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A Far Away Magic



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For Matt

I saw them in the skies
In the corners of my eyes
Darkness, shadows, creeping close,
And the boy stood alone, afraid.

I told him he could fight them all
He knew it; he was ten feet tall
Magic in his veins and power in his blood,
He was afraid of himself.



There's a massive mirror in the drawing room. It haunts me. If you look hard enough, if you look in just the right way, you can see yourself for who you could be. There is always the hope. Most of the time it just shows me exactly what all the others see; what we all become in this house. The crooked spine, the sallow skin, the dark hair that curls and grows out. Nose is longer, more prominent than an average boy's nose. Shadows cling tight and there's a warp in the air around me.

So, not average.

But in the right light, at the right time of the day and with the right frame of mind, I can see something else. Straighter, brighter – a bit like a normal boy. A bit like hope.

'Bavar!'

In a hopeless house.

'BaVAR!'

Aoife is my aunt, my mother's sister. Her kindness comes in cake form.

'School,' she says, handing me a wicker basket.

I usually leave it beneath the old oak tree at the end of the garden. It's overgrown there, thick with brambles and nettles.

'Will you be back at the usual time, Bavar?'

'Yes.'

'Friends?'

'No.'

She nods, her grey eyes unsmiling. 'Maybe tomorrow.'

'Maybe.'

We have the same conversation every day, and I do the thing with the basket every day. Stuff the ham roll into my jacket pocket along with the wedge of cake. A red apple.

Uncle Sal waves from the study window as I head out. His glasses glint in the sun; he looks more mole-like than ever at a distance.

'Say something,' I tell myself. 'Say something. Tell them about lunchboxes. Crisps. Biscuits. Tell them

you don't like beetroot cake; it looks like a bloody pulp by the time you get to school. Tell them –' I hiss to myself, as I wedge the basket next to the withered trunk of the oak, once Uncle Sal has turned from the window – 'there will be no friends; there will be no need for all the cake.'

I know that much at least.



Angel

Idiots, all these people. My first day at the new school, and all the same old idiots wanting to know all the same old rubbish.

I've been lying through my teeth for all of registration. Told one of them my mum was a ballet dancer; told another my dad was in MI5. Said I lived in the massive yellow house on top of the hill that looks over the town. Said I lived in a purple caravan.

They know I'm lying. They won't like me for it. With every turn of my tale, their eyes get narrower, their faces tighter, and it feels good. Satisfying.

'*Why do you do it?*' my mum's voice asks, deep in my head. All soft and sad.

'Because I can. What do you care? You're not here any more,' I reply.

'*I do wish you wouldn't,*' my dad says, his voice a bit more stern, a bit more disappointed.

'Can you wish, where you are?' I answer. 'Because I don't think so.'

And then it's my first English lesson, and a monster walks in. Well. It's a boy, of course. But he looks like a monster. Like a monster who knows he's a monster so he's trying to make himself smaller so nobody else will notice, only in doing that he makes himself more twisted, more monstrous. He shuffles into the classroom, shoulders hunched, chin to his chest, dark curls standing out all round his head. There's a ripple in the air around him as everyone looks away, hurriedly finding a place to sit. They don't even tease him, it's like he's not really there.

Who is THAT?

He sits one row over, one row in front of me, and I watch him for the whole lesson. He's not like anyone I ever saw before. Somehow it's hard to see him clearly, like he's actively deflecting any attempt. It doesn't work on me – I see him. I can see things other people don't see anyway; have done ever since the thing with Mum and Dad.

But I never saw a living, breathing boy like this one.

He never looks up. He grunts when the teacher calls out the register. Bavar. A good name, I reckon. A good name for a boy who looks like that. I stare – I can't help myself. But he doesn't look around, though he must feel me watching him.

He writes with his left hand curled tight over his work, his head bent low. Every so often his shoulders twitch, as if he's been jolted from sleep. I follow him at the end of the day, past all the clusters of kids who don't notice him. He walks with his head down, his feet heavy against the pavement, and I'll be late back if I keep going, but I can't stop myself, because he smells like that night, with Mum and Dad, and there's that same twist in the air around him.

All the things I told myself weren't real, and here he is.

And he's *definitely* real.

'Hey!'

He doesn't pause or turn.

'Bavar!'

He stops. Turns. Looks up. First time I can see anything beneath all the hair.



And wow.
Those eyes.
That face.
Like heartbreak, all pooled in one place.

