

## Colour Changing Paint

Maye Douglass (2019)

The early morning sun shone through the clouds over the parking lot outside Amelia's lab window. Even after six months of the same dreary view, loud colleagues, and a strict boss, Amelia loved everything about her cramped lab: the stainless-steel benches against the wall and the beakers bubbling with DNA and pigments on the island bench. But most of all, she loved the challenge before her: the creation of a paint that changed colour with temperature. It was an ambitious project, but Amelia was ready for the task.

Amelia glanced at her graduation photo of her and her mum. It was sitting under the window. Her mum had been so proud of her that day and when she'd gotten this job, she had been even prouder. Smiling, she returned to studying the properties of chameleon DNA, when her phone rang. Amelia spun to answer the call, knocking a beaker of liquid onto the chameleon DNA plate. She flinched, took a deep breathe to calm herself and, ignoring the phone call, cleaned up the spill.

She was getting out a new sample of chameleon DNA when she heard a strange noise coming from behind her. She stiffened and turned. Behind her was a small, green, shiny, snake-like creature with chameleon eyes and red spikes running down its back, was sitting on the sample plate under Amelia's microscope. Amelia cocked her head, shaken by the sudden appearance of an life form. The creature moved. It slid off the sample plate and across the bench to where Amelia had set up test tubes half full of green, blue, red, yellow, and purple liquids that shimmered in the sunlight. It ran into them, knocking them over, sending the coloured liquids splashing over the bench and cascading onto the floor as the test tubes shattered. Amelia jumped back in alarm, avoiding the liquids. She couldn't believe her eyes. She'd managed to create a living creature.

'Oh my gosh,' Amelia muttered.

She leaned across the edge of the bench and stared at the creature with wonder. The snake slid through the colours, absorbing them and rapidly changing colour. It started to grow. She jumped back onto the island bench. The creature stared at her. Then, avoiding the purple liquid, it slithered away, camouflaging with its surroundings.

Amelia looked at the coloured liquids dripping onto the floor and the shattered test tubes, disappointed. More glass shattered. She spun and looked for the creature. Nothing was

there. She needed to contain the lab to stop the creature from escaping. She locked and sealed the windows, moving as fast as she could. She glanced at the gap under the door and scanned the room for something to block it. Amelia raced over and grabbed her jumper that lay upon a chair. She scrunched it into a cylinder and bent down to shove it under the door.

Two glaring red chameleon eyes stared at her from just outside the lab. Amelia inched opened the door and, holding her breathe, she lunged for the creature. She grasped the tail and tried to drag it back into the lab, but it wriggled and squirmed, and the spikes dug into Amelia's palm. She let go and jumped up, looking at the small marks on her palm, wincing at the pain. But there was no time to dwell on it. She knew that, if the creature continued messing up her workplace, her boss would lose it. Like the time she got distracted and accidentally caused a small explosion. Everyone had come running, just in time to see her get lectured about safety in the lab. No one was impressed.

Then, realising the mess she was among, she remembered how the creature avoided the purple liquid. An idea sprung into Amelia's mind. If she could recreate the purple liquid, maybe it would somehow help contain the snake, but she needed to catch the creature first.

Outside, Amelia heard her boss stride down the hall, towards her lab. Yelling her name and stuff about the safety procedures and how she should know them by now, he stopped outside the lab and banged on the door.

'Just a minute,' Amelia called.

Her boss was strict about safety, but he didn't usually yell. She tried not to get into trouble, but it seemed as though she couldn't dodge it in this job. Another 'incident' might mean the end of her contract. She couldn't face the idea of telling her mum about that. She had been told stories about previous employees who had quit because the boss had intimidated them. But she wasn't about to do that. She was about to pursue the snake. She looked at the mess in the lab; the broken glass and the coloured liquids. Stepping over it to the door, she opened it and squeezed out into the hall, and closed the door behind her, so her boss didn't see the mess.

'Yes?' Amelia asked, a guilty look on her face.

'What's going on?'

'Uh, nothing.'

'Why are there breaking noises coming from your lab?'

'Oh, I dropped a breaker.'

'Really? Sounds like more than a beaker to me.'

'Um, I dropped two?'

‘Alright. Clean it up. I’ll be back in twenty minutes to check that everything’s okay.’ Her boss walked away, his eyes glinting with suspicion.

Amelia exhaled and went back into the lab. She stood still and observed the mess around her. It would have to wait. She turned, pushed open the door, and slipped out onto the hall opposite her lab. Looking down, she saw a trail of clear slime and followed it to the breakroom.

She opened the door to the breakroom and saw her colleagues gossiping. As she hesitated at the door, the snake creature slithered out of the room and under her feet without Amelia, or anyone, seeing. Amelia entered; the room fell quiet. Smiling, she looked around. She searched every cupboard and drawer but found no creature. She looked down and, with all eyes on her, she backed out of the room. As she closed the door, the whispering and gossiping resumed.

She moved through the halls in search for the creature, looking for the slime trail again. Picking up the pace, she slipped on the clear slime trail on the floor and tumbled through an open lab door. She hit the floor with a thud. Getting up onto her elbows, she looked around, trying to ignore the pain. The lab was empty, but there was an open drawer with rustling noises coming from it. Amelia walked towards the drawer, peeked inside, and closed it at lightning speed.

It contained the creature.

Amelia grabbed a specimen jar off the bench and opened the drawer. She grasped the creature. It squirmed and tried to escape her grasp, but she lifted it up and shoved it into the jar and secured the lid. She sighed with relief. Eager to head back to her lab, she turned.

There in front of her was her boss, standing in the doorway, tapping his foot, arms crossed.