4 The king's colours

My name's Oliver. I'm lucky because Dad and I do a lot of travelling together. I heard this story on the radio last year. I really liked it.

Many thousands of years ago, in a country where the weather was always hot and dry, there was an important but sad king. The king was sad because there weren't many colours in his country. The sands and grasses everywhere were yellow, the skies were always blue and the rocks and stones were all grey. All the animals were grey too – the camels in the sandy desert, the swans and the eagles, the horses in the hills and the hippos and snakes.



'I want more colours in my country,' the king said. 'I want to see white, purple, orange, green, pink and black in my country.'

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An old woman heard the king and walked for three days to speak to him. She was tired after her journey but she didn't sleep. She sat down on a large rock, looked at the king and said, 'Don't be sad. I can't give you all six colours ... white, pink, purple, orange, green and black, but I can give you three more colours for your country. Which three colours would you like most of all?'

The king thought and thought and then slept, and then thought and thought again and then slept. On the third day, he had an answer for the old woman.



'Most of all, I'd like the colours orange, black and white,' he said. 'Orange because that colour is like yellow but it looks warmer and more interesting. Orange in my country could make me happy again. I'd like black because I never see black in the day. Black is an excellent, strong colour and black in my country could make me feel stronger again, too. I'd like white because white is the colour of the light from the moon and I know that white in my country could make my heart sing. These three colours could make me the happiest king in the world.



The woman looked at the king kindly and, a minute later, a butterfly flew onto his shoulder. Its wings were a lovely orange colour. The king smiled. 'Amazing!' he said.

After another minute, a big black beetle climbed out from under a rock. The king was so happy he jumped up and down and waved his arms in the air. 'I feel stronger. Wonderful!' he said.



Another minute later, a beautiful white wolf ran down the hill towards them. When the king saw the white wolf, his heart began to sing. 'Excellent!' he said.

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But this wasn't enough for the king. 'Please old woman. Make one of the animals in my country orange, black AND white,' he said.

The old woman said, 'That wish is more difficult. But climb your highest hill and find an orange fruit, five black beans and some white bread. Bring these to me. Go now. I have some hard work to do.'

The king climbed the highest hill, found the food and carried it carefully back to the old woman. The orange butterfly, the black beetle and the white wolf followed him on his long journey.



The king put the food on the old woman's rock and waited. He waited for a week and then another week and another. 'I don't mind, I can wait,' he thought each time the day ended and the night began.

But at the end of the third week, he was tired and he fell asleep. The next day, the king woke up suddenly in the midday sun. He looked at the rock. The orange fruit, the black beans and the white bread weren't there. Then something touched his back. 'Old woman,' he whispered. 'Is that you?'

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But it wasn't the old woman. An enormous tiger – an amazing, wonderful, excellent tiger was standing behind him. It jumped in the air to show the king its strong orange, black and white striped legs and body and then lay down in the yellow grass in front of the grey rocks under the blue, blue sky. Then it waved its tail and turned its head to look kindly at the king.

'WOW!' the king said. 'Now I can smile my biggest smile. Now, my legs, arms and back feel strong and straight, and now my heart is singing loudly again.'

The king often went to wait by the old woman's rock. She never came back but red, purple and green colours slowly began to appear in his country as well. Red birds flew above large red strawberries that grew between the grey rocks. Purple snakes slept between purple sweet potato plants that grew strong and tall from under the yellow grasses. Green frogs jumped between the pink flowers and green pea plants grew high in the blue sky and waved their leaves in the wind. Soon the country was a much more colourful place for the king to smile, walk and sing in.

