

HOW SHADOWS LOST THEIR COLOR

by

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Long ago, shadows came in different colors, not the shades of gray we know today. Shadows were once the color of thoughts and dreams that people carried in their hearts. Some people had blue shadows, some had yellow ones. Some even had shadows in colors that are forgotten today. Babies and children had the brightest ones, because they were so new.

In one village lived a man with a shadow as black as coal. He never had a kind word for anyone, and his face always wore a frown. Children turned and ran when they saw his dark, dark shadow approach. “This is not right,” the man said to himself. “Why does everyone avoid me?” He made up his mind to change the color of his shadow. That night he stayed up very late, mixing potions and looking up old spells in his books. When the sun came up the next morning, he saw that he had succeeded—a pleasant violet shadow lay at his feet. He walked into the town square, and no one ran away from him. Women even smiled as he passed by. But he still wasn’t satisfied.

At night he went home and mixed stronger, stranger potions. He chanted more powerful spells as he waited for sunrise. As soon as it was light out, he saw that his shadow had changed again. It was fiery red, and when he walked through the town villagers gathered around him.

“Wasn’t it violet yesterday?” a woman asked.

“How do we know it’s his?” her friend whispered. “He could have stolen it.”

No one had ever seen a shadow change from one color to another. And still, the man was not satisfied. He wanted people far and wide to admire his shadow, not just a few villagers. So again he mixed strange potions and chanted spells the whole night long.

By morning, the man had crafted a splendid new shadow for himself, with a pattern of crimson circles and turquoise swirls. He walked to the village with his head held high. It

was market day, and the square was full of farmers and merchants from nearby towns. The man could hardly contain his delight when he saw them stop their work and stare. Even the sun paused in her path across the sky to take a look. Some people looked down at their own shadows, wondering, “Why be content with just one color?” They pulled the man aside, offering to pay him great sums of money to learn his secret.

Soon enough, shadows with brilliant patterns and shimmering colors began to appear. Each person wanted his or hers to be the finest. They spent sleepless nights chanting to transform the colors of their shadows. Children no longer wanted to play together.

“Move over—you’re messing up my shadow!” cried a boy to his sister.

She was standing close enough for her shadow to overlap his own. The boy walked away and sat on a tree stump to give his shadow room. He spent the rest of the afternoon by himself, looking at his wonderful blue-and-green striped shadow.

No one wanted to go near anyone else, for fear of intruding on another’s shadow. People kept a respectful distance as they walked, with their eyes glued to the ground, watching for any shadow more colorful or intricate than their own. They didn’t bother looking into each other’s faces anymore, and no one smiled at anyone. Their only concern was showing off a finely colored shadow.

High up in the sky, the sun saw all that happened. She didn’t like it one bit. Because her light made the shadows, she knew she had to be the one to put a stop to the color competition. Day after day, the sun thought and thought about what to do. And the harder the sun thought, the hotter she became. And the hotter the sun became, the brighter her light burned. It burned so bright and hot, that it burnt up all the colors in the people’s shadows. They stared in disbelief, mopping the sweat from their brows, as the patterns in their shadows slowly faded to a dull gray.

Now everyone's shadow looked the same. No one worried about standing on anyone else's shadow. People stopped walking with their eyes glued to the ground. They smiled at each other in the town square. To this day, we have gray shadows, and no magic potions or spells can make it otherwise.

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