

The Colourful Life of Calum McCall

by Ron Butlin

During the early years of his life, Calum McCall was surprised to find himself waking up every morning in a winter country of darkened tenements, black railings and streets of pitiless traffic. There seemed to be only one sun in the Scottish sky, and it wasn't even striped – which perhaps explained the look of perpetual disappointment he could see in the faces of the men and women who lived there. Every so often he tried asking his parents: 'What has happened to the multicoloured suns that used to bounce across the sky, and to the colours that trailed after like rain?'

'Aye right,' said his dad. 'Elbows off the table,' said his mother. At school his teacher told him to sit up straight and pay attention – that way he would get ahead. When he fell in love for the first time he told the girl – she was called Alice – that her kisses brought back all the colours he had known so early on, and which were now faded almost to nothing in his memory. Alice said he was sweet, and a few months later she got engaged to an up-and-coming dentist. Years later, Calum married and had children of his own. One day his baby son pointed at the sky and

gurgled with pleasure. Calum followed the pointing finger, but could see nothing particularly special up there – nothing that was visible to him, anyway.

That night he slept badly for the first time. Now that he was in a position of responsibility, he could not afford to turn up at his office dishevelled with lack of sleep, not among his ambitious colleagues. His doctor gave him a packet of brightly coloured pills. Every morning now, Calum is up early, ready for the day ahead. Every night, he slips from one utterly dreamless world into the next.

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