

## Black or White?

*On or off?* I like our binary system. *On or off?*

There is a yes or no, up or down, and left or right for everything possible. I remember the world being a bit more fluid when I was a kid, but that was a long time ago.

Today, I'm sitting in front of my computer, continuing a long career of working with binary code. *One or zero?* I look up to see a co-worker with a black heart, his hands over his tearful eyes. I readjust my glasses, not believing what I am seeing.

He has a black heart. He's going to lose his job and his house and everything he has in his life. I hear two security guards behind me calling his name and beckoning him to follow them. They both have white hearts. *Black or white?* You can't have both in your heart.

"Are you aware of the crime you committed? Are you aware that you tainted your heart?" one of them asks. Of course, he would be aware. Why would a young guard ask something so stupid? But still, we are all curious.

My partner looks up from his desk and waits for the answer. But the black-hearted person only nods. It must be a heavy feeling to have. I wouldn't know, I have a white heart.

*Black or white?* The co-worker is boring, as he follows the guards without complaints. Usually, I see someone with a newly tainted heart do their best to scream, to shout, to cry, to resist. We live by strict rules. *Illegal or legal?* Not many live till retirement age with a white heart. It's easy to step out of line, trip yourself. I ask myself for the first time if that's a normal way of living.

That evening, I walk home on the sidewalk. I don't have a car; there are too many rules, and I want to maintain my heart. No-one knows where the black-hearted people go. *Dead or alive?* I'm scared. I don't want to learn the hard way.

A beggar on the street catches my eye. My glasses tell me that she has a white heart, but life is unfair. This is rare. Our system shouldn't witness people in poverty unless by choice. We are all born in the same hospital, and our parents had the same inheritance; however, their sums were very, very generous. After all, if you can be old enough to marry and have children with a white heart inside of you, then you deserve recognition. Not many make it, but money is a good motivator—a saviour of our times. *Rich or poor?*

She sees me staring at her and says, "I have the answer, but you will not like it." She hands me a pair of glasses, slightly scratched but still usable. "If you don't like questions, don't put them on."

That's ridiculous, my job is all about questions. I put them on. *Oh, God. What have I done?* I don't see black or white hearts anymore. No, I see greys—shades of grey in every heart I see. *Oh, God.* One person on my street has a darker grey heart than the other. *Black or white? Where is it? Black or white? What's the answer? Right or wrong? Fail or pass? Yes or no? Yes or NO? YES or NO?*

*Oh, God.* I run home, fearing that something will happen. I can see police cars in my driveway. *Too late.* My partner is in handcuffs, his heart has a mid-grey colour. I yell, "Don't! This is unfair!"

The officers look at me and calmly say in unison, "Follow the rules, it's that simple."

*What rules? There is no black heart. Black or white? Grey.* "Can't you see? It's not that simple! It's not binary!"

Cold shoulders. The silence of the night is pierced by my partner's cries of protest. I see the police cars driving away, and I am too stunned to say a proper goodbye, a promise. This is the binary system. But it was never binary in the first place, just a filtered system. No-one gets it. No-one will. *What good are these glasses if they just cause more questions? But at least I don't live in lies with them on. I don't know. I'm confused. No-one will see what I see. No-one will take off their binary view. No-one will believe me. What do I do?*

*Sheep or shepherd?*

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