

The Ones Who Disappear

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The sheer size of the entryway astounded Noelle as she stepped through the door. She gripped her little brother's hand tight 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. The rest of the tenth grade was taking the bus, but she had driven from picking up her brother from kindergarten. Her parents didn't come home from work until well after her brother was let out, so guess who got to take care of him every afternoon after school? Noelle's mom had gotten permission for her little brother to tag along on Noelle's after-school field trip so she wouldn't have to hire a babysitter, which Noelle was not the most thrilled about. It's not that she didn't love her brother, but there comes a time when a teenage girl just wants her own space. A place like this would be nice to have to myself. Noelle thought as she looked up at the vaulted ceiling and the magnificent chandelier that hung from it, then around her. To her left 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 farther up on her left was a narrow hallway, which seemed 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 off he 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 a windowless room about the size of a cubicle equipped with nothing but a plain desk. Surely this was the room he went in, she had pulled the door back open only a nanosecond after it swung shut, she had seen his shadow through the frosted glass. Noelle turned around frantically, but she saw 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.



She stumbled backwards out of the room and the door swung shut immediately. Sunlight streamed through the frosted glass onto her face. The mirror, I forgot to put it back, she thought, trying to recover her mind from what she had just seen, or maybe not seen rather. She opened the door and looked at the back. The mirror was hanging there. She shut the door from the outside. Sunlight still poured through the frosted glass. She opened the door one more time and lifted the mirror again, to find nothing but a painted white door; no glass.

Filled with a sense of confusion she ran out of the room and back down the hallway to entryway. What was this place? What had happened to her brother? Why couldn't she see him? Before she could collect her thoughts fully, the rest of the group came in through the door. Oh yes, she remembered, the house tour. Her eyes immediately fell on Andy, a boy from her grade. 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 undefinable 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. Her heart pounded so loudly she was almost sure the other two could hear it. Martha's muffled swear when she saw Andy's head echoed around the room. "They're right over there." Andy said pointing up the stair case to the right of the door. Noelle looked up the huge staircase the curved down from the upper floors like the tail of some gigantic beast. It was empty.

"What is going on?" Martha demanded, her glance darting from the empty staircase to Andy's absent head. "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 gold framed mirror hanging on the wall.



“Your head is literally 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, her voice trembling.

“My brother disappeared. He just walked through a doorway and then he was gone. 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 invisible too.”

“Disappeared? You mean 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 tiredly. “I can’t see anyone who has disappeared except in mirrors, but only part of you started disappearing, your head. Maybe your eyes are in the other dimension or something, I really don’t know.”

“Like parallel timelines?” Martha gasped excitedly.

“Or the Matrix?” Andy injected.

“Or the Twilight Zone?”

“I always knew I was meant to be a super hero.” Andy whispered as Martha hummed *A Whole New World* in the background. “I’m a freaking super hero.”

“Guys! It doesn’t matter!” Noelle exclaimed. “We just need to find a way to get them all 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 all started going up the staircase, which led to a passage lined with doors. “They’re going through that one,” Andy gestured. Martha went to open it and Andy screamed. Martha froze and stared at him. His hands covered where his mouth presumably was.

“You just walked through Mrs. McCarthy.” He whispered, horrified. Martha cringed. Mrs. McCarthy, their teacher, was an ancient, frail, but lovable creature that looked like she could die from a common cold at any moment.

“Is she alright?”

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

“You’re still in our world since you didn’t disappear all the way I guess.” Noelle explained. “She can’t see or hear you.”



“Well then how are we going to get them back then?” Martha asked. Noelle shook her head; lips pursed and chin quivering, then sunk to the floor with her face in her hands and began to cry. Andy sat down next to her and put his arm around her shoulders.

“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 as far as we can tell, even Andy is surviving well in this amphibious state, we can’t seem to get them back, so we’ll have to go in with them. This place seems to be full of portals anyway. It shouldn’t be hard.”

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

“Perhaps we’ll have to go in to get them out.” Andy suggested. “Come on.” He pulled Noelle off the ground. “Let’s try to catch up with them at least.” Noelle would have been somewhat comforted by this if it hadn’t been coming from a headless classmate. As it was, she was hardly reassured.

Andy stepped through the door and vanished. Martha swallowed deeply and followed, disappearing as well. Noelle stood there with a lump rising in her throat. She didn’t want to be stuck in that mansion forever; she didn’t want to live in some alternative world. She just wanted everyone to reappear so she could hold her brother and go back home. What would happen once she disappeared? Her whole body shook. 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 a freezing swimming pool.

She was in a sunlit hallway lined with white doors with frosted glass panels.

Martha and Andy stood on either side of 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.” She insisted.

“We were the ones who disappeared!” Andy exclaimed. “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. Do you remember?”

“No.” Noelle said without hesitation.

“No, stop, think.” Andy said exasperatedly. “Maybe I can remember better because I was in the other dimension less than you were. Just try to remember how the day went. After school you picked up your brother for the field trip here at the medical institute.”



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

“Made no sense. It was physically impossible.”

“But I remember it all so clearly!”

“Do you remember how you got there?” Martha interjected. Noelle stared at her.

“Of course, it was huge; it was amazing the moment I stepped through the door.”

“Once you stepped through the door. I was amazed too. But if we had seen the outside of the mansion, why would we have been so 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 the outside of the mansion nor the drive there, and as her memories of the field trip to the medical institute grew stronger, her memories of the mansion faded until she was convinced. They were the ones who had disappeared.

