

From the Kitchen

29 September 2010



Today I offer you a parable.

It is a little-known fact that four-winged pebblebugs see everything in shades of green – pure blue looks black to them and pure yellow looks white. Red doesn't register at all.

They are called pebblebugs because in a fierce wind they wrap their six legs around the nearest small stone and hold on. Despite having four wings, they do not like to fly. If one of them fails to find a pebble in time and is blown away, it will walk home.

A pebblebug will usually only fly if pursued by something that would eat it. Unfortunately, one of those pebblebug eaters is the red petragast, which, of course, the pebblebugs cannot see. When a petragast eats a pebblebug, all the other pebblebugs simply see the victim disappear.

One day a pebblebug was born who had a genetic defect – she could see into the red part of the spectrum, so that yellow looked creamy, orange looked very pale pink and red looked, well, dark pink. That's how *we* would describe these colours as little Sandy saw them but *she* wouldn't, because these words don't exist for pebblebugs. Because Sandy didn't know that others couldn't see these colours, she thought nothing of it.

Sandy would sometimes ask her parents the name of something and they would look to where she was pointing and say, "There's nothing there, dear." She would be indicating a pale pink seed or a dark pink leaf and couldn't understand why no-one else could see these things. Her parents always said that she had an over-active imagination.

Then, one day, Sandy saw a large, dark pink monster walk up to a pebblebug and eat it. This horrified her. Why had no other pebblebugs called out, as they did when a voracious blue pebble cruncher was nearby? Then all the pebblebugs would scream and take to the air in a whirring cloud.

When Sandy asked her parents about the dark pink monster, they told her not to be silly. There *was* no such thing and she would have to stop making up such silly stories. Why couldn't she be sensible like the other youngsters?

Sandy could not understand her parents' attitude. Weren't they worried about the pebblebugs disappearing? When she raised this, they said that, of course, it worried *everyone*, but nothing could be done because they didn't know why it happened. It was just the way the world was.

As Sandy grew up, she started to understand the special gift that allowed her to see things that others couldn't. Apart from being able to avoid becoming a meal for a petragast, she also discovered that some of the dark pink seeds she saw lying around were tasty and nutritious. She tried to get her parents and siblings to eat these but, although they could touch and feel them, they were suspicious of something that was invisible to them.

One day Sandy was high up on a tall flower, eating the delicious nectar that was a pebblebug favourite. She happened to look down and saw a petragast approaching a young pebblebug. She called out a warning and other pebblebugs looked to see what she was yelling about, but they saw nothing. Sandy jumped up and down in her frustration and green pollen showered down and landed on the petragast's head, just as it devoured the little bug. Pebblebugs screamed and took to the air.

When Sandy, shaken and crying, got home, she was shocked to be met by her two angry parents and a furious pebblebug officer. The officer immediately started reprimanding her for her unforgivable behaviour which had made a monster appear out of nowhere.

“But,” sobbed Sandy, “that was one of the beasts that eats pebblebugs. I’ve been telling mum and dad about them for ever. They’re real, but no-one sees them because they’re a different colour.”

The officer told her to stop making things up. Above all, she was never, ever again to use her magic to make monsters appear.

“But we can do something about the monsters ... I mean, if we have pebblebugs on flowers, shaking them, then everyone will be able to avoid being eaten ... I mean, avoid disappearing.”

“That’s the most preposterous thing I’ve ever heard. Young lady, you are to stop this nonsense or your whole family will suffer the consequences.”

When the officer left, Sandy had to listen to her parents’ angry words and their fervent pleas. She never again mentioned seeing *anything* pink to *anyone*. She felt as if part of her life had been locked away.

When she was older and Sandy had her own baby pebblebugs, it soon became apparent that each of these youngsters had the same visual defect as their mother. Sandy taught them at an early age not to say anything about the things that other pebblebugs couldn’t see.

Of course, Sandy and her offspring avoided being eaten by petragasts. The only ‘normal’ pebblebug who believed and understood Sandy, was her partner Stonnington. He could see that there was something special about her and it served him well into ripe old age.

Sandy’s children did get very upset every time they saw a petragast. They would run out of the way but frequently they saw one of their playmates being eaten.

Sandy reconciled herself to her helplessness in the face of all the other pebblebugs who refused to benefit from her gifts. However, she hoped that when her children grew up, *their* babies would have the special sight and that, eventually, her descendants would be so numerous that the other pebblebugs would *have* to accept their gift as real. When ‘normal’ pebblebugs accepted that there were many ways of seeing the world, everyone would be better off. She also hoped that somewhere down that dusty track, the ‘normal’ pebblebugs didn’t get it into their heads to rid the world of the pink-seeing bugs because they were different. But such an eventuality was too awful to contemplate.