

The Ones Who Disappeared

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The size of the entryway astounded Noelle as she stepped through the door. She gripped her little brother's hand as she stepped from the threshold, sinking deeply into the Persian rug. So this was the house they were going to tour, although no one seemed to have arrived yet. She looked up at the vaulted ceiling then around her. To her left, almost a bit behind her, was a sitting area for visitors. Everything seemed to be made of dark, walnut wood and upholstered in a deep blood red fabric.

But up a little further on her left was a narrow hallway, much too small in comparison with the rest of the entryway. Lining the hallway was a row of white doors with frosted glass panels, not unlike something you would find in a doctor's office. Sunlight streamed through the door windows despite the hallway being too far into the house to have any windows to the outside for those rooms. Before she could ponder the impossible physics of sunlight in the middle of the house and the oddity of something so utilitarian and sanitized in a mansion of such obvious grandeur, her little brother suddenly let go of her hand and ran off down the hallway.

Why do I always have to be chasing after a five-year-old? Noelle wondered to herself as she ran after him. He ducked behind one of the frosted glass doors, and it swung shut just before she could reach him. She yanked the door back open immediately only to find an empty room about the size of a cubicle. Surely this was the room he went in; she had pulled the door back open only a nanosecond after it swung shut, and she had seen his shadow through the frosted glass. Noelle turned around frantically, but there was nothing but white walls, a plain desk, and herself. *Wait, what?* She whipped her head back around and stared at herself. There was a full length mirror hung on the back of the door she had gone through. Suddenly, a small figure darted across the view in the mirror. She jerked her head over her shoulder; she was still the only one in the room. She lifted the mirror off the hook it had been hanging on and used it to look over her shoulder. There was her brother, sitting on the edge of the desk, smiling and swinging his legs. She lowered the mirror and quickly looked around the room for herself: nothing. She lifted the mirror back up to see behind her, and there he was. He seemed fine, but he clearly could not see her in return.

Filled with a sense of horror, she ran out of the room and back down the hallway to the foyer. *What was this place? What happened to my*



brother? Before she could collect her thoughts fully, the rest of the group came in through the door. *Oh yes*, she remembered, *the group we were going to tour the house with*. She scanned the crowd, looking for someone who could help. Her eyes immediately fell on Andy, a boy from school. He strode through the entrance at the head of the group and turned left into the sitting area by the door.

“Dang,” he said, “This place is nice.” He walked to take a seat, but as he did, his head began to disappear. Noelle ran to grab his arm and jerked him back. He was still there; he hadn’t disappeared like her brother. Noelle was about to sigh with relief when she looked up into his face. It wasn’t there. His whole head was nothing but a dark blue blur, the insubstantial shadow of what had begun to disappear.

“Andy?” she called fearfully. *Was he dead or worse?*

“What just happened?” Andy’s voice came from the indefinable void which hovered over his shoulders.

“Where is everyone?” another voice asked. Noelle turned around; it was Martha, one of Noelle’s friends who must have been at the back of the group. But now the rest of the group was nowhere to be seen. In her panic over Andy, Noelle hadn’t noticed the loud chatter of the crowd suddenly silencing. The group had disappeared just like her brother had.

“They’re right over there,” Andy said, pointing up the staircase to the right of the door. Noelle looked up. It was empty.

“What is going on?” Martha demanded. “What happened to Andy?”

“What is up with you guys?” Andy asked. “I’m fine—we should probably join the group.”

“There’s no one there! Your head is missing!” Martha shrieked at him.

“You’re off your head,” Andy retorted.

“No, Andy,” Noelle said, leading him to a mirror hanging on the wall.

“Your head is gone.” But as she looked into the mirror with him, there was Andy, head and all, and the last of the group could be seen walking up the stairs in the background. “Martha! Come see this.” Noelle yanked Martha over to the mirror. Martha gasped and whipped her head around to look at the staircase herself. There was no one there.

“Noelle, what’s going on?” Martha asked.

“My brother disappeared. I don’t know how it happened, but I can only see him in mirrors. Andy was about to disappear when I pulled him back, and now the group is gone, too.”

“Disappeared? You can’t see them? You can see me, right?” Andy seemed confused. “Why can you see me and not them and I can see



everyone?”

“I don’t know,” Noelle replied. “Only part of you started disappearing: your head. Maybe your eyes are in the other dimension or something. I don’t know. But we need to find a way to get them back. I need to find my brother.”

“Well, I saw him go that way with the group,” Andy said, pointing to the stairs. “Let’s go.” They went up the staircase. “They’re going through that door,” Andy gestured. Martha went to open it, and Andy screamed. Martha froze and stared at him.

“You just walked through Mrs. McCarthy,” he whispered, horrified. Martha cringed.

“Is she alright?”

“Oh yeah. She didn’t seem to notice. Are you okay, Mrs. McCarthy?” Andy called. “Mrs. McCarthy? Mrs. McCarthy??” He started towards the door, but Noelle held him back.

“You’re still in our world,” Noelle explained. “She can’t see or hear you.”

“How are we going to get them back then?” Martha asked. Noelle shook her head, sunk to the floor, and began to cry. Andy sat down next to her.

“We’ll figure this out, don’t worry,” he reassured her. “At least they all seem safe.”

“But how are we going to be able to see them again?” Noelle sobbed.

“We disappear, too.” Noelle and Andy looked up at Martha in shock. “What?” Martha said. “They are all safe, we can’t seem to get them back, so we’ll have to go in with them.”

“But we need to get them back out!” Noelle insisted.

“Perhaps we’ll have to go in to get them out,” Andy suggested. “Let’s try to catch up with them at least.”

Andy stepped through the door and vanished. Martha followed, disappearing as well. Noelle stood there with a lump rising in her throat. She just wanted everyone to reappear so she could hold her brother and go back home. What would happen once she disappeared? *I can’t do it*, she thought. But then she thought of her brother, and she knew she had to. Shaking violently, she held her breath and did a mad rush at the door like she was about to jump into freezing water.

She was in a sunlit hallway lined with white doors. Martha and Andy stood next to her.

“Where did you guys disappear to?” a boy snickered as he walked



past with the rest of the group. Noelle started to protest, but Andy stopped her.

“No, don’t you see? This is the real world,” Noelle stared at him, confused.

“But we saw those people disappear; we have to get them back.”

“We were the ones who disappeared!” Andy insisted. “Don’t you see? We were on a tour of the medical institute near school. Your little brother was thrilled he was allowed to come along with us. Don’t you remember?”

“But,” Noelle stammered, “the mansion...”

“Made no sense. It was physically impossible.”

“That was because of the portals! The mansion was real! The moment I walked through the door I was amazed!”

“Once you stepped through the door,” Martha said. “I was amazed, too. But if we had seen the outside, why would we have been surprised at how big the inside was? Can you remember the door? Or the drive there? Think, Noelle.” Noelle thought, but she could remember neither, and as her memories of the trip to the medical institute grew stronger, her memories of the mansion faded until she was convinced. They were the ones who had disappeared.

