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The Colour of Bee Larkham's Murder

Author: Sarah J. Harris

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Review:

“People say silence is golden. They're wrong. It's no colour at all,”
— Jasper

Jasper is thirteen. He is autistic, and has a further two conditions that make his experience of the world different to your average thirteen-year-old. Jasper sees colours when he hears sounds. This is Synaesthesia, in which two of the senses are merged. As grown ups, our five senses are processed independently by the brain, but at birth they are all interlinked. As we grow, a gene triggers the severing of the extra connections between the senses, but for some people, these extra neural connections remain in place. This is the case for Jasper. As the novel progresses, we learn about how he associates different people with different colours, and how the colour often reflects associated emotions. For example, Jasper's late mother was a beautiful and lively bright blue.

Jasper is also “face blind” otherwise known to neurologists as Prosopagnosia. This means that he cannot recognise faces, even his own – they are just an anonymous configuration to him. To compensate, he associates different people with the tone (and colour!) of their voice, or the clothes that they wear. This strategy works well for Jasper, until he witnesses the murder of his neighbour Bee Larkham. Can he work out who the murderer is if he hasn't recognised their face? This is the central dilemma of the novel. Jasper is at first convinced that he has committed the murder, and that his Dad helped to conceal the crime and removed the body. But this belief is slowly eroded as the novel progresses and Jasper's story becomes enmeshed with the neighbours he is surrounded by and their complicated pasts.

Harris's empathic understanding and visceral portrayal of Jasper's synaesthetic, face-blind, autistic world is compelling; a novel not to be missed.

Word count: 299