

Sixteen Colours

On a parallel Earth, much like ours, there are only sixteen colours. There is no tomato, candy-apple, or fire engine red. There is just red. When you say green, purple, maroon, aqua, or ivory, they know what you mean. The sun is yellow, snow is white, the sky is blue, the night is black, bottled water is clear, pumpkins are orange. There are no “shades of gray” for them. As a people they don’t understand our need for shades of colour. The biggest difference between us and them, however, is that they have a million shades of meaning in how they relate to each other, their feelings far richer and more varied on their world than in ours. A nervous glance means the end of a relationship, a wink the heart learning to beat again. On any given day you can witness two people tearing each other’s clothes off under a tree that has a brown trunk and leaf-green leaves, a woman slapping a man clean across the face on the gray of a nearby parking lot, and someone stepping off a ledge, falling six stories to the pink carnations below. They kill each other in jealous rages, commit suicide by the thousand, and write great poems. They don’t know how to hold back. How could they?

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