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THE
COLOR OF
BEE
LARKHAM'S
MURDER

A NOVEL

SARAH J. HARRIS



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**THE
COLOR OF
BEE LARKHAM'S
MURDER**

SARAH J. HARRIS

TOUCHSTONE

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

*For Darren, James, and Luke With love also to Mum,
Dad, and Rachel*

“I could tell you my adventures—beginning from this morning,” said Alice a little timidly: “but it’s no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.”

—LEWIS CARROLL, *ALICE’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND*

synesthesia (sɪnəs’θi:zə)

noun

1. physiology

a sensation experienced in a part of the body other than the part stimulated

2. psychology

the subjective sensation of a sense other than the one being stimulated.
For example, a sound may evoke sensations of color

—*COLLINS ENGLISH DICTIONARY*

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TUESDAY (BOTTLE GREEN)

Afternoon

Bee Larkham's murder was ice blue crystals with glittery edges and jagged silver icicles.

That's what I told the first officer we met at the police station, before Dad could stop me. I wanted to confess and get it over and done with. But he can't have understood what I said or he forgot to pass on the message to his colleague who's interviewing me now.

This man's asked me questions for the last five minutes and twenty-two seconds that have nothing to do with what happened to my neighbor, Bee Larkham, on Friday night.

He says he's a detective, but I'm not 100 percent convinced. He's wearing a white shirt and gray trousers instead of a uniform and we're sitting on stained crimson sofas, surrounded by cream-colored walls. A mirror's on the wall to my left and a camera's fixed in the right-hand corner of the ceiling.

They don't interrogate criminals in here, not adult ones anyway. Toys sit on a shelf, along with an old *Top Gear* annual and a battered copy of the first Harry Potter book that looks like some kid tried to eat it. If this is supposed to put me at ease, it's not working. The one-armed clown is definitely giving me the evil eye.

Would you describe yourself as happy at school, Jasper?

Are you friends with any Year Eleven boys?

Do you know anything about boys visiting Bee Larkham's house for music lessons?

Did Miss Larkham ask you to deliver messages or gifts to any boys, for example, Lucas Drury?

Do you understand what condoms are used for?

The last question's funny. I'm tempted to tell the detective that condom wrappers look like sparkly sweets, but I recently learnt the correct answer.

It's SEX: a bubble-gum pink word with a naughty lilac tint.

Again, what does that have to do with Bee and me?

Before the interview began, this man told us his name was Richard Chamberlain.

Like the actor, he said.

I haven't got a clue who the actor Richard Chamberlain is. Maybe he's from one of Dad's favorite U.S. detective TV shows—*Criminal Minds* or *CSI*. I don't know the color of *that* actor's voice, but this Richard Chamberlain's voice is rusty chrome orange.

I'm trying to ignore his shade, which mixes unpleasantly with Dad's muddy ocher and hurts my eyes.

• • •

This morning, Dad got a phone call asking if he could bring me down to the station to answer some questions about Bee Larkham—the father of one of her young, male music students has made some serious allegations against her. His colleagues plan to interview her too, to get her side of the story.

I wasn't in any trouble, Dad stressed, but I knew he was worried.

He came up with the idea of us taking in my notebooks and paintings. We would tell the police that I stand at my bedroom window with binoculars, watching the parakeets nesting in Bee Larkham's oak tree. And about how I keep a record of everything I see out of my window.

It's important the police think we're cooperating, Jasper, and not attempting to hide anything.

I didn't want to take any chances, so I stacked seventeen key paintings and eight boxes of notebooks—all filed correctly, their boxes labeled in date order—by the front door.

I hated the thought of them all together in one confined dark place: the boot of Dad's car. What if the car crashed and burst into flames? My records would be destroyed. I helpfully suggested we divide the boxes and travel in two separate taxis to the police station, like members of the Royal Family who aren't allowed to travel together on one plane.

Dad vetoed this and muttered: "It might be a good thing if these boxes did go up in flames."

I screamed glistening aquamarine clouds with sharp white edges at Dad until he promised never to harm my notebooks or paintings. But the damage was done and I couldn't shake his threat or the colors out of my head; they mixed spitefully behind my eyes. I couldn't bear to look at Dad or think about the terrible things he was capable of doing.

What he had done already.

Returning to the den in the corner of my bedroom, I rubbed the buttons on Mum's cardigan until I felt calmer. When I crawled out again, twenty-nine minutes later, Dad had packed the car without me. He'd replaced some of my numbered boxes containing records of the people on this street with much older ones from the loft.

You've made a mistake, I told him. These are my notebooks from years ago, listing Star Wars characters and merchandise.

Dad said not to worry; the police would probably still be interested in the range of my work, and the selection of notebooks could help distract them.

I disliked his explanation. Worse still, when I looked closer in the boot, I realized he'd put box number four on top of box number six.

"Number four's carrot orange and sneaky!" I said. "It can't go on top of dusky pink and friendly number six. They don't even remotely belong together! How can you not know that by now?"

I wanted to add: *Why can't you see what I can see?*

There was no point, there never is. Dad's blind to a lot of things, particularly involving me. When I was little it was always Mum who understood my colors.

But Mum's gone now and Dad doesn't want to know.

He let me go back inside so I could spin on the chair in the kitchen rather than run to my den again. We didn't have time, but we both knew I had to avoid more upset. I felt like an actor, walking around in the shoes belonging to me—Jasper Wishart—ever since the night Bee Larkham . . .

I couldn't go there. Not yet.

I had to get the long, snaky ticker tape in my head in order. It had tangled up, with vital bits damaged or jumbled together. I couldn't figure out how to rejig what had happened back into place.

Being late freaked me out even more. Dad said it'd be OK and not to worry, but that's what he says whenever we get late-payment reminders for our electricity bills. I'm not sure I can trust his judgment anymore.

After I'd double-checked my boxes were settled in the boot, we made sure our seat belts were fastened, because people are thirty times more likely to be thrown from a vehicle if they're not wearing one.

When we finally arrived, we were fifteen minutes and forty-three seconds late. The desk sergeant told us this wasn't a problem and we should take a seat, a detective would see us soon.

The desk sergeant's voice was light copper. I tried not to giggle at the irony. No one else in the police station would understand the joke, apart from Dad, who wouldn't laugh. He doesn't find my colors funny.

I longed to fly around the waiting room like a parakeet. Instead, I folded my arms tight and pretended I was *a normal thirteen-year-old boy*. I stared at my watch. Counting.

Five minutes, fourteen seconds.

The door beeped open, *light grayish turquoise circles*, and a man in a gray suit came out and shook Dad's hand without glancing at me.

"Hello, Detective," Dad said. "Are you in charge of the investigation into Bee and these boys?"

The man took Dad aside and spoke quietly in muted gray-white lines. He didn't talk to me or stare.

I overheard Dad tell the detective he doubted I could help because I don't recognize people's faces. Something to do with my *profound learning difficulties*,

Dad suspected. He'll get that assessed at some point.

Did the detective still want to go ahead with the interview? It could be a waste of everyone's time.

"Jasper sees colors and shapes for all sounds too, but that's not much use to anyone either," Dad added.

How dare he say that? It's useful to me because the distinctive colors of people's voices help me recognize them. Plus, it's not just useful, it's wonderful—something Dad will never understand.

My life is a thrilling kaleidoscope of colors only I can see.

When I look out of my bedroom window, chaffinches serenade me with sugar-mouse pink trills from the treetops and indignant blackbirds create light turquoise lines that make me laugh.

When I lie in bed on Saturday mornings, Dad bombards me with electric greens, deep violets, and unripe raspberries from the radio in the kitchen.

I'm glad I'm not like most other teenage boys because I get to see the world in its full multicolored glory. I can't tell people's faces apart, but I see the color of sounds and that is so much better.

I was desperate to tell this police officer that while he and Dad can see hundreds of colors, I see millions.

But there are also terrible colors in this world that no one should ever have to witness. Since Friday night I haven't been able to get some of these ugly tints out of my head, however hard I try.

I longed to disobey Dad and tell this detective that whenever I close my eyes at night the palette becomes even more vivid, more brutal.

That's because I can't stop seeing the color of murder.