

COLORS OF THE BEYOND

C. A. SALTORIS

CHAPTER ONE COLORS OF THE BEYOND

A GOTHIC FANTASY & PARANORMAL HORROR
NOVELLA

C. A. SALTORIS



PRAISE FOR C. A. SALTORIS

Colors of the Beyond gave me a different view of Gothic. And I, who was not a fan of the style, fell in love.

The plot engulfs you and even when the story is over you do not forget it, because you want to know this incredible universe personally and embrace every character that lives there. I don't judge Josh for his choices, because maybe I wouldn't do it any other way!

— JESSICA GALLEOTE, BETA READER

"C. A. Saltoris is a creative powerhouse. She subverts and handles the boundaries between Gothic and Fantasy, competently, like few names in national fantastic literature today."

— PROF. DR. ALEXANDER MEIRELES DA SILVA
PROFESSOR AND RESEARCHER OF FANTASTIC
LITERATURE

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I

Josh woke up on the subway, sweaty and frightened; aware that the voices still echoing incomprehensible messages in his head weren't from a dream. He tried to locate himself, to calculate how long he had slept through the veil of confusion brought on by the fatigue in his bones and the alcohol in his blood. He took a deep breath, brushed a hand across his face, looked around, and settled into his seat.

Outside, the sky was tinted with the pink that carried the night, bringing with it the hope that comes with light. Or the illusion of hope so necessary to move forward on cold, empty days like this. Well-formed clouds resembling cotton candy hung over Berlin's television tower, which shimmered over the city like a giant disco ball, casting thousands of tiny diamonds onto the city at its feet, helping him to locate himself. He was near the station, not beyond it.

He sighed, relieved, not wanting to spend any more time walking around; he had celebrated enough. Sinking into his seat, he opened the camera on his phone and examined himself. The normally bright hazel eyes were reddish and dull, the square face wore the faint expression of intoxication, the light

brown hair was damp with something he refused to identify. He preferred to doubt whether the moisture was sweat, beer, or vomit. None of the numerous women who had flirted with him that night would have said "Wow, but you're really cute" to him *now*.

In his ear voices. The German hip hopper telling Berlin how ugly and dirty it could be.

You took the words right out of my mouth, Peter Fox. He thought, comforted by the fact that he had left the earphones in, persuading himself that the singer was the noise wandering around in his subconscious. But the music hadn't been the voices. They had never been songs. No matter how much he wished they were.

When he was a child, they were part of his games, worlds created by his fertile imagination that would make him a screenwriter with some recognition by his twenties. Childish creativity was what the adults called the images, and they refused to listen to the plea in his little boy's voice, trying to convince them of the strange quality of his visions. To no avail. Adults never listen.

Once, at the age of six, while playing in the garden among the dead leaves of the autumn trees of his grandparents' remote cottage, he got lost in one of them, following a girl about his age, olive-skinned, wearing a white nightgown of another time, and carrying an orange flower with pointed petals, like wings, at the level of her right ear, resembling a winged animal.

She was holding the hand of a young woman who, unlike her, never looked at him.

They were each other's mirrors, childhood hand in hand with their future. Their skirts dragged through grass and dirt, showing a brownish stain down to their shins, as if they had been wandering in the mud for days. He followed them, feeling his heart beat in his chest, light, desperate, like the wings of a wild bird desperate for freedom. Diving into the thick mist that

came from the lake near the forest, he followed them one foot at a time, catching the sad, worried look of the girl holding the hand of the young woman whose face he hadn't seen. And he followed them, stepping through the mist and finding himself on a dirt road surrounded by trees so different from the ones he knew in England, tall with leaves like tiny ferns. The others he knew from his last vacation in Greece, his father had told him they were called palmtrees.

Palm trees and those tall ones with leaves made of tiny ferns, much greener than they could have been under a gray sky, in that damp frost.

They walked slowly along the road. Josh was afraid to look over his shoulder and find that his grandparents' house was no longer there. Hesitantly, but driven by curiosity and childlike innocence, he followed them on their way, disturbed, even if unconsciously, by the silence and the absence of any life.

Not a single forest animal. Not a single insect. Just silence.

The girl's eyes met his again, begging him to go back to where he came from. The woman walked on in her trance.

At the first corner he saw a small building in ruins, like the station of a guard who had never returned to his post. The white paint on the rough wall was peeling, the triangular roof was broken on one side.

He approached, eager to enter through the hole in the missing window and examine what was inside. But something stopped him, like an invisible wall growing in his chest, preventing him from taking another step toward the building that stood abandoned and half-destroyed, reigning alone at the corner of the dirt road. He didn't know what that feeling meant when he was six, but decades later he could still feel the energy of the place weighing on his soul, pushing him away. And his instincts kept him where he was, echoing the presence of danger within him.

Little Josh followed the little girl and her companion, who were

clearly heading for a white church with long, pointed spires at the end of the road, framed by mountains of more intensely green trees bathed in mist. Inside its open doors was a tiny reddish spotlight, like a piece of burning coal floating in the air, or the tip of a cigar.

For a second, the world seemed to hold its breath, and the gong of low, slow bells carried through the heavy air, making his ears ache. And the boy felt the power of fear come for him, like huge, fleeting hands of black shadows.

Stunned, he stayed where he was, feeling the icy air of the place find his pores and penetrate them, freezing him from the inside. Petrifying him.

The woman stopped suddenly, searching for the sound, like a bird of prey sensing the presence of a meal hidden in the bushes. She slowly turned toward him.

The little girl, staring at him with tears in her eyes, shouted for him to run, and after a moment of confused hesitation, he obeyed. The girl's voice broke. Was she still screaming? Joshua didn't know, all he cared about now was finding his way back. The only thing he wanted to know was when he was going to see his mother. And the boy, instinctively sensing the gravity of his situation, burst into tears as he ran.

A guttural, animal sound cut through the air, overlapping the bells, and the feeling of the trees coming to life almost paralyzed him. In a small voice, too thin to reach even his own ears, he cried out: "*I want my mommy!*"

Once again, the inhuman roar came for him, causing him to lose his balance and fall. Whatever it was, it produced unintelligible words that seemed to be repeated by the leaves like tiny ferns, spreading through the environment like the song of cicadas.

She was behind him, he was sure of it. Those were footsteps, the sound of something touching the earth, weren't they? Footsteps, hurried like his own, soon to be followed by a deadly

embrace when she reached him, lying there even more helpless. And what would she do then? Take him with her? Chew on his little legs while he was still alive?

The sound of something scratching the ground, perhaps a twig? No. It was footsteps! He knew it. Scratching the pebbles along the path, faster and faster. Closer and closer.

Joshua stood up, not daring to look back. Not knowing what would happen to him if he saw the woman's face. Was she even human?

He finally reached the bend with the abandoned cabin. The darkness that emanated from it seemed to pulse, echoing the song of a thousand insects carried by the even stronger breeze, mingled with the warnings of a lonely church at the foot of a jungle mountain.

With no further thought, he closed his eyes and continued on his journey. A second later, Josh ran into his grandparents' yard and found them both worried and relieved to see him.

He had told them what he had seen, which made his grandfather laugh after calming him down and making sure he was all right. The man then praised his imagination and warned him not to stray too far from the cottage.

His grandmother, on the other hand, had a different glow in her eyes, one of recognition. A memory buried deep in her subconscious. They never talked about it, but to this day she still asked him about the worlds he invented as a boy, and he knows she believes in the impossible more than she would like to admit. Out of fear or prejudice, he didn't know. But he had given up asking, and carried the burden of seeing and hearing what others could not.

Uncomfortable with the memory, Josh scratched his head with both hands, trying to dispel the thoughts he had so carefully locked away in his soul's underworld.

It took his weakened body two minutes to realize that he

was cold, his head was heavy, and his feet were burning. He looked at his phone again. 7:15 in the morning.

The sun shone behind a wall of thin, unstable clouds. Blurry.

- Oh my God! - That was all he could say as he saw the boy next to him, no more than eighteen, making unmistakable guttural sounds.

The boy's nose was dripping red, sticky liquid, and he was spewing alcohol, blood, and goo onto the metal floor of the train. The young woman on the other side hurried to lift her gothic robes from the seat and twisted her face in disdain and disapproval. In a single motion, she sat down two seats over. Josh wanted to warn her that some of the young man's stomach contents had stuck to his leather coat. But the subway stopped and she got off.

Too late. Josh shrugged. It was always like this, he thought, his mind running free now, the result of the recklessness brought on by the booze. Always thinking about doing something he thought was right and giving up before he tried. Living for himself, in a spiral of selfishness and individualism. Passive.

The boy's face was so pale that it seemed he had lost his soul as well as his dignity. As his only sign of life, he laid his head on his neck and fell asleep.

The subway stopped again. Joshua recognized his station and got up, knowing he should have gone to the boy for help, woken him up to see if he was okay. He should have, but he staggered to the door and stepped out. The city air on his face brought the sobriety and the reasons why he hadn't fallen asleep yet to his consciousness.

Good reasons, and yet...

Part of him had gone out to celebrate, the other part to numb the other, less noble feelings brought on by the same news.

He walked down the stairs of the station, inhaling the

unmistakable smell of urine, sucked up by the concrete walls over time. He zipped up his coat and stopped at the traffic light at the intersection, along with so many others who, like him, were returning from clubs or going to work.

The light opened and he took a quick walk home.

As he crossed the street, his gaze fell on the rear window of a stationary car, where the reflection of the image of the glowing tip of a cigarette or cigar momentarily confused him, then disappeared as if made of smoke.

Leaving behind the familiar feeling of unnaturalness, like the echo of the call he felt he could no longer ignore.

THANK YOU!



Thank you for reading this chapter and if you are interested in this story, please sign up for the newsletter to be notified when the book is released and to get many more insights about Berlin and more(!) that I don't share on social media!

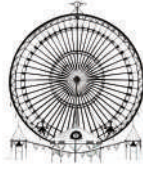
Colors of the Beyond Insights!

If you are reading this on a printed PDF, you will find the link on my website and on <https://linkin.bio/casaltoris>.

I would love to have you as a part of this troupe!

C. A. Saltoris

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



C. A. Saltoris is a Brazilian journalist, former actress and theatre director, entrepreneur, founder of the YouTube channel Halls in The Forest - Rescuing Folk Tales, and author of fantastic and gothic stories that have something to say - and which she cheekily calls literature, in the sense of serious work. Although she prefers to write about witches and goblins rather than 21st-century people who suffer the same things we do

in our everyday lives. For that, she reads the newspapers or calls a friend with a broken heart. Saltoris was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in the late 1980s. She lives with her husband and son in Berlin, Germany.



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