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THE ROAD HOME

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WHERE AM I ?

Before he even opened his eyes in bed, Sam realised that he was very cold. In addition to the cold, he also had a vague feeling of nausea, as if he had spent ages in the trunk of a broke bus travelling on a windy road. He had felt this way once before, during a summer holiday, when he, Kevin and Odette had travelled to a popular mountain resort. Odette, his mother, disliked nature. She hated insects and anything that might suck her blood or hurt her. She also hated the unnecessary effort that had to be put

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into hiking the trails. ‘If one can go by car, Why walk?’ she used to say. ‘There is no stopping progress,’ Kevin joked her every time she said that.

Kevin loved to move, of course, but only in a gym with complicated machines and mirrors in where he could admire his muscles from all angles. He believed that working out with machines, unlike walking in nature, provided useful results by making him more beautiful and stronger.

The reason why Odette had wanted to go there was because it was a very exclusive place, full of elegant villas and, consequently, luxury shops.

Admiring those shop windows, filled Sam's mother with the same ecstasy, he would feel watching a giant manta rays swimming in the ocean. Odette spent hours in contemplation in front of the luxurious clothes while Kevin, consulted apps on his mobile phone.

Throughout the trip back, Odette droned on about those dresses and her dream of owning them one day, if only she could win the lottery.

"It was precisely during one of those returns, amid the succession of hairpin bends, that Sam had started to feel a strange sickness. By the tenth turn, he had closed his eyes because he felt as if he were on a small rowing boat at the mercy of the waves. The boat went up and down, up and down, and with each rise and fall, an unstoppable nausea grew within him. Perhaps, he thought, he should have asked to stop the car, but he didn't have time to speak before an overwhelming wave rose from his stomach to his mouth and exploded in the car's interior.

'Boark!'

'Oh my god, gross!' screamed Odette.

They had to stop, and Kevin tried to clean up while

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Odette yelled, 'You could have opened your mouth to say something instead of throwing up! You never use your brain!' And for the rest of the trip, she stayed silent, with a handkerchief pressed to her nose."

For the rest of the trip, she stayed silent, with a handkerchief pressed to her nose.

That morning, waking up, he felt just like that—with his stomach in knots and his muscles aching as if he'd exercised too much.

But when he finally opened his eyes, his unease grew even stronger. That bed was not his bed, and that room was not his room. The only thing he could recognize was his backpack, though it looked dirtier and older than he remembered.

What happened?

Had he perhaps gone to a sleepover at some classmate's house and now didn't remember? But no classmate had ever invited him in all his years at school, and if that were really the case, there would be another bed and maybe another kid around. Instead, he was alone and couldn't recognize any of the things around him.

The door to the room was slightly ajar, but no sounds were coming from the rest of the house, as if it were uninhabited.

Since he had never met his grandparents—aside from a photo of the Witch Breaker, Odette's mother—he had always wished he could spend time with them. Maybe now he was with them. Odette and Kevin must have left him here for the summer holidays, and he had slept so deeply he'd forgotten.

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Thankfully, there were no signs or sounds indicating the presence of Cassius and Rocky, his hateful stepbrothers, Kevin's sons.

So Sam gathered his courage, got out of bed barefoot, and quietly approached the slightly open door. He caught a glimpse of what looked like a sort of kitchen with a lavish breakfast prepared on a table. Could it really be for him?

Once, his friend King, an African boy he had met at a roadside café, had told him to always proceed with great caution, so he approached the table slowly. That is when he saw a note attached to a glass of orange juice.