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Scattering Like Light

Written by

S. C. Ransom

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Scattering Like Light

S.C.Ransom



"Small Blue Thing"

Today I am
A small blue thing
Like a marble
Or an eye

With my knees against my mouth
I am perfectly round
I am watching you

I am cold against your skin
You are perfectly reflected
I am lost inside your pocket
I am lost against
Your fingers
I am falling down the stairs
I am skipping on the sidewalk
I am thrown against the sky
I am raining down in pieces

I am scattering like light
Scattering like light
Scattering like light

Today I am
A small blue thing
Made of china
Made of glass

I am cool and smooth and curious
I never blink
I am turning in your hand
Turning in your hand
Small blue thing

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For Pete, with all my love

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Airport

I could feel the sweat prickle on my forehead as the man in uniform glared at me. "Miss, just go back through and put all the jewellery in there, please," he repeated, nodding towards the small plastic tray. "*All of it*, like it says on the notice," he stressed, as my hand hesitated over my wrist.

"I . . . I . . . I'll just be a minute," I stuttered. Then, under my breath, I hissed, "Callum! I need you now, *quickly*!"

"Come on, please. You're holding up the line." The security guard was getting annoyed. Ahead I could see my parents picking up their belongings from the other side of the X-ray. They hadn't noticed that I'd stopped. I couldn't believe that I hadn't thought this through, that I hadn't realised that the amulet would set off the alarms on the metal detector. Where *was* Callum?

The security guard picked up the tray and thrust it towards me. I couldn't help looking around me, knowing full well that I wouldn't be able to see Callum, but searching for inspiration to explain my odd behaviour. I was clammy with fear. "Callum!" I hissed again, as loudly as I dared.

"What's the hold-up here?" An officious-looking man in a suit was pushing up behind me, desperate to get through and on to his flight. I looked wildly between the two angry men, and swallowed hard.

"There's something not right here. I'm calling for the police,"

announced the guard, taking in my obvious discomfort. He pressed a red button on the side of the metal detector. Within seconds armed policemen converged on the spot, their guns conspicuously at the ready.

"Really, there's no need for that," I said as calmly as I could. "It's just that my bracelet is very tight and it hurts to take it off, that's all." I smiled at him as sweetly as I could, trying not to look at the machine guns. They hadn't pointed them at me yet, and I really didn't want them to. In the meantime, my parents had noticed the commotion and were heading back towards me.

"Can't you just examine it where it is?" I asked, trying not to sound too desperate, hoping that I could avoid a confrontation between Mum and the guard.

"That's not the procedure. All jewellery has to be removed until you can go through the scanner without setting it off."

"Alex? What's going on?" called my mum. "What's happening?" she asked the guard pointedly. "Why won't you let my daughter through?"

"Stand back, please," said one of the policemen, stepping in front of her.

"Look, I'm just taking it off now, OK? Then I'll come through the machine." I put my finger under the bracelet and eased it off my wrist, making sure that I kept my finger inside for as long as possible. "Come on, Callum, get here now!" I muttered again. I was just about to drop it into the tray when there was a welcome tingle in my hand and a familiar voice in my head. "Go, I've got everything covered here. You'll be fine."

Heaving a sigh of relief I slipped the amulet into the little tray along with my watch and necklace. "OK, shall I come through now?" I asked the guard hopefully. His colleague at the X-ray

machine picked up the tray and lifted the amulet out with the end of a pen. Trying not to look at what they were doing, I took a tentative step towards the metal detector. "Is it OK to go ahead?" I asked, catching the eye of one of the policemen, not daring to take another step until he had finally nodded. Mum had wisely kept silent as soon as she had seen the guns, but one glimpse of her tight-lipped expression told me that she wasn't finished.

I stepped carefully through the threshold of the detector, which remained mercifully silent. They weren't done with me though. A female guard stepped forward and gave me a thorough pat-down, and all the while I was trying not to look at what the guys by the machine were doing with the amulet. Finally the female guard declared me safe, and I turned towards the conveyor to retrieve my belongings. Dad had picked up most of the stuff, but the guard holding my amulet was clearly waiting for me.

"This yours?" he asked, dropping the amulet from his pen into a separate tray.

"Yes." I nodded. "Can I have it back, please?"

"It's been randomly selected for further testing," he announced in a bored tone.

I tried not to panic as I thought about what Callum might be doing to keep me safe, and how much longer he could keep it up. Desperately trying to keep my fear contained, I smiled at the guard. "Oh, I see. What does that mean?"

I was trying to talk to him as the luggage from the impatient queue behind me started to pour through the X-ray machine and down the conveyor. The man in the suit brushed me aside so that he could retrieve his laptop case, and I felt his radiating disapproval.

The guard continued indifferently, "It's got to be tested for traces of explosives." He placed a small cloth in some special

tongs and started to wipe the bracelet with it, being careful not to actually touch it himself. I bit my lip.

"What are they doing now, Alex? What's the hold-up?" Mum was at my side, bristling with indignation.

"They seem to think that my bracelet might be dangerous, that's all," I answered as calmly as I could, wondering if at any second Callum might lose the fight that was no doubt raging around us. If he was beaten I would be as good as dead within moments. I knew that he would give everything he possibly could to keep me safe, but I had to do my bit and get the amulet back on my wrist as quickly as possible.

I forced myself to relax as the guard put the small cloth into some sort of detector, then pressed a few buttons. The wait seemed interminable but was probably no more than a minute. Finally a little green light popped up on the detector. The guard's shoulders slumped slightly. He had obviously hoped for a more interesting result. Really bored now, he picked up the tray with the amulet in it and tossed it on the table in front of me, already looking around for his next victim. "All clear. Next!" he shouted as the tray rattled to a stop. I reached for the amulet gratefully, desperate to have the comforting silver band back on my wrist. But as I lifted it my eye was drawn by some engraving on the inside. Puzzled, I looked closer. There were definitely words there, words I had never seen before. But I didn't have time to examine it further. Sliding it back into place on my right wrist, I heaved a great sigh of relief as the familiar tingle washed through my arm.

"Honestly, it was OK, there's no one around," said Callum. "You didn't need to panic."

"How was I supposed to know that?" I muttered under my breath.

"What was that, Alex? Did you say something?"

"No, Mum, nothing. Just thanking the security for being so vigilant." I smiled at her as convincingly as I could manage. I felt cold and clammy as my breathing and heart rate returned to normal. We walked swiftly through to the departure lounge.

"I'm just going to find the loos; I won't be a minute," I announced as my parents looked about for somewhere to sit.

"Don't be too long, Alex," Dad called after me. "They'll be calling our flight soon."

I waved to show him that I'd heard, then quickly put on my mobile phone earphones. As soon as I was out of sight I found a quiet spot and leaned against the wall. "Don't do that to me – I was really worried!" I hissed to Callum. "What took you so long, anyway?"

The voice in my head was as rich as chocolate, and I could picture his gorgeous features as he spoke. His tousled, dark-blond hair, his perfect skin, his slightly crooked nose and, of course, his mesmerising blue eyes. I couldn't help stealing a glance at the amulet, where the stone was dancing in the bright airport lights: the stone that looked exactly like those eyes. . .

Callum sounded a bit bashful. "I went off to see if I could travel on planes. I've never tried before, but they left me on the runway. I know, I know," he said as I snorted with relieved laughter, "but it was worth a pop. I could have come with you if it'd worked!"

"I couldn't believe that you weren't right there."

"I know you don't like me talking to you when you're with your family, and anyway who knew the queue was going to move that quickly?"

"It's not that I don't like it," I corrected him. "It's just that it makes life extra difficult, that's all. I always want you around, you

know that."

"I do know that," he replied. I didn't have my mirror out, but I heard the smile in his voice. I could see Callum only in reflections. He was a Dirge, someone trapped in a half-life of misery after drowning in the River Fleet in London. My bracelet, or amulet, matched the ones that Callum and his friends wore, and when I had found it in the mud of the Thames it connected me irrevocably to him. I had given Callum my heart, and I was determined to find some way to make a future together possible. And I was working on a plan that I was feeling pretty confident about. But my amulet was the only escape route for the other Dirges, and I had to be really careful to keep it on at all times: it was the only way to be safe.

"Well, panic over anyway," I said. "It's just I still remember that horrible fight with Lucas." I tried not to shudder as I thought about it. Lucas had very nearly compelled me to remove the amulet, and I never wanted to go through that again.

I could feel Callum's featherlight touch on my cheek. "He's gone, I promise, and none of the others will do that to you, not while I'm around."

I couldn't resist it any longer; I pulled a little mirror out of my pocket and pretended to check my hair. Callum's glorious face appeared behind my shoulder in its usual spot. It was even better than my memory, and I just had to smile at him. I reached up towards my shoulder and gently stroked his cheek, trying to be an unobtrusive as possible. It felt as if I were trying to stroke a thin gossamer film. "Thank you for keeping me safe," I breathed, staring into those deep-blue eyes.

"I love you, Alex, and I'm going to look after you in whatever way I can."

"I'm going to miss you so much while we're away," I sighed, glancing at my watch. "Oh! I've got to get back to the others, Mum'll be having kittens if I'm much longer. Will you stay with me until we get to the gate, even if I can't speak to you?"

"Of course," said Callum. "I just wish I could come with you."

I stashed the mirror back in my pocket after one last glimpse of his face, then walked quickly back towards my family.

"Oh, Alex, there you are! I was just going to send out a search party," scolded my mum as I threw myself down into one of the empty chairs.

"I don't know why you get so het up," drawled my brother, Josh. "We'll be ages here, and then even longer at the gate. It's all a ploy to get us to go shopping." He paused, then smirked at me. "Time for you to go and get some overpriced perfume to make you irresistible to Max."

I laughed. We were going to meet some old friends of our parents' in Spain, who had two kids, Max and Sabrina. We hadn't seen them for a few years and we were all looking forward to meeting up again at the hotel. But the last time I'd seen Max he was short for his age with huge braces on his teeth, lank, greasy hair and an obsessive interest in sports cars.

"Max!" I snorted. "Oh sure, he's just my type. More likely that you'll need something to win Sabrina over – perhaps a paper bag to put over your head?"

I could tell that Josh was about to come up with some pithy put-down when Mum butted in. "I told you we didn't have much time. Our flight has just been called." She didn't even try to keep the smugness out of her voice. "Come on, let's go."

I could see Dad smiling as he turned to pick up the bags.

"You played right into your mum's hands. She'll have us here at the crack of dawn next time!"

"Oh don't," groaned Josh. "I might refuse to come with you if she gets me out of bed any earlier."

"And turn down a free beach holiday in Spain?" I laughed. "Yeah, right!"

We gathered all our hand luggage and started the long walk to the gate. All the time I was conscious of the familiar tingle in my wrist that told me Callum was next to me. He was mostly quiet but I loved knowing he was there, only occasionally asking questions, which I could answer with a nod or shake of the head. I tried hard not to think about the fact that I was going to have to say goodbye very soon.

At the gate the plane didn't seem to be ready, so we settled ourselves down into another set of chairs to wait again. Callum continued to talk to me about the things he was seeing, what he had been doing and generally anything that would stop both of us dwelling on our impending separation. He was talking about the security guard at the scanner, when I suddenly remembered the inscription on the amulet.

"I just need to tell Grace something," I announced as I leapt up from my chair. "I'm going to ring her quickly."

"I do wish you'd thought of that earlier. Don't go far," said Mum, exasperated.

"I won't," I muttered, reaching for my earphones. I walked towards one of the windows and looked out at the plane that was waiting to take us to Spain. There was a frenzy of activity going on underneath, with hordes of people getting it ready to leave.

"What's up, Alex?" Callum's voice was crystal clear in my head.

"Earlier, when I took off the amulet I saw something inside, some engraving. Did you see it?"

"Nope, don't think so. What was it?"

"Well, words, I guess. Not a picture anyway."

"So it has engraving – what's the big deal?"

"It didn't used to, that's what. When I first got it I examined it pretty closely, and there was nothing there. I did think at one point I had seen something, but when I looked again it was just the beaten silverwork. But today it was really clear."

"That's weird. What did it say?"

"I didn't have the chance to read it. Is it safe to have another look now?"

I could sense Callum's hesitation, but he finally spoke. "There doesn't seem to be anyone about. Keep your finger in it while it's off your wrist; that should give you some extra protection, and we'll still be able to talk. I'll let you know immediately if I see anyone."

"OK, let's have a look." I gently prised the C-shaped bracelet off my wrist, keeping my index finger firmly inside the band as instructed, and the comforting tingle told me that I still had my connection with Callum. I quickly turned it over, peering into the inside. There, engraved along the underside of the silver band, were some ornate letters.

mor memoriae

"Can you see that?" I breathed. "That *so* wasn't there before!"

"Spooky. What does it mean?"

"I don't know. I think it's Latin, but I'm not sure. And is that scratch between the words an 's', do you think?"

"Let me look. I don't even know if I know any Latin." We both peered at it silently for a minute, then he sighed. "Nope, not a

clue. Can't have been one of my subjects."

"But it's so weird! How come I can suddenly see it when it wasn't there when I first found it?"

He considered that silently for a moment. "Hmm. Have you looked at the inside since we got it back on your wrist in the hospital?"

I thought back. So much had happened in the few short weeks since my brush with death at the hands of Callum's sister, Catherine. She had stolen the amulet and then persuaded me that she had destroyed it. The second I finally got it back from her accomplice, my ex-boyfriend Rob, I had stuck it back on my wrist and refused to take it off. The danger was one thing, but the thought of not being able to talk to Callum was far worse. Without it I couldn't call him to my side, see him in the mirror, feel his featherlight touch. I'd never felt so lonely in all my life.

When Catherine had stolen all my memories in order to escape life as a Dirge, Callum had been able to take a copy and had saved my life by putting them back. Now, with my amulet on, I was able to see the emotion in people's thoughts. When people were happy or thinking of good memories, their auras were shades of yellow, bright sparks of happiness that flicked above their heads like fireflies. Angry thoughts showed up as red clouds, while unhappy, miserable people had purple mist around their heads. Glancing at a crowd of passengers whose flight had been delayed I could see mostly red clouds above the adults and flecks of yellow bouncing around above the heads of the children.

Something in the transfer of memories back to me had given me this unexpected ability, and I loved it. I could tell when my friends were down and needed cheering up, or if Mum was cross about something. Maybe the amulet had given me the ability

to see the mysterious lettering too.

"Apart from when it was stolen, it's not left my wrist for a second, so I haven't looked," I admitted. "But it could make sense that I got this talent from you too." In the faint reflection in the large plate-glass window I could see him behind me, looking at the amulets that were on our superimposed wrists. The strange blue opal-like stone glinted in the bright light, the flecks of gold flashing briefly whenever I moved.

"What else is it going to reveal, I wonder?" he murmured. "What other strange things will you find that you can do?"

"Who knows?" I replied as casually as possible, not wanting to discuss those possibilities. Not in the middle of the airport, and not before I had done some investigating. "I'll ask Josh about the inscription; I think he did some Latin at school. Or google it when I get to the hotel."

"Look – your mum's waving at you. I think you're all about to go through the gate. Do you want to say goodbye now, rather than on the plane?"

"I wish you could come with me," I grumbled.

"I know, it sounds like fun. Two weeks of eating, sleeping and surfing – what more could you possibly want?"

"You, silly. That's what I want, and don't pretend you don't know."

"I'll be here when you get back, I promise."

"I love you, Callum, more than anything else in the world."

"Me, too. Look, your mum's coming over; you should go. I'll see you back here really soon." I felt his lips brush my cheek with the softest of touches.

"Bye," I sighed. "I just wish I could give you a hug and say goodbye properly."

"Have a good time, gorgeous. I love you." His beautiful voice echoed in my head, and then abruptly the tingle was gone.

The trip to our favourite holiday destination was uneventful but slow, and it gave me time to think about my plan. I knew that I had been responsible for releasing the Dirge called Lucas from his life of misery. What I didn't yet know was what had happened to him: if, as I hoped, he was alive somewhere, that meant I could rescue Callum too. But if I had allowed him to die . . . I had to find out, to be sure. I had spent the last few weeks scouring the Internet for information, but there had been nothing about him appearing in the river as Catherine had done. So my plan to be united with Callum in the real world was on hold until I knew that he would be safe. And then I would also be sure that I would never again have to speak with Catherine. She seemed to know about how to release the Dirges, and thought that I needed her. It made me feel pretty smug to know that I didn't. Thinking about Callum kept me occupied for most of the rest of the flight, imagining how brilliant it would be to have him with me; the fun we would have in Spain.

It was late afternoon before we finally reached the hotel, and Josh and I had the opportunity to go down to the beach. The weather was perfect, still warm but with a light wind to cool us down. The beach was long and wide, and out on the water huge numbers of bright sails whipped back and forth as the expert kite-surfers took advantage of the constant breeze and jumped and twisted above the waves. As usual I was amazed that none of them got tangled up, but they were all too good. Every few minutes one of them glided effortlessly to the shore, and in a single motion scooped up their boards and guided their huge kites up the beach