

Colourless

'What happened?'

He remembered sunsets that bathed the sky in pink and littered it with orange. He'd lay on little hills in the grass and gaze upwards, making patterns out of golden clouds that dotted the sky, always moving and yet perfectly stationary. Every once in a while he'd drop his neck to look straight at the impossibly far horizon streaked with erubescant tints, as if blushing at its own beauty. Dropping it further still the greens of nature surrounded him: avocados that hung humbly from treetops; dartmouths and shamrocks that lay dispersed amongst spring pastures; occasionally the nauseating chartreuses of a furtive grassland reptile.

He remembered the oceans blue, vibrant and full of life with their ripples of azure spread expansively across the water. Closer to the shore, he would wade in currents of teal and turquoise that would carry the wind on their backs and lap gently against the sandy shoreline.

He remembered his house furnished in an astounding array of brown, from birch chairs and oak floorings to powerful doors of maple and majestic tables of mahogany. At night, they would all be bathed in yellow lighting, bright enough to display their magnificence, soft enough to shape curves and edges through shadow.

All of that was gone now, of course.

Prohibited.

Banned.

Removed from existence.

It didn't start with colour. When they first coalesced into what was now known as the Planetary Authorities, the newly-joint governments of the world began by censoring little things. Redacting the odd line in a book, cutting a 10-second clip from a movie every now and then. But slowly, steadily, incrementally, they began to censor more and more. Defamatory posters, letters critical of the government, unfavorable e-mails, all removed. Social media and private communication disappeared overnight. Religions outlawed, libraries torn down and production of any food more complicated or savory than a biscuit ceased. Before people knew it, they were entirely stripped of anything and everything they could possibly use to express their voice and think creatively. Well, almost everything.

For such an abstract construct, removing colour was incredibly exhaustive for the planetary authorities, and took several decades, but on a cold winter's evening in 1984, every last scrap of it was wiped clean off the face of the world.

There was nothing to do but watch helplessly, unable to cry out in protest as the planetary government announced that "for the social, economic and political efficiency and welfare of the people, the government and the world, colour has now been successfully removed from our planet."

And that was it. All the colours of the world that one could name, see or even imagine, gone. Like the wisps of wind that fly by and then cease to exist, they'd lost colour before they knew they had it. The wild spectrum of the rainbow, from the deepest red to the darkest shade of violet, all reduced to black and white.

But for him and others like him, the children of then and the octogenarians of now, they would always have colour. From the second they closed their eyes, their eyelids became projector screens onto which they cast their most distant memories of a world where hues and tints were scattered across the canvas of the Earth and sky. Where the planet wasn't a cinder block that rotates around a grey star, it was a work of art crafted by God's expert hands. They could delve into the realm of the past and relish in its iridescence and saturation, in the tinctures, pigmentations and complexity in a world of colour.

'We can do that', he thought. 'But they can't.'

The new generation. Those born into the absence of colour, who grew up never knowing the endless creative expression possible in a world without censorship. He saw them everyday, their youthful faces, their attentive mannerisms, but he also saw something else. Or rather, didn't see. Something was missing. Their strides showed conviction but their eyes were absent, as if longing for something without knowing what. Their heads tilted as they walked, struggling to remember something that didn't exist in this monochromatic reality, but something that they desperately needed nevertheless.

Looking out the window, at a grey sky over a greyer building behind a road that was greyer still, he sighed. The warmth of his breath condensed upon the glass as he saw his distorted reflection. He chuckled internally.

'Dear, oh dear, what have I become?'

Once-rosy red cheeks now shrivelled into ashen skin, once-bright blue eyes now a dull grey, once-proud black hair reduced to dusty strands of dead cells. The mouth that could raise a smile that lit up entire rooms now somberly sagged downward in a permanent look of melancholy. The face that once held so much promise, so much life and hope of the future, now lay decaying in front of his very eyes.

As he stared, he pondered how this pallid mask before him wasn't just a reflection of himself. It was a reflection of everyone and everything that had lost its vibrance, its vitality, its colour. The realisation of what he should do, *must* do, had come to him many a year ago, yet everyday he wondered whether he had the courage to enact it. Several other times he'd debated internally over it in an attempt to convince himself, to no avail.

But now, looking at the hollow, empty husk that stared back at him in the window, he realised there was nothing else for him anymore. Every ounce of creative expression, every drop of colour and purpose wringed out of him by countless laws and bans and censors over his lifetime, and he did nothing. Nothing but watch. But

the one thing he still had was his memories, and they were screaming at him that this was not the way the world had to be, what the world should be.

Straining, he lifted himself out of his grey chair and hobbled towards the door of the cellar. He hefted it up with considerable effort, the rusty hinges groaning along with him as he did so. Reaching downstairs, he searched for it, hands grasping in the dark...

With the exaggerated care of a dying man, he carried it upstairs, opening the door of his house and walking outside into the bustling street. Well, bustling was the wrong word for it. It implied energy, chaos, life. There was none of that before him. Black cars puffed black smoke from their black exhausts as the grey-clad people walked quietly and hurriedly to whatever place demanded their presence for whatever reason. He took in the scene before him, feeling so disconnected from this scared new world that it almost felt like a book or a movie playing before his eyes. Not that anybody had read or watched one for over 70 years.

He lifted the lid of the metallic can and peered inside at the fluid that seemed so impatient to get out it almost seemed to churn and bubble with excitement. The ends of his mouth, for the first time in several years, reached the corners of his face as he swung the can with all his might and hurled the contents of the can onto the street, the cars, the buildings, the people.

And, just for a moment, the whole world is brought to a standstill. Except him. He's laughing a joyous, maniacal laugh. The hardest and loudest he's laughed in a long, long time. He knows he will be killed for what he's done, but that doesn't bother him

in the slightest. He's happier than he's ever been. Happy that people have been reminded of this necessity of life. Happy that they can see, enjoy and embrace this phenomenon, this gift of nature. Happy that people will once again, if only for a moment, be reminded of what it is like to walk on an Earth that is basked in the rays of this miracle.

Colour.