

The Breakfast Table [1560]

Claude chewed his cereal slowly.

"I'd really say the sky is more cerulean than baby blue," his mother posited. His father, distracted by the newspaper, nodded. His younger sister, Elle, bobbed as well.

Claude looked up, assuming that his family expected some form of acknowledgment. Elle turned to him, and he nodded once before pausing.

"You know," he said, "I think it might be closer to azure. What do you guys think?"

Claude watched as his father started and lowered his newspaper. Elle shook her head. "No," she interjected. "Mom said *cerulean*."

Her eyebrows knit together so tightly that Claude changed course.

"Of course," he added as he glanced around the table, "I could be mistaken." His father's newspaper rose again, and his mother looked pleased.

Claude could not forget the conversation. He stared at the sky as he walked to school, but still could not see that it was certainly cerulean blue. He glanced out the window exactly five times each hour, hoping to surprise himself into noticing this apparent truth. It concerned Claude that he was not successful, but he soon lost this sense of urgency as he focused on his worksheets.

A few weeks later, Elle came downstairs wearing a new shirt. Claude was sitting at the table, eating his cereal. He nodded at his sister as she sat down. His mother complimented Elle, saying that it was lovely to wear a shirt that matched the sky. Claude studied the shirt, and then glanced at his mother. She was watching him.

"I could be wrong," he began, "but I think that I see the color of that shirt and the color of the sky as two separate shades of blue."

His mother leaned forward, speaking rapidly. "Well, the majority of Americans surveyed by Vogue agree that the sky is cerulean blue, so there must be something to that."

Elle leaned towards her mother, and agreed that it was nice to wear a shirt that perfectly matched the sky.

Claude approached his father later that night. They sat together in the living room in silence, and then Claude spoke up.

“Dad, do you really think the sky is cerulean blue?”

His father chuckled. “Absolutely! Your mother has an eye for color; if you had lived with her for as long as I have, then you would understand.”

Claude blinked and went outside to look at the sky. It was dark though, so he could not see anything.

The next day, Claude walked into the living room after school. Elle and his parents were already there, laughing while his sister grinned. His mother noticed him, and broke off to explain that they had been joking about color blind people.

That weekend, Claude could not focus on the allure of free time. He sat on his bed, staring out the window. He was embarrassed that he could not understand how everyone saw cerulean. He narrowed his eyes into slits and widened them again, but he still saw azure.

On her side of the room, his sister sat in front of her laptop. When Claude tapped her on the shoulder, she took out her earbuds and paused her TV show.

“What?” Elle asked, still facing the computer.

“What color do you actually think the sky is?” Claude asked. It was difficult to disagree with their parents, but he knew that it was just the two of them now.

His sister whipped around to face him, and her chair creaked.

“Cerulean, obviously.” Elle’s tone was sharp, and Claude drew back.

“Oh.” Claude said. “So you’ve never seen it as any other shade of blue?”

Elle scoffed. “Why should I have?”

Claude paused for a moment, thinking this through.

“So it would be accurate to say that you have always believed the sky to be cer-”

“Yes.”

Claude frowned.

“So if someone were to tell you that they thought the sky was azure, for example, then-”

“Then they’re totally wrong.”

Claude felt the blood rush to his face at his sister’s retort, and grew obstinate.

“So you think it is an absolute fact that the sky is-”

“Cerulean,” she interrupted. Elle jammed her earbuds back into her ears, and thrust her neck towards the computer screen.

Claude got into bed and pulled the covers over his head.

Over the following week, Claude’s anger became all-consuming. Each time he tried to forget, one of his family members would make a remark about the color of the sky. He distracted himself during these moments by imagining himself as a sacrificial lamb living among a clan of hyenas; he could already tell they were waiting for an opportunity to tear him to shreds.

At the breakfast table on Monday morning, he caught his mother studying him out of the corner of her eye as Elle pontificated about their family’s superior ability to discern differences between shades of color. Claude could not restrain himself, and unclenched his teeth to ask Elle how she developed her ideas on this subject. Their mother jumped in before Elle could answer.

“We know this in the same way that we know our values are correct. We’ve developed our values over years of living, and know that they are the only logical conclusions that exist. We employ this same process as we learn how to perceive subtle differences in color. Soon, we just see things that other people miss.”

Claude tightened his lips, watching his sister as she bounced like a bobblehead in her haste to agree with her mother.

“Of course,” his father added, “There’s so much that the younger generation just can’t know unless they learn it from their parents. If you knew what I know about these processes, then-”

“Dad,” Claude interrupted, “What do you know about the color of the sky that I don’t know?”

His father’s eyes widened, and Claude watched as his cheeks grew ruddy. He opened his mouth, but his wife spoke first.

“No one is talking about the color of the sky, Claude!”

Her lips tightened into a pout, but Claude could hear the glint of anger behind her beseeching tone. Elle turned on him angrily.

“Why do you always have to do this, Claude? We were having a nice time until you came, and now everyone is upset.” She started crying, and her mother leaned over to comfort her.

He felt them all closing in on him. His dad’s momentary anger had been replaced by a sneer, and the two women reveled in the closeness they’d achieved through their perception of shared antagonism.

“But isn’t that what this is all about?” Claude looked around the table, studying his family. His father watched his daughter sniffle, and he interrupted as Claude tried to glean specifics about this process they all utilized to distinguish between subtle differences in color.

“Claude, the sky is cerulean blue. We understand how these things work, and you don’t. It’s not our fault that you can’t see.”

His father met Claude’s eyes to fully communicate the depth of his disgust. Claude broke the eye contact to stare at a crumb laying on the table. He focused on the table for so long that he felt his family members stiffen.

Claude rose from his chair. His sister studied her mother’s face; Elle needed to anticipate her mother’s reactions so that she could choose her own expressions. His father glared in Claude’s direction. As he walked out of the room, white spots obscured sections of Claude’s vision. He felt his pulse beating in his temples as he continued out the front door.

Claude walked along the sidewalk, keeping his head down to avoid seeing the sky. Anger sharpened his thoughts.

As he walked, he imagined himself trapped in a glass room with the rest of his family. They were busy painting it cerulean blue, but Claude sat apart from them with his back pressed against the cool wall. Though he didn’t speak, he watched his fury grow as they continued to fling paint at his corner.

Soon, this fury erupted as pustules that covered his entire body. His family continued to spatter cerulean paint, now aiming for his eyes and mouth. Claude watched the pustules burst and coat his family members in putrid, yellow pus. They laughed at this though, and soon his oozing pus was replaced by blood that spewed from his gaping lesions. His blood landed on his mother’s

eyebrows, and Claude watched as some even trickled into his father's ear. At this, they erupted into a cacophony of laughter.

Claude curled up and used his fingers to plug the lesions. He stilled as the geysers became trickles of blood, and only then did the members of his family stop laughing. They stepped over his body delicately, and his father repetitively threw his weight against the wall. Once the glass finally shattered, they filed out peacefully.

Claude finally looked up, and found that he'd been walking along the train tracks. It was still morning rush hour; he would not have long to wait.

Claude continued past the station, and found a section of the tracks that was obscured by bushes. Though he hadn't brought rope, he knew that he would not feel tempted to move once he heard the rush of an oncoming train.

Claude reveled in the coldness of the metal against his back, and settled down to wait.