

FIREFLY YELLOW

I don't know when it started, but as long as I can remember I have associated my feelings with colors. Whether I'm calm and associating my feelings with the soothing serenity of aquamarine or if I'm feeling energetic and overflowing with happiness basking in the color of aerospace orange or those times when I'm extremely hopeful and matching my emotions with the color of dandelions. No matter the emotion, one thing is definite, if I feel it I'm going to give it a color. Emotions in my life have created a palette of colors. There are times when each emotion stands alone and at times when the colors fuse together to define a mixture of emotions. My mom says that I remind her of a ring that was popular when she was my age. It was called a mood ring and would change colors to match the mood of the person wearing it. I guess I can be considered the mood ring of my family because my mood changes to match the events in my life. It may be a possibility that if my family was like other families I wouldn't have to change moods so much, but my family is different. We have our own set of

dynamics. My family exceeds what most people would call dysfunctional. We are more like a multi-level dysfunctional family.

The older I become, the more I realize that in order to cope with the dynamics of my family I use the denotation of colors to maintain a sense of being the norm. I once read somewhere that before you are born that you get a chance to select the life that you are going to live in order to make a difference in the world. If that's true I sure don't understand why I chose this life. I mean there are things about my life that I love, but there are also things about my life that are complicated and sometimes hard to endure. Today is starting as one of those days when I'm loving this life that I am living. Today I would definitely label my life firefly yellow! At least at this moment, I'm riding high standing here looking in the mirror with a smile that stretches from ear to ear. I can't help but think that on a scale of one to ten that I measure right up there at a seven or a seven and a half. Now, I could try to fool myself that I'm a nine or ten, but reality sneaks in and lets me know that I'm far from perfect. However, I've learned how to accessorize myself to bring out my best attributes. I'm the total opposite of my sister, Tori. Tori wakes up beautiful with every strand of hair in place. Most people would rate Tori as a ten plus.

No, I'm not Tori, I'm just Aretha Malay Woods. My name does make me a stand out feature, because whenever people hear my name they don't even question who my mom's favorite singer was when I was born. I think my name is unique because I don't know any other person my age with this name. Whenever I tell someone my name it automatically starts a conversation. The first thing a person asks me when they hear my name is "Can I sing?" I always respond by singing a few notes of R-E-S- P- E-C-T. After hearing me sing a verse of what I consider to be my signature song it's like I certify my right to have the name Aretha. After getting this certification from people it sends my emotions to the comfort zone of steel blue. As great as my name is, my family and friends rarely refer to me as Aretha. To them I'm known as ReRe

This year I'm a sophomore in high school, and I have just lost the last of my baby fat. All of my other friends started developing their bodies earlier than me which left me feeling like once again I was coming in last in the race of life. However, in the last leg of the body development race, I caught up. Even though I have lost my baby fat I'm by no means skinny. I'm what my grandmother would call pleasantly plump with all the sections of my body evenly distributed. I can proudly say that when I look in the mirror, I see that I have transformed from baby fat to super phat! Or you can say like my grandmother so elegantly put it, "I have come into my own"

Things so far this year have made a turn for the better. I'm feeling better about myself, putting more focus on my schoolwork, making more friends and even participating in extracurricular activities at school. Now don't think for one moment that I have a big head, because I don't. I'm a down to earth type of girl who can easily chill with anybody. Besides who could be persnickety when they have a sister like Tori. It's like God planted a thorn in my side by giving me her for a sister.

Everyone I know seems to have a high interest in Tori which adds to our complicated relationship. I guess there are those who think that I may be a little jealous of her and her ability to capture the attention and heart of most people that she meets. Well, I can assure you that that shade of green is not a feeling I wear, I'm definitely not jealous of her. If I had to categorize my feelings for Tori I would probably say that I have a love –hate feeling toward her. I love her because she's my flesh and blood, but I hate the person that she is. Tori is self-centered but has the ability to make other people think that she is a victim in every situation. The older I get the more I seem to resent Troi. This resentment that I have for Tori I can never discuss openly and honestly with my family because they would classify me in the outcast file for harboring such a negative feeling towards a family member even if it's justifiable. It's okay in my family to dislike what a person does, but it's seen as a damnable sin to dislike the person. This notion

comes from being a part of a family that has a history of several generations of deacons at one of the town's local churches.

Of course, everyone in my family believes in the rule of no hate except for my Aunt Jenny. She's cool and she is the only one who is on the level when it comes to the truth about my sister. I think that the two of us share the same feelings about Tori; it's just that my Aunt Jenny has an advantage because she's at an age where she can voice her opinion without repercussions, and I have to keep my feelings bottled up inside.

Even with my friends I only can share the surface of my feelings about Tori. She is their idol. They see her as a dare devil who takes chances with things that they can only dream about. One thing Tori has going for her is that she is popular. And whether a teen wants to admit it or not, one of the things that we crave the most is popularity and the easiest way to gain popularity is to associate yourself with someone who is popular. So naturally all my friends want to be acknowledged by Tori. Normally my friends are not so tasteless when it comes to choosing people to admire but in the case with my sister, they hit rock bottom.

A second thorn in my side is where I live. I live in a small town where everyone knows everyone. It's a small town where the people live normal everyday lives with nothing that they do would make national headlines. Most of

the residents here have experienced events that cause lots of tongue wagging by the locals, but nothing major. The people in Sadeville go day in and day out wearing transparent masks believing that they are fooling those around them about the kind of lives that they are living and the battles that they fight daily. They put up this façade that everything is falling into place with no worries, when in actuality our lives are far from picture perfect. No one in Sadeville lives on the extreme spectrum of life where everything is either black or white. Everybody's life here is filled with multi shades of grey.

It's my guess that the rest of the world probably have never heard of Sadeville unless they have read a few articles which mention it as the hometown of some guy named Donnell Geeson who made it big as a famous athlete. Donnell doesn't seem like such an important figure to me since to my knowledge he has never been back to visit Sadeville after his graduation from the local high school. His departure from Sadeville was way ahead of my time so I know only what I've heard about him. It's common talk around town that Donnell hasn't done anything to help the community since his big success. This fact makes him less than a hero to most of the people who live in Sadeville. However, there are those who excuse his lack of giving back to the community because of the rough life he had while he lived here. I really don't know the whole story about Donnell's days in Sadeville, just a few little things that I have overheard adults talking about, which I have

never really forced in on any of these conversations about him, because as I said before the whole Donnell Geeson's thing doesn't interest me. There have been recent rumors that he is supposed to throw some type of grand gala in Sadeville soon and this brings a little excitement to everyone here to know that we may finally be recognized on the national map.

Thinking about the possibility of Donnell Geeson showing his face in Sadeville makes me wonder about how many other unknown small towns exist. What do they do for excitement and will anything exciting happen to make them known to the rest of the world? Will it be someone as simple as me, that brings the town to prominence or will it be someone as colorful as my sister, Satoria aka Tori, who will make the town world famous? My only fear is that if it is somebody like my sister that brings fame to the town then the town would be in trouble of attracting negative energy, which leaves me to conclude that in that case the town would be better off unknown.

“ReRe, are you ready?” I hear my mom scream from the front door.

THE SUBJECTIVE MIXING OF COLORS

That's my mom yelling at the top of her voice. It's hard to believe that most of my friends think that my mother is this soft-spoken person who never raises her voice, when all she has done the last year and a half at home is talk in this demanding motherly voice that makes me respond to her requests without giving them a second thought. Not that she doesn't have every reason to be so demanding, especially with what my sister, Tori, has been putting our mother through these last two years.

Miss Beverly Denise Woods, my mother, who everyone refers to as Miss Niecy made a declaration to everyone within a hundred-mile radius that she is not going to have another child of hers to live such a carefree life as my sister Tori does. Even though she makes this statement to my grandparents and aunts all the time, it's quite clear to me that the message is meant for me. I'm the only other child that she's parenting. Even though technically I'm a little past the child stage, have almost completed the teen years and will soon be entering into the adult stage of life, my mom still refers to me as a child when she is speaking about me to others.

In all of her assessment what I think my mom fails to realize is that I don't want to be anything like Tori. Actually, I despise Tori. Tori has caused my mother and I nothing but pain and sleepless night with her constant sneaking in and out of the house at all times of night, cutting school, having her wild friends over without permission, and to top the cake she ran away from home to try to stay with our dad, who walked out on us when Tori was six and I was two. When Tori went to our Dad it was a pivot point for my mother's level of toleration of foolishness. Tori running away to our dad hurt my mother so much because of our past relationship problems with our dad. Our dad never called, sent a birthday card, or paid child support. These are things Tori and I were not supposed to have noticed, but I did. I can't help but think that Tori did too. Tori was so caught up in herself and what she wanted that she didn't give any thought to what a slap in the face her going to stay with dad was to our mother. But then on the other hand, Tori seems to specialize in causing our mother nothing but pain.

Dad called after Tori showed up on his doorstep with a sad story about how she couldn't live her life and that Mom was trying to make her life miserable by trying to control her. I was confused by this way of thinking because I always thought parents were supposed to control your life to a certain extent.

Tori had gotten our dad's address from our Aunt Teresa, who is my dad's sister, and hitchhiked to Newark, New Jersey, which is seven hundred miles from where we live. Dad was infuriated with Mom based on things that Tori told him and made several calls during Tori's stay with him to inform Mom how unfit she was as a mother and to let her know that he fully understood why Tori wanted to leave home while at the same time demanding that Mom purchase a ticket for Tori to return home because she was interfering with his lifestyle. It seemed like Tori couldn't see the situation for what it was Dad just doesn't want us! I am four years younger than she is and it was clear to me.

What Tori had not witnessed during her stay with Dad was the pain that Mom went through. She tried her best to hide it from me, but I knew there were times when she would break down and cry. She constantly stayed on the phone seeking comfort from my grandmother and aunts. We were going through a subjective mixing of colors, and I didn't want to be separated from my mom for fear she was going to have a nervous breakdown. Mom would often try to get me to spend the night with a family member or my friends, but I would refuse to do so because I wanted to be close to her. Somehow, my giving her comfort gave me comfort.

During the time that all of the drama was going on with Mom, Dad and Tori, Aunt Teresa kept calling Mom accusing her of harassing Dad and claimed that Mom was trying to push that “mess of a daughter”, namely Tori, off on her brother while he was trying to get his life together. My Aunt Theresa is not the typical aunt. She really does not see Tori and me as her nieces but rather as two stumbling blocks in my dad’s way. The sad thing is that other than my dad, Tori, and myself are the only living known family members that Aunt Theresa has. My Grandmother Michele adopted my dad and Aunt Theresa during her elderly years because her husband had died, and she had no family of her own. Everybody claims that she spoiled them by providing them with everything they wanted but somehow, they still managed to hold on to some type of inner anger that they allow to dominate their lives. My Grandmother Michele died three days after I was born, so I only have the stories that I’ve heard about her.

Eventually, Tori ended up returning home with an increased anger toward Mom because Dad had filled her head with the excuse that he did not send any money, call or visit because he knew what a proud and independent woman Mom is and that she would never accept any type of help from anyone, not even him. You would have thought this would have been a wakeup call for Tori. But not! I’ll be the first to say that our mother is a proud and independent woman who has had to work hard to take care of us while at the same time making great advancements

in both her education and career endeavors, but it had not been done out of choice, but necessity. If I can see that being the youngest child, why can't Tori since she is the oldest? Tori is the type to believe only what she wants to believe and accept only the things that fits how she wants to live.

Every day I face people who think that despite coming from a broken home that I live in this perfect family, that I live the perfect life, when in actuality, it is just the opposite. They all see my mom as this super strong woman who can face any challenge. For some reason, my mom thinks that it's important to live up to their expectations. Unfortunately, I can see too clearly by looking in her eyes that Mom is on the verge of breaking down. I think that is what frightens me the most. What if Mom does break down? Where would that leave me? I'm not a hustler like Tori who knows how to make it on her own. I would be totally lost. I pray Mom will stay strong. Mom breaking would be like the Hoover Dam breaking which would leave some important areas in my life completely flooded. In a way I'm happy to know that being strong is what Miss Niecy does and I also know that most of the time she does it for me. I wish I could give her strength, but there are times when I don't even have enough strength for myself.

"I'm coming!" I yelled

LIME GREEN AND AMETHYST

Grabbing my jacket on the way out of the room, I throw my brush on my bed. Glancing back, I made sure that everything in my bedroom was in place. I hate to enter a room that is junky. I'm not a neat freak, I just like for things to look presentable. I've slept in this room for as long as I can remember and to me it was just a bedroom until two years ago when I discovered that I could move the furniture around and give it a completely new look and feel. My favorite colors this year are lime green and amethyst and my room reflects this fact. The green and purple give me a sense of coming into my own, out of the shadows of others. At present, my bed is on the wall to the right when you enter the door and directly across from the bed on the wall to the left is my entertainment center, which houses my flat screen TV, satellite control box, Wii control box and VCR/DVD combination (sometimes I'm nostalgic). In the drawers of the entertainment center, I keep my electronic games and iPod Touch. Whenever my friend Maria comes over, I hide my games and iPod in my mom's room because Maria is known for her quick hands. Home girl is cool and all, but she gotten quite a few of us with her sticky fingers.

There was this one time when I invited her over and when she left I didn't suspect a thing, however the next day she had on my black looped belt and my

favorite hair barrette. I was so angry I could have torn right into her, but that is not my style. I can talk a rather good game; I'm just not a fighter. When I talked to Mom about Maria taking my things, she said that since I couldn't be one hundred percent sure that it was my things that Maria had then I shouldn't say anything because the belt and barrette might be somewhere that I had forgotten that I placed them and Maria may have brought a belt and barrette like mine's. I might not have been one hundred percent sure, but I was ninety-nine percent sure that the belt and hair barrette that Maria had on was mine and what really pissed me off was the fact that she had the nerve to grin in my face like nothing happened. Well one thing was for sure, ReRe wasn't going to play the fool a second time; if Maria took anything else from my room it was going to be something everybody could see her taking out of the house. I started putting all my small valuables in my mom's room whenever she came over.

Tonight, for the first time Mom is allowing me to drive to the game. I know that my mom's a little nervous about me driving and with good reasons. When Tori was a senior in high school she had gotten into an accident driving to her part-time job. I'm not quite sure what happened because every time Tori tells the story about what happened in the accident the details are always different.

Basically, mom received a call from Tori telling mom that she was in an accident down the street from our house. When we arrived at the scene of the accident we noticed that the car was flipped upside down and was a total loss. Tori said that while she was driving her pocketbook slipped out of the passenger seat onto the floor and she reached down to grab it and the next thing she knew she was flipping. She said she thinks she flipped three times. Tori's account of the accident didn't seem believable to me, but my mom brought the story. I didn't believe Tori's account because of a conversation I had overheard my mom having with my grandmother about a situation that happened three weeks prior to the accident. My mom had been riding with Tori, and Tori had been unable to keep the car from hitting the edge of the road because she was speeding. My mom told my grandmother that she had made Tori pull over and my mom took over driving. I wasn't with them that afternoon because I was visiting one of my friends. My mom told my grandmother that my Aunt Theresa came over that afternoon and when she went to get Tori out of her room to speak to Aunt Theresa that Tori jumped and started fighting her. She said she had to defend herself by fighting back and that the tussle had lasted for quite a while. My grandma had inquired as to whether or not my Aunt Theresa had tried to intervene and stop the fight. My mother sternly replied that it wasn't my Aunt Theresa's place to do so. Even though I wanted to ask my mom about the fight I knew I couldn't, but it made my feelings about Tori

grow stronger. At the scene of the wreck the story had flashed to my memory, and I knew Tori had wrecked because she had been speeding. Tori's speeding did not end that day. Mom replaced the car Tory had with a more updated model. One day after school Mom had approached Tori with the accusation that Tori had been driving to school so fast that when she turned the corner the witness to the incident saw my body lift up out of the seat. We never found out who the witness was to our speed ride, but it had to be someone Mom trusted and respected because Mom took the keys from Tory and banned her driving.

I've had my beginner's driver permit for two weeks. My granddad has worked with me every day since I've gotten my permit to ensure that I become a safe driver. *I tell you the man has the patience of Job.* Even though Granddaddy was grinning after each driving session, I know that beneath the surface that he was shaking in his boots based on some of the driving heartaches I put him through. After two weeks of training, he assured me that I was a fast learner and an excellent driver. Tonight, will be my time to show off all the hard work of driver's training that my granddad had put me through. I can barely wait to see the eyes of my friends when I drive up in the gym parking lot. I want to arrive early while people are still entering the building so that I can make sure that they take notice of this new driver. I know all my friends will be standing outside waiting to see me drive up because I texted them earlier telling them that I would be driving.

I'm the first in the group to get my permit so it kind of makes me the temporary leader of the group.

Driving into the parking lot at the gym I can't help but notice that there are already at least one hundred cars already there. This is our big rivalry game against Bevfour High School and everybody who has ever attended either one of the schools will be in attendance. I swirl into a parking space like a pro sending my mother into one of her preaching modes.

“Aretha Malay Woods if you insist on showing off then maybe you don't need to be behind a steering wheel. Driving is serious business and not a game. There are entirely too many teens that have accidents because they want to be seen by their friends showing off instead of behaving like a safe driver.”

I glanced quickly at my mom to gauge just how mad she is at me for my expertise in driving. I see that there is a little look of pride in her eyes at the fact that I can handle a vehicle in such a manner. Now the only thing that I need to do is to get my mom to close her mouth so that I won't be late getting to my cheering post and having Miss Murray, my cheerleader advisor, on my case. “I'm sorry Mom, “I purr. “It won't happen again. I'm so sorry. Please, please forgive me.” I say in my innocent childlike voice with the cutest little smile plastered across my face.

I can see that my innocent act is working, and Mom is beginning to melt.
“You better make sure it doesn’t happen again young lady.”

As I rush into the gym door, I notice that there is extra security at the game. This is a normal precaution that is taken to prevent any outbreak of a fight between the two rivalry schools. In the past there has never been anything more than a few excited fans yelling bad calls by the referees, but it was always better to be safe instead of sorry according to Mom.

Sadeville High School is a small school in which approximately three hundred students attend. Most of the students at SHS started school together in kindergarten and have a bond that makes them more like family than classmates. Those students who migrate in from other schools quickly become a part of the SHS family except for a few who try to play hard and are label wannabes.

One of the new immigrants to SHS is Dorsey, who also happens to be the daughter of the new pastor at Mount Moriah, which is the largest church in Sadeville and the church that I attend. The fact that she is the offspring of Pastor Defoe gives Dorsey automatic popularity that few newcomers enjoy. Dorsey moved to Sadeville six months ago from Washington, DC and like Boom! Dorsey and I became best friends. Becoming friends with Dorsey was like finding a part of me that was missing. Dorsey is a little more on the quiet side while I’m a bit

outspoken at times, but her personality speaks volume so making friends for her was easy. There isn't anybody at Sadeville High School that doesn't like Dorsey. As I enter the gym Dorsey runs up to me with the biggest grin anyone could ever have.

“Girl, you handle that car like a professional.”

“I almost professional myself out of driving again,” I replied with laughter all in my voice

“Now you know Miss Niecy wouldn't stop you from driving now that you've earned your wheels.”

“I'm glad you feel that way, but somehow I doubt that she does. Girl, we better get into that gym before Miss Murray makes us sit out the first quarter of the game and I definitely don't want that. Not tonight.”

The girls' game was exciting as the lead flipped time after time ending with the Sadeville Tornadoes taking a victory of 37-36. The crowd went hysterical and it took a few minutes to calm the crowd down before they could start the match between the boys. Our boys are undefeated and want to remain that way. Besides, it would be a little embarrassing if they lost after the girls won. Not to mention the

fact that I would be infuriated if they lose when my girls and I are blowing the gym out by cheering the Bevfour Wolverines cheerleaders into shame.

As we step out onto the floor at half time to do our dance routine, our boys are down by seven points. The tension in the gym is tense, but it is a good tension that reflexes hard competition. We all know that no matter who wins the game the other team will sincerely congratulate the victor and anxiously await the rematch later in the season. My heart is beating three times as fast as it should while we wait a few seconds for the music to begin to signal the beginning of our half time performance of our dance routine. We've practiced emphatically all week to make sure that the dance routine is the hottest thing smoking. In the split second of watching Mrs. Murray press the start button on the remote control for the sound system and the start of the music a thousand thoughts of doubt fill my mind. What if I forget the routine? What if I get off beat? Is everybody watching me, are they watching each of us equally, or are they focusing on conversations that they are having with their friends and will only look at us as a second thought when the crowd reacts to one of our dance moves? Is anyone out there in the crowd thinking, *Oh, that's Tori's sister and one day she's going to be just like her?* I quickly shake the negative thoughts from my head. I focus on the positive energy that I have inside that has made the determination that I am not going to define my

life by someone else's. I have to make my mark on the world, and I want it signed with my signature, not my sister's or anyone else's signature.

A second factor that I have working against me is that I attend the same school where my mother has an administrative position. The fact that my mother works at SHS causes some people to question if I earn my good grades based on my hard work or are they given to me because of who my mother is? Was I elected secretary of the Student Government or was the votes tampered with? Did I earn the spot on the cheering squad or was it given to me? To make matters worse is the fact that Tori had been a high achiever in high school, so this made me feel as if I always have to prove myself.

It's moments like this when the crowd is roaring with support and every Tornado fan is out of their seat cheering us on that I feel at my highest peak. My eyes glance around the gym while I'm dancing and I notice my personal fan club that consists of my mom, Aunt Brandy, Uncle Robert, and two cousins, Allayah and Justin, screaming my name to boost me on and this produces a type of energy that I didn't know I had as the adrenaline pumps freely through my body. I feel as if I am floating on air as I throw my head one way and my leg kicks out in the opposite direction. The high is so natural, and nothing could feel better. Before the final beat plays, I know I've done it. I've proven for the millionth time that I've

earned my spot on this cheering squad. I know that I belonged right here in this time and moment. It's just one of those defining times when nothing can make me doubt who I am and where I belong. I'm soaring to the top and nothing can hold me down.

It's somewhat funny how one moment you can feel on top of the world and the next you're wondering where in the world you are. Here I am a part of a group that just completed a crowd stirring performance. In my mind there is nothing that can top how I feel at this moment, not to mention that there is definitively no way that the night could be ruined. There is just too much positive energy flowing in the atmosphere for the night to be anything but perfect. Little did I know that things were making up for a turn of events. Little did I know that everything was slowly turning a scarlet red.