes, be sufficient to distract her from more serious self harm. Sometimes.

She became aware of a noise from the flat next door. The old man from last night. She was aware of it rather than hearing it. But now, as she sat alone, always alone, in her cold room, in the reflected sodium street light, the same became clearer. A repeating, rhythmic knocking sound. Muffled, as if whatever was causing it, was trying to be quiet. Every so often, at seemingly irregular period of time, there was a barely audible scraping noise.

She could remember if she had been sleeping, or perhaps, dozing. But had this noise woken her up, or had she been awake anyway. The anxiety was becoming intolerable. Under her bed was a plastic folder, she had been given when her nurse had recommended an anxiety management course, a few months ago. A small book of useful advice. She loved them and found them reassuring. Flicking through, she read some of them at random. Allowing herself time to reflect on their meaning. That was the point, to reflect on the meaning.

*"We love being mentally strong, but we hate situations that allow us to put our mental strength to good use."*

“Old words are reborn with new faces.”

*“Fear seems to exist only in our imagination “*

But, this wasn't her imagination. It wasn't. She remembered what she had heard the previous night. He had gone outside, and came back, dragging some sort of heavy object, which he had taken into his room.

'Colour the Mandala' exhorted the bold banner headline of the A3 paperback book also in her folder. Black and white outlines of the exotic eastern patterns of circles and shields. The first few she had carefully coloured in with narrow felt tip pens which she kept in a pink fluffy pencil case. She had had it since school, and it gave her a feeling of contentment. Sometimes. Flicking through, she found the first blank page. Folding it open by running her finger down the inside of the fold in the pages, choosing a yellow pen, she started to colour the mandala. Hoping that by doing so she could put her anxiety to the back of her mind.

Then, there it was again, the disturbing scraping noise. She couldn't ignore it. Then, she heard his door opening and footsteps as he stumbled into the shared hallway. Desperate to know what he had been doing, hoping for but doubting there would be an innocuous explanation. How could there possibly be? She wanted to look out of her door, but dare not do so. He would be bound to see her. She was already concerned that the light from under her door would attract his attention to her conscious existence. She heard him carrying something into the hall. His chair, it must be his chair. She could hear his lips, wet on the cigarette paper and then the smell of his cigarettes. Cursing under his breath and mumbling as he sat, in their hall.