**Yellow**

Anne E. Raustol

Yellow is the color of smooth butter melting down the sides of my stack of pancakes and onto my plate. I am a little girl, sitting at the table in a town called Ozark. Across from me, my twin brother, with his curly brown hair and ready smile, eats his breakfast. We are each silent. A universe swirls inside our brains. Parents who don’t talk. A dad who is mad and sad. I know this because of his eyes looking down and his jaw flaring in and out like gills. I think of a fish lying on the concrete.

My pancakes are moist. The best on the planet. The love I can taste. My mother stands at the kitchen sink. What is she thinking? Is she wishing us away or just dreaming of a time she is straining to understand? Trying to sort something out like a math problem. She sips her coffee, and I can see that she is crying quietly. This annoys me. My arms wrapped around her middle don’t fix her. My father is walking our dog, Ricky, muscular and black as the sky when the night isn’t afraid to be what it is, when it doesn’t get complicated by full moons and clouds and city lights.

A girl in my neighborhood eats dog food and laughs in a particular way that I sometimes imitate in the bathroom mirror with the door locked because even my brother who floated in my mother’s belly with me, would laugh if he saw me pretending to be a different girl. Her laugh would end up in a painting in a museum. And people would stand in front of it and say smart things about it or be confused. But no one admits to confusion. Here’s the thing, she throws her head back until all of her hair reaches her poochy butt then she instantly stops laughing, but she keeps arching back like she’s stuck. She scares me. She once broke into our house like a robber and took Ricky outside to play. When we pulled into the driveway, she was lying in the grass, Ricky standing over her. My mother said, *Dear God*. My dad said, *What the hell?* We all began opening our car doors. I thought she was dead, so I clutched my mom’s arm as we walked toward the girl. Ricky stopped licking her and lowered his ears while lifting his eyes at the same time back and forth. He knew that things were not ok. The girl giggled as if she had done nothing wrong.

Yellow is the color of one Lego piece in my brother’s shoebox full of Legos. Sometimes I find that one piece and use it for cheese when my Barbie’s go on a picnic under the weeping willow. My brother does not like his Lego to be used this way. I don’t understand why he cares. He cares about things I don’t, like whether my dad smokes in the back yard. He thinks my mom will drive away if he keeps smoking. I stand with my dad in the backyard while he smokes sometimes. I ask him about the old days when he played the stand-up bass. He talks to me in breathless spurts in between drags and puffs of his cigarette. He doesn’t ask me why I want to hear the same details over and over. One day, I’ll ask something else like: what’s your favorite color?

Yellow is the color of sun melted on the ocean. I’ve never seen the ocean, but I can imagine. I’d swim to the cold depths and stay there until my mom wandered if I’d become a fish and stopped being her girl.

Yellow is the color of the Tropical Tang in the Chinese restaurant where my dad takes us when it’s his turn to cook. I stand at the tank with my brother, and I can’t help but pucker my lips out like the Tang until my brother tells me I’m doing it again. The way her expression never changes makes me think of a zombie or an annoyed stage director darting this way and that. When the food is ready, my father slices the air in front of my face until the spell is broken.

Yellow is the color of corn on the cob piled up on a plate in the middle of my granny’s wrought iron table on the concrete next to her cellar door. Ready, set, go. My cousins and I grab piece after piece. Butter runs down our chins and through the holes of the metal table until the ground is full of darkened spots. A solar system next to our mud-rimmed bare feet.

My mother turns from the kitchen sink and says it’s time for school. She wipes her eyes and I glare at her until she looks at me, and I soften the muscles around my mouth. “It’s Saturday,” I say. “Pancake day.”

“Oh,” my mother says faintly. “Silly me.” She pulls me toward her.

I can hear my father come in with Ricky, and I hear the sound of the leash falling to the floor. I break away and walk into the living room. I pick up the leash and hang it on the hook where it belongs. My mother walks in with her coffee. I stare at her and back at my father. I hold my breath and imagine that I have gills. I imagine them pulsing like feathery hearts beating in my ears.