

COLOR / OFF-COLOR

Emily Pease



Image: “Sunline” by Annie Kuhn. “Color / Off-Color” was written by Emily Pease for Rattle’s Ekphrastic Challenge, June 2021, and selected as the Artist’s Choice.

Fulfilled, we stripped the bed and washed it all—
the sheets and pillow cases, the pretty dresses
we wore while dancing, yours the bronze
orange, mine the dappled pink you say
I look sexy in—plus the blue cape you
swung last night like a lasso, doing your
theatrical cha-cha. We let all that cotton

mix in the machine, hummed to the tune
of slosh and spin. It was so hot, even
the early morning air said Morocco.
Half-naked, we made iced coffee, ate
the remaining mangos. Later, when
we headed out to the line, I said you
might at least put on shorts, and you

answered, let the neighbors enjoy.
Who couldn’t love a woman like that?
Everything you did was colorful
off-color, like your canary-dyed hair.
We stood at the clothesline dripping
in the heat, pinching clothespins.
Piece by piece we hung the laundry:

stripes with stripes—pink/white/yellow
green/white/pink/blue—tangerine
bed sheet—lavender/white/pink/
orange. Our dresses sagged softly
on the line, draped at the neck as if
we still slinked in them, skin slippery
with sweat, twirling, singing, satisfied.