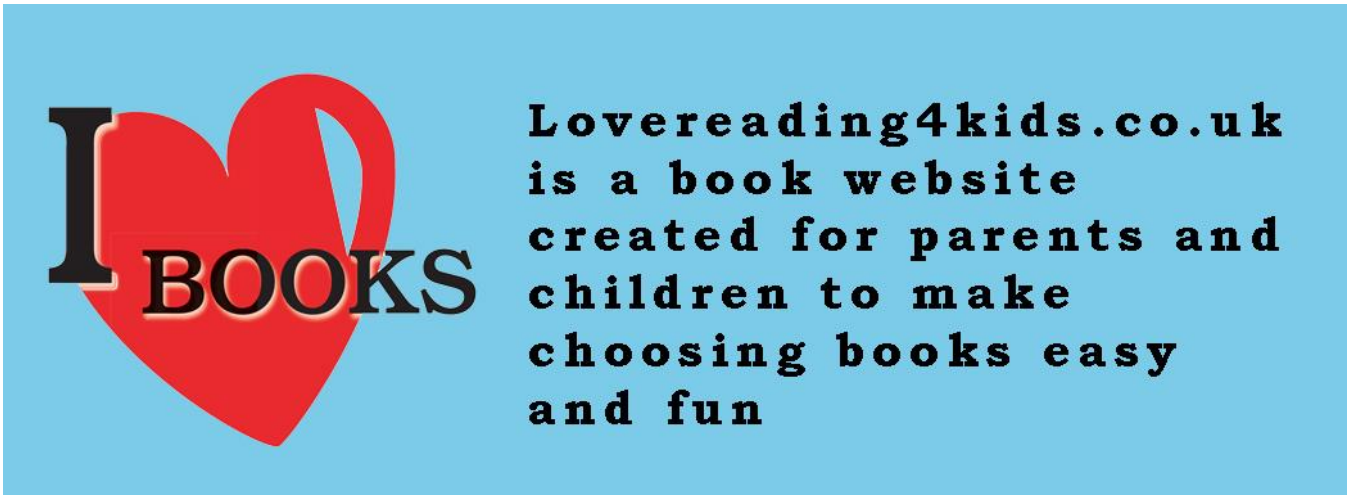


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Movers

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THE HOURLY TIMES

MOVEMENT IN OAKLAND HILLS

11 APRIL 2077

VIEWS: 234, 789, 056
UPDATED: 1.2 SEC AGO

Another Movement incident has rocked the sleepy suburb of Oakland Hills in the city of Avin. Police were called to the apartment of Michael Mermick, a 39-year-old insurance salesman and father of two, early Sunday evening. Mermick, a registered Phase 2 Mover, was found by Bureau of Movement Activity Control (BMAC) officers in his apartment after Movement activity was reported by neighbours. Suspicions were confirmed when officers discovered the body of Mermick's unidentified Shadow at the front door of his fourteenth-storey apartment. The Shadow, BMAC reports, died at the scene, having suffered what appeared to be severe burns to the head. Mermick was promptly taken into the custody of Avin area BMAC. The Move itself has baffled experts, with wind speeds reaching 174km/h, the highest in recorded Movement history. Significant damage, not typical of Movement activity, was reported by residents within a 3km radius of the Move. Current BMAC status classification holds that only Movers with a Phase 3 status are capable of successfully Moving a Shadow from the future. How then, was Mr Mermick, who holds a Phase 2 status, capable of causing the Move in Oakland Hills? And so powerful a Move? BMAC has yet to comment. Mermick's wife, Isabelle Randle-Mermick insists that BMAC's monitoring of Mover status is flawed at best. And there are Movement activity experts who have voiced similar criticism. 'While the signs and symptoms of Movement are well known to us,' commented Professor Jacobs of Avin University, 'the cause of the disorder is not yet understood. There is no measurable qualifier for Movement.'

THE HOURLY TIMES

GOVERNMENT TO CHANGE PHASE RENEWAL POLICY IN WAKE OF MERMICK SHELVING

23 APRIL 2077

VIEWS: 344, 035, 928
UPDATED: 0.3 SEC AGO

Michael Mermick, a 39-year-old family man from Oakland Hills, was sentenced to the Shelves after being charged with Moving and murdering his Shadow, who has since been identified by Mermick as Oscar Joji (time unknown). But the question that has captured the interest of the country is now the subject of parliamentary debate. How was Michael Mermick able to Move his Shadow if he was only classified as a Phase 2 Mover? Mermick's last phase renewal occurred last year, according to his wife, in compliance with BMAC and government regulations. But what if he had been up for renewal last month? 'Annual phase renewal is simply not enough,' prosecutor Sheila McCain told press on Wednesday. 'If Michael Mermick had been monitored with the vigilance we expect of our government, his Shadow would not only be alive, but still in the year he belonged.' BMAC has announced that status renewal for citizens with Movement capabilities is to be increased from annually to monthly with immediate effect. We Are Now, a group known for their anti-Mover sentiment, welcomed the change.

PROLOGUE

All the windows were busted. The wind from the Movement activity shattered them all. The cool storm air rushed around me, pulling at my T-shirt and tickling my baby sister's nose as I held her in my arms. I sat there, under the table in our kitchen, away from the broken glass, while my parents whispered furiously in the bedroom. When I say bedroom, I mean living room/dining room/my room/Mom and Dad's room/the baby's room. It's the only other room in our tiny apartment besides the bathroom. Which meant, even over the rush of the wind, I could hear every word they said.

'BMAC will trace the Move here,' Dad told Mom. 'You know that, Izzy.'

BMAC – the Bureau of Movement Activity Control. They didn't like Moves. Their whole job was to stop Moves. But they hadn't stopped this one.

'They can't prove you're the one who did it!' Mom said.

And then the wind caught my sister's little purple hat, ripping it from her baby-soft head and carrying it away.

She screamed as the breeze tugged her fuzzy black hair. I rocked her gently in my arms, wanting her to shut up so I could hear.

'BMAC doesn't have to prove it. Look around you, Izzy.' Around us was disaster. The splintered pieces of our apartment, our lives, scattered across the floor or half out the window. 'They'll take one look at this place,' Dad said, 'and then it's the Shelves.'

My stomach leaped into my throat. I might've been eight, but I knew what Shelving was. Every Mover knew what Shelving was. Still is. An endless sleep. A living kind of deadness.

Mom didn't say anything for the longest time. Neither did Dad. Even my sister stopped crying. The only sound was the roar of the wind outside. How did this happen? One minute we were watching my favourite show, about a ninja who lived in a kid's pocket, and the next my parents were making me climb beneath the kitchen table while the world exploded around me.

And then a bang made me jump.

It was coming from the door.

'Is it BMAC?' Mom whispered.

Dad stepped into the kitchen, his brown curls a frizzy windblown mess.

Another bang.

'Daddy?'

Dad held out his hand. 'Pat, take your sister to the bathroom.'

But I didn't have to. Mom was already grabbing Maggie out of my arms.

I stayed there on the kitchen floor, my hot hands sweaty on the cold tile as my dad peeked through the hole in the door.

Bang!

'Breezes!' Dad shouted. 'Izzy, help me!'

And he opened the door.

All I saw was red.

Blood red.

A guy tumbled in, falling into Dad's arms and bleeding from his mouth, choking out our last name: 'Mermick.' And another name I'd never heard before. 'Oscar Joji.' He clutched his head with one hand, blood caked to his hair and seeping through his fingers, the skin blistered, red and peeling. 'Oscar Joji.'

I can remember that I screamed.

And then the guy collapsed.

None of us said anything – Dad, Mom, me. We just stared at the fallen guy's body, seeping blood into our rug. He wasn't gasping any more. He was dead. It's the quiet that tells you that kind of thing. The quiet just lets you know. Even at eight, I knew it.

Mom's voice broke the silence. 'Shadow?'

Dad stared at his red, stained hands and nodded.

I felt cold. Freezing cold. Like everything that had been warm and safe and good about our home had been sucked out the shattered windows. A Shadow. I looked at the bloody lump on the floor – he was from the future. And he was here, in our apartment. He wasn't allowed to be here.

'Mike,' said Mom. She walked up to Dad as if the dead

guy wasn't even there – wasn't there dead – and held Dad's face in her hand. 'Mike, we have to run. We have to go. BMAC is coming.'

An entire flock of feathery, angry wings flapped in my gut and I pulled my knees up to my chest. BMAC is coming? Coming for who?

'We can run, Mike,' she told him. 'We can still run.'

Dad shook his head and kissed Mom's hand. 'They'll find us.'

And then Mom cried. So did the baby in her arms. And Dad hugged them both.

The wings in my stomach pushed up against my throat and my eyes began to sting. BMAC was coming. What would they do when they found the Shadow? He couldn't be here. How did he get here?

Mom wiped away her tears and took the baby over to the bed. I didn't move. Couldn't remember how. There was a Shadow in our home. A real dead Shadow. And BMAC was coming.

'Pat?' Dad crawled under the table and we stared at each other for the longest time. He had brown eyes. I'll never forget them. And when they caught the light, I could see flecks of green. 'Pat, son, I need you to listen to me. BMAC is going to be here any minute and I need you to be ready for it.'

My heart hammered in my chest so hard I could feel the beat of it vibrating down into my feet. 'What will they do?' I barely managed to whisper.

Dad closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened them again, they were wet. 'They're going to take me.'

I knew it. Even though I didn't really know it, some part of me had been waiting for him to tell me that. I leaped at him, wrapping my arms around his neck, and cried. BMAC was coming for my dad.

'Listen to me, Pat,' he said. 'I need you to look out for your sister for me, all right? You need to take care of her because she won't have me here.'

'I don't want you to go,' I told him, and squeezed him tight, as if my arms could somehow glue him to me and then no one could take him away. Not even BMAC.

'You're gonna be good for me, all right?' His voice broke then. And a new bolt of fear shot through me, one that still makes the muscles in my stomach constrict when I think about it. He was scared. 'You're gonna be good and you're gonna help your mother, because she's going to need you, right?'

I wanted to tell him yes, but my voice was caught, strangled in my throat. I remember the feel of his big hand on my back, warm and strong as he rocked me. He sniffed three times. Big runny sniffs that told me he was crying. My dad never cried. But he did then. The last time I saw him.

I don't remember how long we stayed that way, clinging to each other. Don't remember the pounding on the door before BMAC finally broke it down. Don't remember how many BMAC agents it took to prise me loose from my dad's neck.

I just remember the grey of their uniforms, swarming our tiny home like phantoms. I remember the current bindings they brought with them. The way they hissed and crackled a menacing electric blue around my dad's wrists.

I remember Mom screaming and cursing as they dragged Dad off.

I remember, they walked right through the Shadow guy's blood. Dad left twenty-eight red footprints from our door to the elevator. I counted them later.

They took Dad. They left the Shadow.

They took Dad to the Movers' Prison and Shelved him till his trial.

A living kind of deadness.

Said it was procedure in a Mover's case. That was six years ago. His trial didn't help him much, cos he hasn't been awake since.