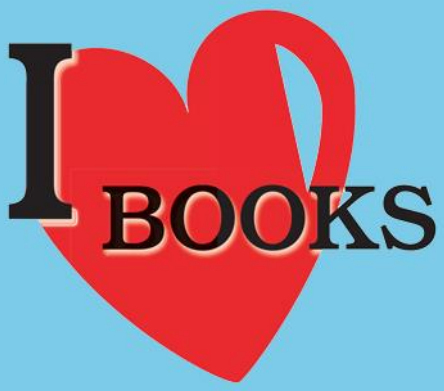


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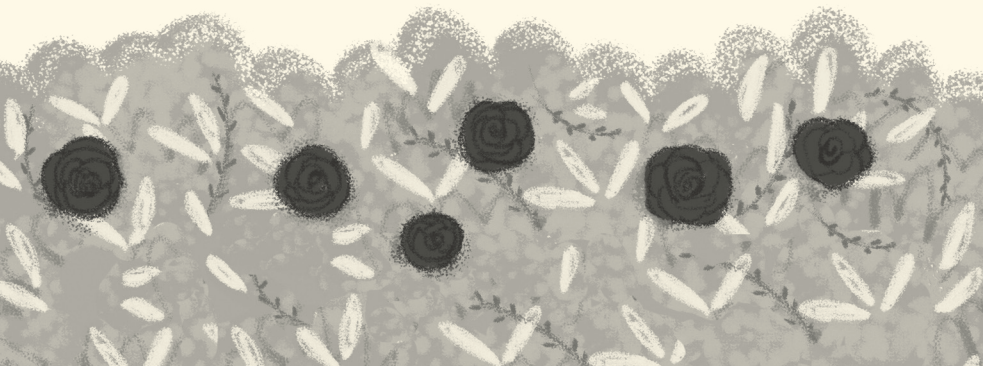
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CONTENTS

TALE 1

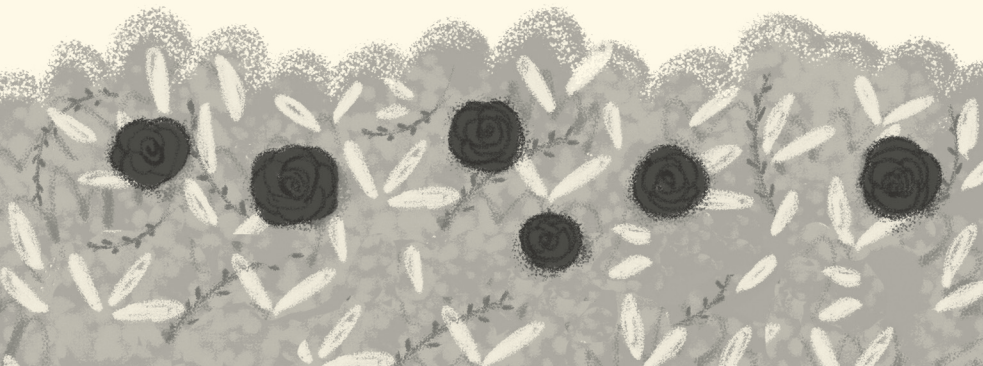
The Family Photograph 3

TALE 2

The Fortune Cookie 21

TALE 3

The Dream House 37





Our road isn't really called Weird Street. That's just what Asim and I call it. Its proper name is Weir Street because there is a stretch of the river at the end that plunges down, fast and deep like a waterfall, over the old weir.

Asim and I call it Weird Street because so many strange things happen here. We share the stories between us.

I told the first one that day. It was so hot. Asim was lying in the shadow of our garden wall. His sister Laila rocked to and fro on my

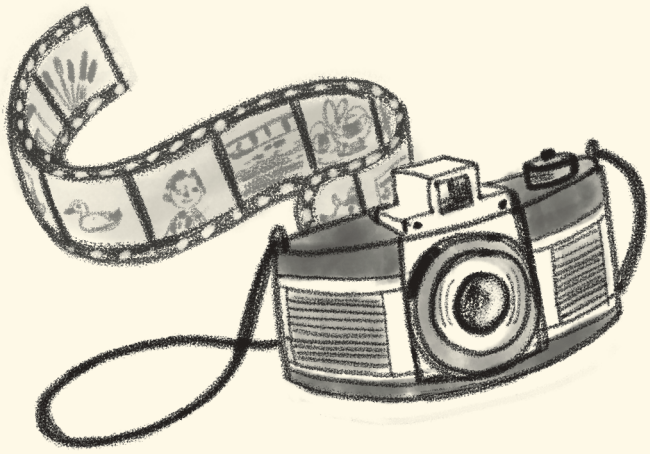
old swing set. She had been staring at my great-grandpa, fast asleep in his deck chair with his old straw hat way down over his eyes.

"He doesn't talk much, does he?" Laila said.

"Sometimes he does," I said, and then I told them a story my great-grandpa had once told me.

Tale 1

The Family Photograph



Gramps and I were alone in the garden. Dad had gone off to get pizzas for later, and Mum was out with a friend. Gramps was slumped in the deck chair, and I was taking a break from the weeding. I sprawled on the grass to watch an ant haul a leaf across a bare patch. I'd just been telling Gramps about how one of the boys in the street had slipped off the river bank close to the weir, and almost drowned.

Gramps said, "That's how George Henry died."

I didn't know what to say. I knew that Gramps had a twin brother who'd died young. But no one talked about it. I didn't want to

drag Gramps into saying more than he wanted, but I was curious.

Very curious.

"How old was he?" I asked.

"Not that much older than you are now, Tom."

I gave him a moment, then asked, "How did it happen?"

The answer couldn't have surprised me more.

Gramps said, "It was my fault."

I stared at him. "*Your* fault?"

He nodded. "In a way. You see, I'd had a warning."

"A warning?"

Gramps sighed. “The clearest warning. And yet I was too stupid and stubborn to see it for what it was. So I missed my chance to save my brother’s life.”

“What on earth happened?” I asked him.

Gramps shut his eyes, as if he was sending himself back down some inner path to the far past. At last, he said, “It was like this. My eldest brother William had been offered a job. But it was thirty miles away. Back then, nobody travelled such a long way each day to get to work. It wasn’t possible. We all knew William would have to leave our family home, and rent a room nearer the factory.”

“He didn’t have a car?” I asked.

“Cars were only for rich people in those days. Our family never had that kind of money.”

I'd heard a lot about how poor our family was back then, so I just waited for Gramps to get back to the story.

After a bit, he said, "My sister Beth was leaving home as well. She was about to get married. Her new husband's farm was even further away, and Mother said she felt as if her family was being scattered all over. She wanted a photograph. 'Before you all go,' she said. And then, of course, she looked at me because I was the only one in the family who had a camera."

"Really? The only one?"

"Things were so different then," said Gramps. "For people like us, cameras were almost as rare as cars. But I'd been in the local scout troop for years, and our Patrol Leader had a day job at a photographer's studio. He knew that I was keen to learn, so he gave me one of his old cameras and showed me how to take my own pictures and develop them."

"Was that hard?" I asked Gramps.

"Not if you knew what to do," he said. "You went into his special dark room and filled flat trays with the right mix of chemicals. You wound the film out of the camera, and dunked it in the first tray for an exact amount of time. Then you used tweezers to slide it into the next tray, and so on. Hey, presto! It was mostly a matter of timing – and being careful."

"And you were careful?"

"Oh, my word, yes!" he said. "Film was *expensive*. And so were the chemicals. Not like now, when you just press a button to get rid of photos you don't want! If you got things wrong back then, you wasted a good deal of time and money."

I left the ant to his task with the leaf, and rolled over on the lawn to watch Gramps as he went on with his story.

"So on the next dry day Mother arranged us in a family group. Mum, my father, William and Beth stood arm in arm in a row. My twin brother George Henry was on his knees in front of them. They left a space for me beside George Henry. I fixed the camera on the tripod and aimed it for the precious shot. I pressed the button for the ten-second delay, and rushed to kneel in my spot beside William."

"And everyone tried to be sensible and stay still."

Gramps chuckled. "That's right. We did the whole thing seven times over, so I'd be sure to get a really nice photo of us all, with nobody blinking or looking silly."

Then Gramps' smile faded.

"Go on," I prompted.

He took a deep breath. "Well, next day, I developed the roll of film. I was as careful as

