

THE
PERTURBED
COLOR MAN





The Perturbed Color Man was not given to exaggeration, though he did misrepresent himself from time to time. "I'm not actually perturbed; this is just my face," he would say, by way of excuses.



It used to be that his most notable feature was the unprecedentedly vivid colors which radiated from him with indescribable splendor; indeed, so warm and vibrant were they that a glorious wall calendar was produced comprising 13 pictures he ^{commissioned} ~~commissioned~~ of himself - one for each month of the year and one for the cover.

When he unwrapped the proofs sent by the printing house he saw that the colors were a bit off. Bright colors were dull and dull colors were only adjacent to his notions of what they should be. Looking at the results or even thinking about them filled him with unease.



He called the printer and screamed to the high heavens, "Why are these colors wrong? The reds are anemic, the greens sickly, the yellows look like overripe summer squash and the blues look like an abandoned swimming pool on a clear day. A perfectly lovely blue, it must be said, but it does not do justice to the blue I have! And where to begin with the purples?"

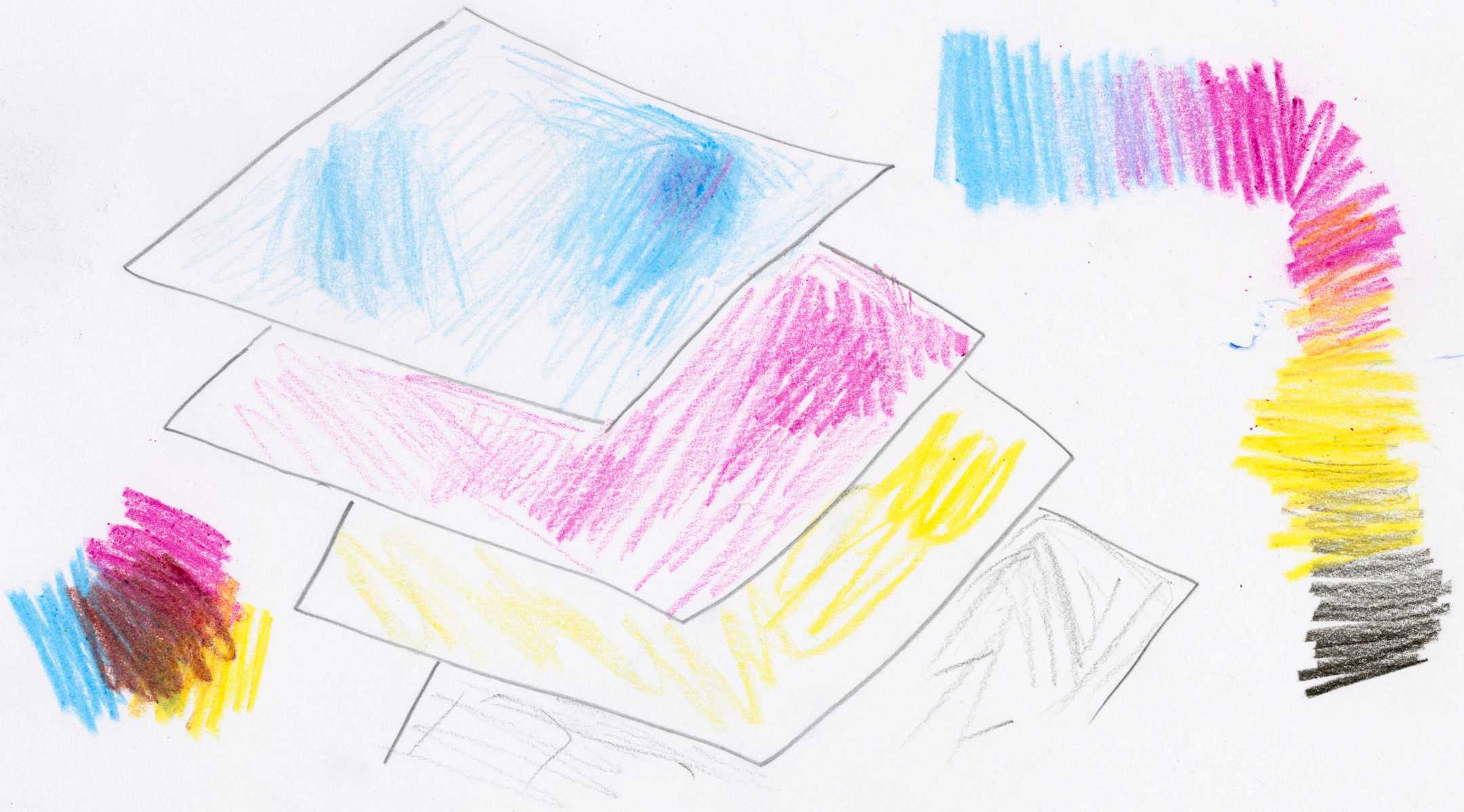


The printer replied, by way of explanation:

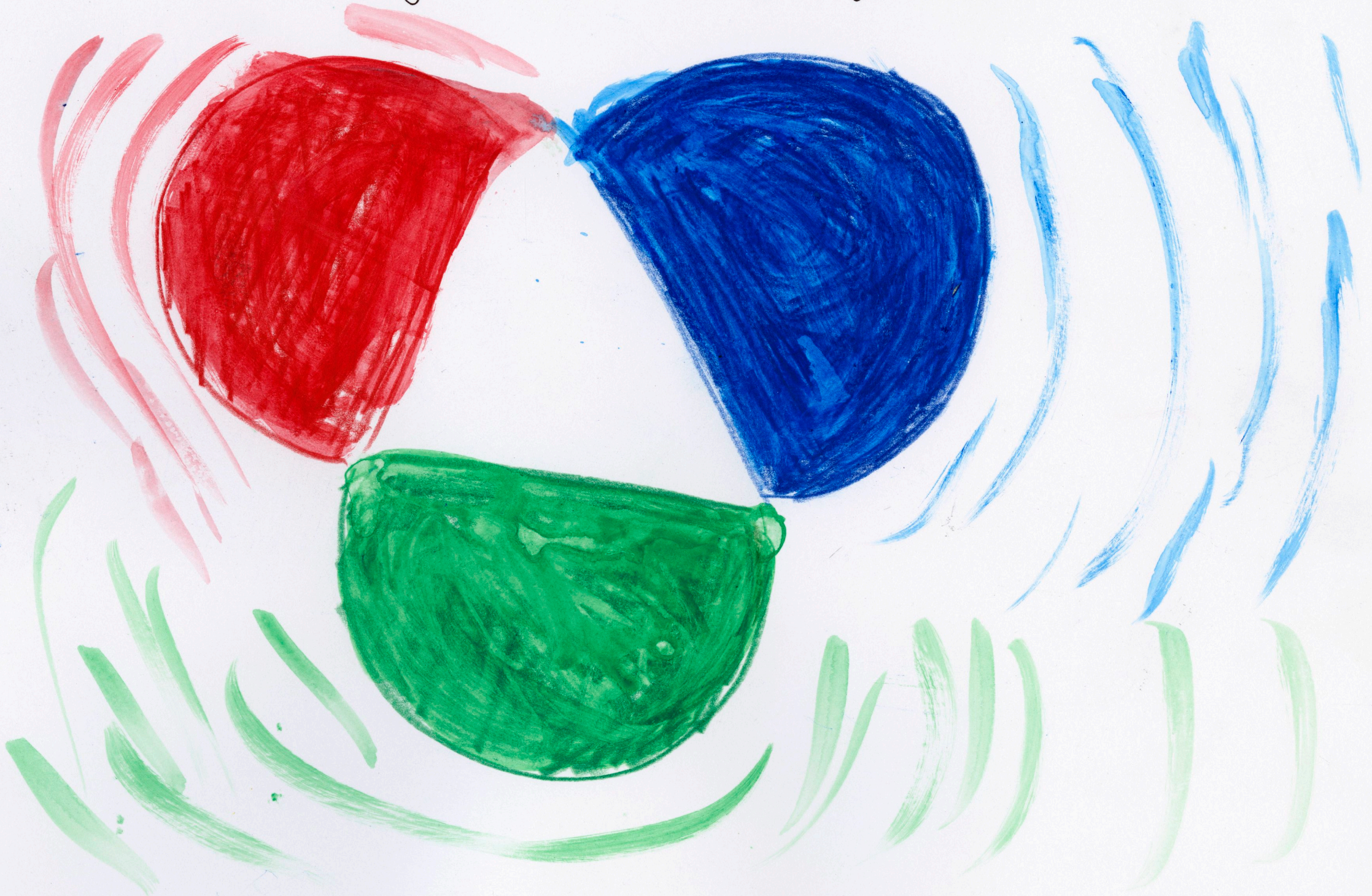
"I'm sorry you are upset. You must understand, Perturbed Color Man, that ink works differently than what you're used to seeing on a screen, or what you see in a mirror."



"Ink is additive, in terms of how much of each color there is. The types of ink are cyan, magenta, yellow and black, or CMYK for short. 'K' is black. If you add all of them together it makes a goopy mess. To give you an idea, try this on for size: topographical maps, the kinds with textures of altitudes, are made by printing each layer of C, M, Y and K on the same paper, in sequence and with subtle variances in quantities at each spot. It's the closest we can come to capturing the totality of nature, or at least what little slice of the light spectrum we can perceive. That's how printing works.



"Whereas on a monitor color works subtractively. How much is there of red, green and blue? Together in their maximum amounts they make white. It's apples and oranges, Perturbed Color Man."





This answer was not satisfactory to the Perturbed Color Man. In his rage he found another printer, who happened to be a magician as well.

"I understand that something was lost in the translation from screen to page for your calendar. There is an experimental technique that will give you the fullest of full colors. If it goes wrong I won't charge you for my troubles. But if all goes according to plan I'll add a 10% fee."



"Oh, go right ahead. Anything to capture my splendor so the world may see it!"

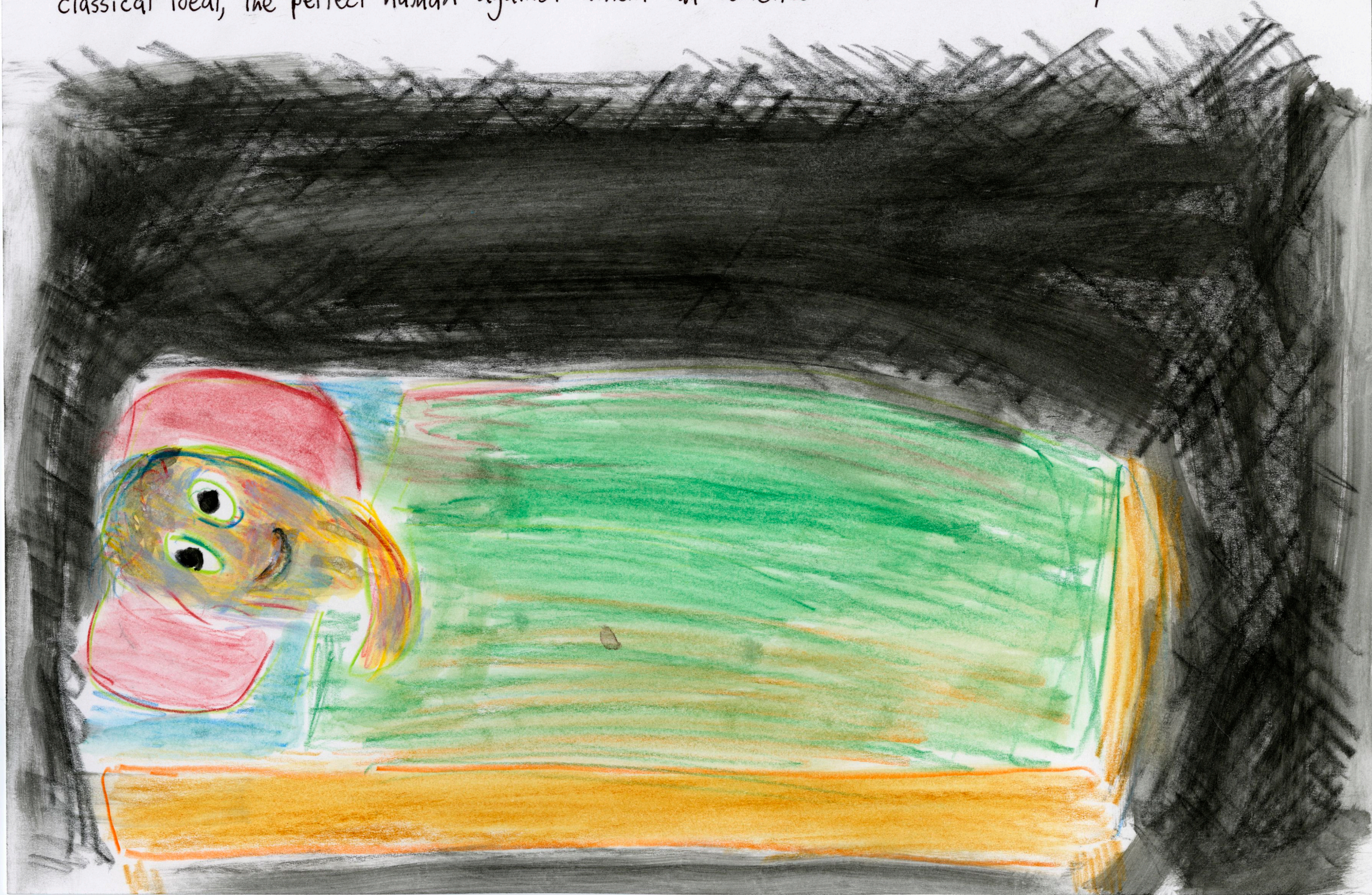
Much to his surprise, these new proofs were brilliant. With exuberance he called the printer-magician.

"They are even better than I imagined! Please go ahead and make the whole run."

He was the slightest bit pale from the shock, and after his customary mug of hot cocoa he went to bed.



P.C.M. was up through the night of the print job, tossing and turning, excited at how his glory would be captured and shared across every land and ocean. He would be regarded as the modern classical ideal, the perfect human against whom all societies' finest would be compared.



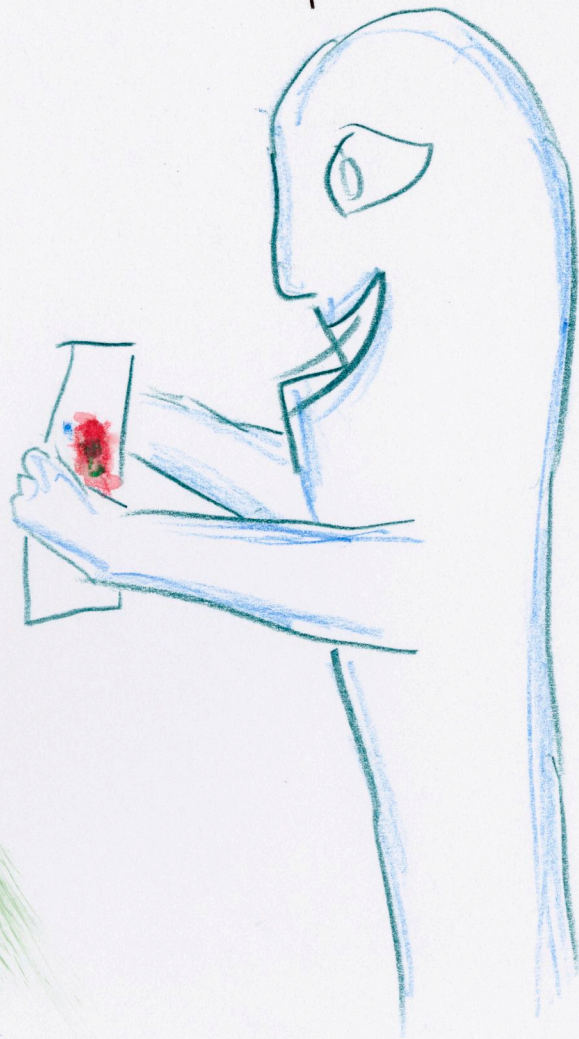


Morning arrived with a box of overruns and a receipt indicating that distribution had begun. He held a copy of the calendar up in front of the mirror to remind himself how close it was to its living source material. The cover picture and January were spot-on... except... Astonished, he saw that his own colors had become an unassuming combination of asparagus green and lavender. Where did his colors go? Was this the real cost of the printer-magician's experimental printing technique?

The calendar was a smashing success. Copies were sold around the world. In fact, a neighbor even bought **him** a copy of the calendar, not privy to its history.



"You **must** see this calendar, P.C.M.! I've never beheld such a magnificent specimen of a human being."



The Perturbed Color Man never regained his glorious colors. As fleeting as his beauty may have ultimately been (even without this distressing turn of events), he'd unknowingly squandered it to allow a magical calendar to project his splendor far and wide. He was celebrated, which was exactly what he'd wanted ever since he first became aware of his gift.



As for the calendar, it was as fleeting as the year whose months and days it marked. In each of the thousands of copies its ink faded, as did his own memory of that which had made him so very special.

