

A Far Away Magic

Praise for *A Girl Called Owl*

‘A sparkling, frosty read, full of feisty characters, myth and mystery’ *Daily Mail*

‘A winter treat full of frosty magic’ Katherine Woodfine, bestselling author of *The Mystery of the Clockwork Sparrow*

‘A magical debut’ *Bookseller*

‘Deftly integrates figures from folklore and ancient mythology into the wider narrative of family, friendship and identity’ *Primary Times*

‘A perfect read for those who love wintry magic and a strong female character proving her place in the world’ BookTrust

‘An impressive coming-of-age debut novel, *A Girl Called Owl* combines elements of mystery, adventure, romance, fantasy and folklore’ SLA

Books by Amy Wilson

A Girl Called Owl

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AMY WILSON

*A Far
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Illustrated by Helen Crawford-White

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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.





Run. Run. Staggering, stumbling run. She saw me. She saw past the other stuff. I saw her eyes widen, saw the brightness of her shock.

‘Bavar!’

Her voice, so light and clear; her footsteps flying after mine. She’s quick – I have to stretch my legs. What does she want with me? Nobody ever chased me before; nobody even *saw* me before. I run further than I need to, just to lose her, just so she won’t follow me home. She’s determined, but gradually I outpace her. And then I have to turn back and head home, my breath hot in my chest, my legs burning, looking out for her as I round every corner.

‘Bavar!’ my aunt exclaims as I walk up the drive towards the yellow house. ‘You’re late! But look at

you – you’ve grown in a day!’ Her voice thrills with it, and I shirk back, my cheeks flushing. Then she frowns. ‘And where . . . where is the lunch basket, Bavar? Were you chased? Did you lose it?’

So of course then I have to show her where the basket is, and she wants to know why I hid it there.





Aⁿg^el

I have to remind myself that I'm the new me now. Sometimes the old me is so close, it's like she's breathing down my neck, and I have to literally shrug her off my shoulders.

Man, does she cry.

She's trying now, even though the new me has strictly forbidden it.

I'm back at the house. It's a nice house. The people here are nice. They have grown-up children of their own and thought it would be good to do something positive for others not so fortunate.

I'm not so fortunate. You wouldn't have known that a year ago. I didn't know it a year ago. Anyway. The best thing is to think of other things. And the best thing right now is to think of Bavar. He's like a murder

mystery in boy form. I want to know who done it: Who made his eyes ache like that? Who made him hide in his collar? I want to know where they are, and why they did it.

Sometimes people don't know they're doing that kind of thing. Killing someone on the inside. My parents would have been horrified if they knew they were going to do that to me. Of course they didn't mean to, but I'm not sure that helps. It makes it hard to be angry with them, and sometimes . . . sometimes I really need to be angry with them. They're the villains of my murder mystery. They killed me on the inside when they died like that. It was them.

The nice people are called Pete and Mary. They wear bright stripy jumpers, and jeans with no shape, and they like gardening, and cups of tea, and cake. Their grown-up children both live in America, and they're very proud and they miss them very much, and I wonder – if it's all so nice and happy, then why did they both go so far? If I'd grown up and they were still here, I'd never go. I'd never go all the way to America.

I shrug my shoulders, swallow more tears and think of Bavar again. Man, can he run. You can really see how tall he is when he runs like that. Taller than any grown

man I've seen. About seven foot, I reckon. Or nearly, anyway.

I'm going to keep up with him tomorrow. I'm going to wear my trainers to school specially.

