



A TWISTED PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER

WHEN THE ONLY WAY OUT
IS TO FACE THE TRUTH

THE
COLOURS
OF
DENIAL

ARTI MANANI

THE COLOURS OF DENIAL

**THE
COLOURS
OF
DENIAL**

**Chapter One
Free sample**

ARTI MANANI

Copyright © 2020 Arti Manani

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978 1 6596 1293 6

For my niece, Shreya

Keep shining

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arti Manani is a passionate writer and marketer, born in West London, England. She fell in love with books in her early childhood and wrote her first short story when she was ten, on scrap paper bound together by treasury tags.

The Colours of Denial is her first novel.

Find Arti on Instagram [@Author_Arti_Manani](#)
[#TheColoursOfDenial](#)

CHAPTER ONE

The man with the blurred face is getting closer. She's increased her pace but beneath her feet, the sharp grains of sand blackened by the darkness pulls her down into the ground, working her harder to leave the shadows. The clouds have encroached across the moon and the desert is dim, leaving her with no company other than the figures created inside her head. Her heart is pumping against her chest, with each beat louder than the one before and each breath heavier, as she comes to realise that she may not get away. Away from the darkness, the shadows and this unknown man with the blurred face. Her legs are weak and heavy and she begins to slow down until eventually, she stops running, accepting her defeat. The sun will soon rise, threatening to expose her. She has nowhere to hide.

The sound of breathlessness fades as her heart slows. Light appears in the distance as the sun gently pushes its way through the blackness. She stands, as she witnesses this miraculous fight between light and dark. The sun, so powerful that not even the shadows can defeat it, begins to celebrate its victory by showing off its vibrant, fiery colours across the skies, sprinkling the desert with gold dust. Even the clouds have surrendered and in this moment, she is calm. The world is still and silent. She stands motionless, feeling content. She is embraced by the sun's heat. Safe. Warm. The man with the blurred face has disappeared.

Sunday, 17 September 2017, 4:45 a.m. The curtains were drawn but the dim light from the streetlamp outside her window came flooding in, casting dark, creepy figures across the room. Sophia lay in bed, tucked beneath her thick duvet staring at the ceiling, recalling her latest nightmare. The man was getting closer. A drop of sweat trickled from her forehead and down the side of her face. It was only a matter of time until she would fall asleep, and it was only a matter of time until she would be face to face with this mysterious man who had been watching her, following her, haunting her in her dreams.

She turned her body and glanced over at Oliver as he slept beside her. His long, curly, brown hair swept across his face as he lay there, peacefully. She wanted to wake him from his sleep, to talk to him, to tell him about her nightmare. She wanted him to comfort her and tell her she was safe. But he was asleep, snoring gently beside her, calm and still. A deep sigh of disappointment escaped from her mouth as she disregarded the thought of waking him, slowly turning to move into her original position. She lay on her back once again, lost in her duvet, wide awake as she

stared at the blank ceiling.

Cold sweat continued to seep from her pores as her mind became hazy, clouded by the happenings of her recent nightmares. She was unable to forget, no matter how hard she tried. A secured box that was buried deep inside her was forcing itself open, compelling her to recall some of her previous encounters with the man with the blurred face. The danger wasn't real, but she was terrified. She lay there, trying to stay afloat in a pool of memories that were weighing her down, and drowning her in her own thoughts. It didn't matter that Oliver had been sleeping beside her. Sophia felt alone as she suffocated in the silence that surrounded her. It was the same silence which would later be interrupted by all of the nasty voices inside her head, as they constantly reminded her that she was not alone.

Sophia's eyes were heavy and tired but she refused to give her body what it was asking for. She refused to let herself fall asleep or rest, in fear of being tormented by another nightmare. The man with the blurred face had been getting too close, too fast.

She wasn't ready. She clenched on to her duvet as she pulled it up, tucking it under her chin, covering her body as if the duvet was a shield against her fears. She moved her arms beneath the covers, resting them by her sides as she lay there still, quiet and afraid as her armour failed to do the job she intended it to.

The voices inside her head had awakened from their peace as they hissed in a whisper through her ears. They slithered inside Sophia's mind and through her thoughts, entrancing her under a spell of anxiety, spilling all of her worries that she had stored away. Her dark thoughts spilled like a large coffee overflowing in an espresso cup. The coffee was bitter and strong, full of caffeine. It was a drug she didn't like, an addiction of darkness that was embedded inside her. It was a coffee being served without a smile, and one that she didn't want to drink.

The voices inside her head would strike her often, forcing open a box of instincts, gut feelings, and signs that she had ignored and buried within. Yet no matter how far down it was hidden, the truth remained on the surface of her soul and the voices would be sure to remind her.

The voices continued to hiss at her as the drums of her heartbeat throbbed through her ears. She began to fight the snakes inside her, pushing the lid back onto the box, forcing it down. She lay there, breathing deeply while releasing some of her nicer thoughts as they soaked up the bitterness of the spilt coffee like a sponge. She lay there, trying to recreate the safe zone that had once existed.

Her bed was a place of security, where she could escape and lock herself away and be free. It was her hiding place. A place to run away where no-one would disturb her. It was the place where she could be herself, weak and sensitive, without the need to pretend that she was anything else. But the safe zone was no more, the voices inside her head told her so. Safety had become a distant memory and her safe zone was transformed into a place surrounded by dark and evil thoughts. It had become a place where she'd have many sleepless nights where she'd force herself to stay awake with no choice but to listen to the torturous voices inside her head. It had become a place where she would eventually fall asleep and be tormented in her nightmares. Her bed had become a place where she could no longer run or hide.

She turned around, grabbing on to what was left of her consciousness as she slipped out from beneath the duvet, snuggling her feet into her navy blue slipper boots. It was cold on the other side of the duvet, cold and gloomy. But she was better off.

Sophia tiptoed over to the silhouette of her overly busy dressing table, quietly, trying not to

wake up Oliver. She picked up her hairbrush from its assigned area, nudging a jewellery box out of the way at the same time. Bad move. The box pushed a bottle of Chanel perfume off the table and she jolted her left arm forward to save it from smashing against the wooden interior of their bedroom floor. Saved. But a slight touch of her elbow to a can of hair spray sent it tumbling to the floor. It was dark after-all and inevitable given the state of her dressing table. The hair spray was not hers and had no assigned place on this table. If Oliver were to wake up now, it was his own doing. But he didn't flinch, oblivious to his surroundings.

Sophia began to comb her hair - fine and golden like the desert sands that haunted her in her sleep, each strand glowing like the rays of sun that had been threatening to expose her to the dark shadows and the man with the blurred face. The hair spray rolled towards Oliver's abandoned exercise bike near the window, which now served the purpose of being a dumping ground for clothes. She glanced over at him. Despite the noise, he didn't move. He lay still, fast asleep, peacefully.

'Sorry,' she apologised in a whisper. 'About to head out for a jog.' Sophia put the hairbrush back in its allocated spot, ignoring the hair spray on the floor. She grabbed her running clothes that had been hanging from the handlebars of the exercise bike, before leaving the room.

She switched on the light as she entered the bathroom and stood at the basin, squinting and blinking as her eyes readjusted to the brightness of the large, round, moon-like ceiling light. She stared at her reflection in a small, oval mirror which sat on a little shelf above the sink. The mirror had a blue and green mosaic tile border around it. Some of the tiles were missing and the mirror itself had a chip not too far off from the centre. Despite its current state, she held on to it.

Sophia smiled at her reflection, staring at herself beyond the cracks and chips. She looked strong and controlled, independent, powerful, feisty, confident. She looked like everything she was not. She stood out, like a lion in a field of green, living in an environment that wasn't made for her, where she was always seen, but made to hide. The shades of golds and browns in her hair, the shape and depth of her large, orangey-brown eyes, and her buttoned nose were very much like the features of a lion. She played a perfectly good role in holding up the appearance of being strong and courageous, but she hid the real animal inside her, always afraid, always looking out for danger, always running away - Sophia, the meerkat.

She turned on the tap and began to wash away the sweat from her face as the ice-cold water began to steal her warmth. She changed into her black leggings and Oliver's baggy sweatshirt and stood there, soothed by the scent of his Armani aftershave as she closed her eyes and held her breath. The scent filled her with gratitude and awe as she reconnected with herself, embracing the steadiness of her soul with Oliver's. She exhaled slowly as she looked into the mirror proudly before turning to exit the bathroom.

Sophia headed down the stairs, quietly, slipping her feet out of her navy blue slipper boots, and into her black and orange trainers, stuffing bits of her mane into a bun at the same time.

The front door instantly slammed shut behind her. She jumped as the sound echoed through her ears, spilling more coffee from the overflowing cup inside her head. Flashbacks of the nightmare from nearly seven months ago came back to haunt her, when the man with a blurred face first came knocking on her door.

'No,' Sophia whispered to herself as she turned away from the house. She jogged down the steps and onto the street, telling herself that she was not going to be afraid, even though she was.

It was around 5:30 in the morning. The street was cold and eerie with little life other than that

of the handful of other lone joggers and dog walkers. Sophia began to jog down the pavement. She jogged along three blocks, past houses, a petrol station, a church and her old high school, before she reached the entrance of her local park. She dodged out of the way of an elderly man who was walking out with his old and sad looking golden retriever. The dog immediately began to bark at her, angry and ferocious like a raging fire.

'Sorry,' Sophia apologised under her breath as she looked down at the ground, ashamed and afraid, avoiding any eye contact with this stranger and his dog. The dog continued to bark viciously at her for coming too close to his master as she scurried, moving further away from them and from any confrontation that could have come of it. The old man ignored her but the dog's barking was persistent as it growled angrily at Sophia, threatening her with its sharp, claw-like teeth. The man had been trying to pull at the dogs' leash, embarrassed and keen to keep walking.

She jogged through the gates of the park and stopped at a bench just inside the entrance to tighten her laces, skimming around at the same time to see if anyone else was there. As usual, like any other Sunday morning, not one single being was to be seen. Three empty cans of Budweiser were stood on the floor beside the bench, making her wary as she looked around, cautious and paranoid in case the culprit was still hanging around. Nobody was there.

Sophia began to jog down a wide path with mountains of golden brown leaves that had been swept to the sides. The park was beautiful and came to life with the vibrant colours of autumn. Trees stood tall and proud every two meters down the path on both the left and right of her. The fields behind them were spotted with evergreen bushes and more trees holding on to what they had left of their red and gold leaves. It was perfection at its finest.

The whole park was the most peaceful and positive place to be in and the perfect place for Sophia to escape. Escape from all of her problems, her nightmares, reality. Everything would disappear, except the voices inside her head as they continued to abuse the drugs from the overflowing coffee cup, addicted to the demonic energy being served within.

Sophia jogged along a sandy footpath that went through a woodland area of tall trees, long grass and bushy hedges.

'Get away.' 'Get out.' 'Go.' The voices inside Sophia's head began to mutter, getting louder and sharper like an angry and violent windstorm. She ignored the tornado that was beginning to form inside her and jogged past a children's playground area, and up a hilly slope that sat further away from the playground, overlooking the nicer part of town.

'You did this, Sophia.' The howling inside her head began to turn into a storm, forming angry flashes of lightning into her soul, creating a burning fire within. But she took no notice, she was nearly there. She jogged down the hill and approached a large pond with a fountain in the middle that sat at the end of the park, not too far from the hilly slope. Opposite the pond was Lilly's, a small and cosy café hidden deep inside the park. She continued to jog around the pond, slowing down her pace as the sounds of the fountain sprinkled into her ears. She was there. The sounds began to drown out the voices that had been hissing at her from inside her head, extinguishing the fire that had been created by the intensity of the caffeine-induced storm. There was something about the sound of running water that made Sophia feel at peace. It surrounded her with a sense of harmony giving her the warm hug that she'd been yearning for. She was exhausted. She was tired of running in the park, in her sleep, away from everything throughout her entire life. But she needed this run, it was one with a purpose. A purpose she was yet to figure out.

Just over an hour had passed and Sophia had run over fifteen laps around the park before she decided to head back home. She'd been running almost every day for nearly seven months, but fifteen laps was a new accomplishment for her. Yet she didn't feel a sense of achievement. The closer the man with the blurred face got to her in her nightmares, the more laps around the park she would do out of fear and panic, running away from her problems and the negativity that came with it. Fifteen laps wasn't something to be proud of, it was a sign of failure. Her failure.

Sophia walked, slowly and out of breath towards the same gates that she had entered through. Puffs of condensation left her mouth as she exhaled. She wanted to get back into bed. She was tired, drained and in need of rest but she couldn't let herself fall asleep. She knew the impact of drifting off, she couldn't risk it. Wrestling against tiredness to stay awake and being tortured by the voices inside her head were far more appealing than the effects of falling asleep.

As she walked closer towards the exit, a sudden feeling of uneasiness filled her gut. Everything seemed off and the air had become colder and bitter. A sudden gust of wind struck her face startling the voices inside her head as they began to scream. The sounds tore through her skin like shards of glass being thrown at her in masses. Sophia stopped dead in her tracks. She stood there, terrified and numb. Someone was there, watching her. The figure sat in the distance, on the bench where she'd tightened her laces. He sat, in his muddy blue jeans and his unzipped, dark brown bomber jacket over a navy blue hoodie. His face was down but his eyes were on her, staring at her, watching her.

Uncomfortable, confused and scared, Sophia was loyal to her fears. She froze as her brain refused to communicate with the rest of her body. Her legs became heavy and her meerkat survival tactic had failed her before she could even attempt to run. She kept her eyes on this figure. He was observing her, watching her. The fine hairs on the back of her neck rose as terror struck her soul. Her muscles became tense. She wanted to run but had become paralysed to the spot. The voices inside her head screamed at her to move but she remained stationary. Her mind became clouded with fear. There was nothing she could do. Sophia was weak. He watched her as she stood there, trying to fight the battle with herself.

Adrenaline activated her nervous system as the sound of her heart pounding into her ears became louder and louder. Her blood began to pump through her body viciously bringing her back from her numbness. The man was still watching. It was fight or flight. The voices inside her head began to panic, awakening her meerkat instincts – flight. She began to move, scurrying to the side making sure there was going to be enough space between herself and this man. She had to pass him to get out of the park, she had to be quick, she had to escape. Her legs were heavy as a strong magnetic force began to pull them down towards the ground, making it harder for her to get away. The happenings of her nightmares were becoming real. Her paranoia kicked in and she panicked.

'Who is he?' 'Why is he here?' 'What does he want?' The voices inside her head began to scream at her all at once. 'This is your fault, Sophia.' 'Why are you running?' 'You'll be dead soon.' The nastiness of the voices terrified her. They screamed suddenly with no warning, biting away chunks of her soul each time, making her feel unsafe and unstable in her own body. She sped up, trying to get away from the man, from the voices, from herself. Her large, lion-like eyes filled with fear as she continued to feel his eyes piercing through her skin. She couldn't see his face, she didn't look long enough, hard enough. Her goal, for that moment, was to get out of the park, alive. She was a few meters from the gate, but so was he. Sophia sped up and with each step and each skip of her heartbeat, found herself running. She could see him, from the side of

her eye as he began to rise from the bench, slowly, face down, eyes still on her.

‘Shit!’ she whispered to herself as her heart pumped rapidly inside her chest. The meerkat scurried, heading towards the gates, towards this man, hoping she’d get there first.

‘Yo!’

A voice called from behind her but she wasn’t going to stop. It wasn’t real, it wasn’t happening, no-one was going to save her. Sophia knew only she could save herself. She wished someone was there to help her, but it wasn’t real. She continued to run convincing herself that there was no-one there to help, that it was the voices inside her head, that it was all her imagination. But the man was still there, walking forwards, watching her, waiting.

She ran, away from the voice, away from this strange man, and out of the park gates. She ran down the street with her heart still pumping recklessly. She ran until she was at a safe distance, away from the park, until she was ready to slow down. Still nervous and scared, Sophia turned around. Her entire body was numb with fear. The man was gone. Sophia had escaped, just like in her nightmares. But she hadn’t won, and she knew it. This man was still hunting her, teasing her, preparing to move in. Did her nightmare just become real? Sophia was screwed. Whether she was awake or asleep, he was there, and there was nothing she could do. She scurried home. Sophia, the meerkat.

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking time to read the first chapter of *The Colours of Denial*.

If you enjoyed reading, the suspenseful romance thriller is available to purchase through Amazon in paperback and Kindle formats, and is free for Kindle Unlimited customers.

You can also find a range of snippets on my Instagram page [@Author_Arti_Manani](#)

Arti Manani



PURCHASE FROM AMAZON

Take yourself on an emotional rollercoaster ride filled with suspense by purchasing your copy of *The Colours of Denial* here:

US <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1659612934/>

UK <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1659612934/>

CA <https://www.amazon.ca/dp/1659612934/>

IN <https://www.amazon.in/dp/1659612934/>

AU <https://www.amazon.au/dp/1659612934/>

BEHIND THE SCENES

There's a story behind every story. In my interview with Bidwell Hollow, I talk about where my inspiration for *The Colours of Denial* came from, and my experience of self-publishing my debut novel.

[Click here](#) to read the article on Bidwell Hollow's website.

JOIN MY MAILING LIST

Email AuthorArtiManani@hotmail.com

REVIEWS

“An absolute page-turner! Each chapter leaves you on a cliffhanger. So wonderfully written, I was immediately invested. Read half of the book in one go as I couldn't put it down. As for the ending... argh, I can't say any more – you'll just have to read it!!!” – Amazon customer

“I felt like I was riding a rollercoaster of emotions and I didn't know what to believe or who to trust until the last few chapters, which I won't say more about because wow! Highly recommended.” – Amazon customer

“A page-turning thriller that I couldn't put down. I don't want to spoil anything, but I was blown away by the ending.” – Amazon customer