

**DREAM
WEAVERS**

NIGHT OF THE SCARY FAIRIES

To all those who bring magic into my life
– AS

For every dreamer, big or small, all around the world
– FB

LITTLE TIGER

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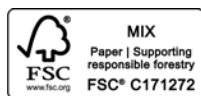
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FORREST BURDETT

LITTLE TIGER

LONDON



WARNING!

Top-secret information for the eyes
of Soothsayers only.

The following knowledge has been gathered
and protected by generations.

And now it falls to you.

Use it wisely.



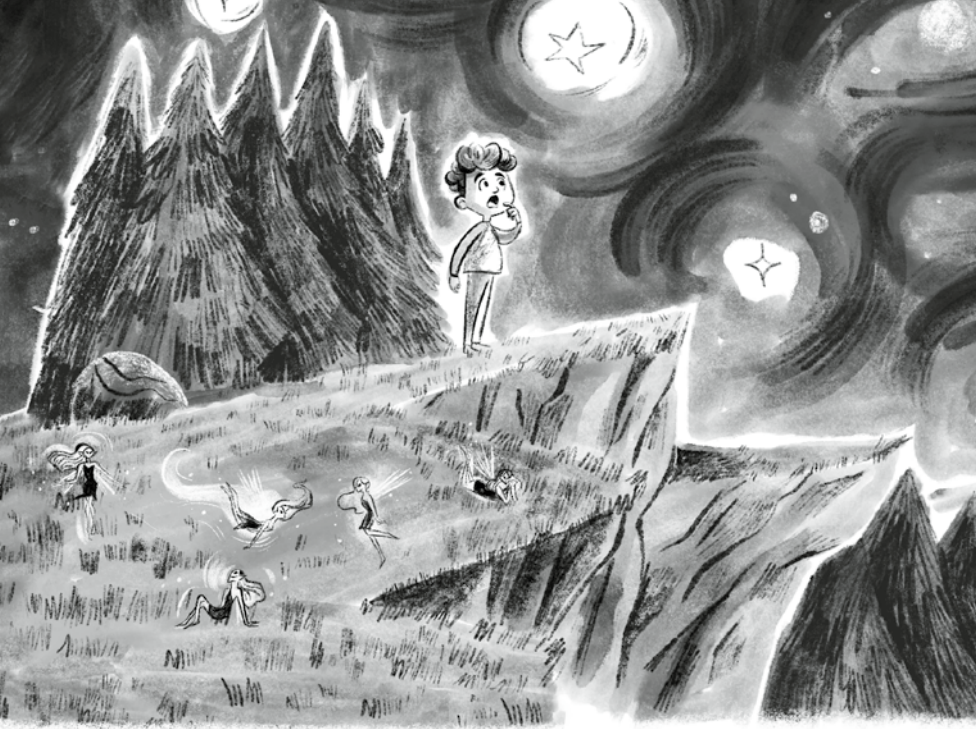


CHAPTER ONE

FIRST-DAY JITTERS

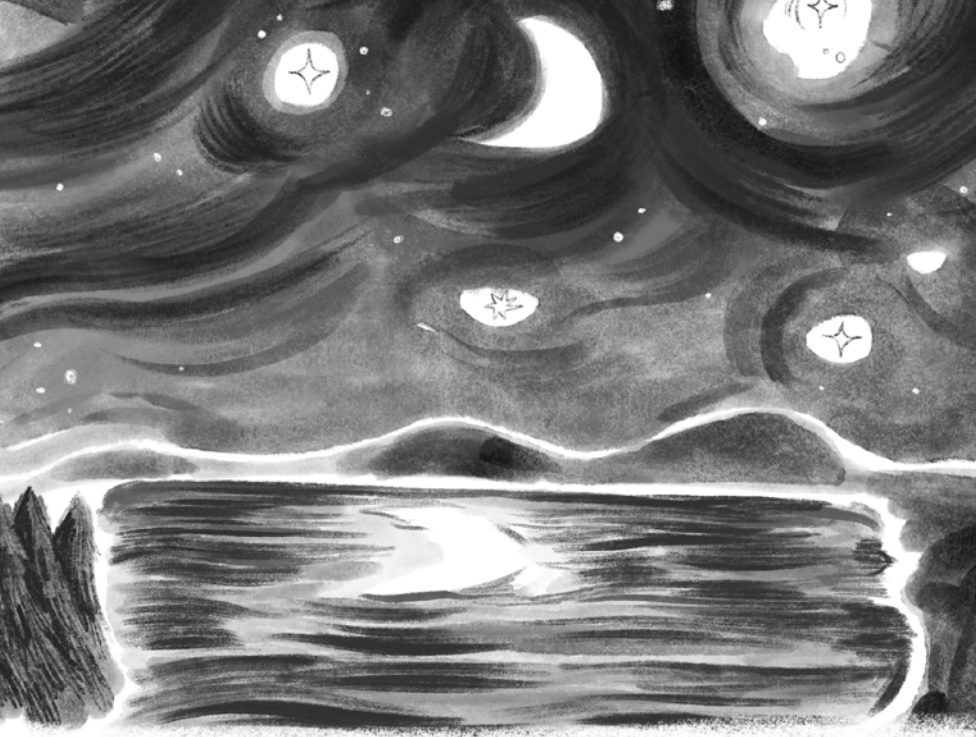
The first thing I notice is my bare feet. I've always thought they were weird because my second toe is longer than my big toe. Everyone knows the big toe is supposed to be the biggest. I mean, it's in the name.

Then I notice the cold grass poking up between my weird long toe and the big one. Odd. It's night-time, so I'm wearing my Spider-Man pyjamas. But why am I on a clifftop with frosty wind rushing through my hair? And where even am I?



I look out at the night sky stretching before me and gasp at the vivid colours. It's streaked with neon green and swirls of violet, all lit up by bright stars. It almost hurts my eyes to look but I can't turn away.

Gradually, from the edge of my awareness, I notice a sound. It's a bit like children giggling and it's coming from down low, in the grass. I stoop to get a closer look and realize that the field is full of tiny, glowing



figures! They're dancing around, flitting back and forth on delicate wings that beat so fast they look blurred. Fear creeps up my spine as I back away when, suddenly, one of the tiny figures springs forwards. In one movement its small mouth opens and it *chomps* down on my big toe.

“*Ouch!*”

★

My eyes fly open to the sound of my alarm clock and my dog licking my face.

“OK, OK! Good morning, Rupert.”

I laugh, gently pushing away his furry snout.

“It’s weird... I’ve had the same dream now for two days. Maybe I’m nervous about school starting back. What do you think?”

Rupert cocks his head to one side as if to say, “Why are you asking me?” Then he springs off the bed and races out of the room. People always joke that me and Rupert could be brothers, since we have the same curly light brown hair and big round eyes. Although I would be worried if my real brother had a tail...

I hear Rupert thunder down the stairs and into the kitchen where Mama is already bustling about. Breakfast time in our house means two things: the smell of sizzling butter and the sound of classical music. My mama is Italian and she *loves* Italian

opera (she'll sometimes listen to German opera too if she's feeling extra dramatic). She even gave Rupert the middle name Poochini so he'd "remember his Italian roots". (I don't ever point out that Rupert's breed is *Australian* labradoodle.)

It's the first day back at school after the summer holidays so I drag myself out of bed, not used to getting up early again yet. When I finally get dressed and walk into the kitchen, Mama is frying eggs and holding Roberto, my baby brother, on one hip.

"Morning, Mama. Morning, Berto."

I give them both a kiss.

"Buongiorno, Tito," Mama sings. "Eat! Eat! Mum is going to take you to school in fifteen minuti."

I peer out of the kitchen window and spot my mum working in her shed at the bottom of the garden. I call them Mama and Mum so we don't get confused but really my parents

couldn't be more different. My mum is DIY obsessed and loves working on random projects. Our house is a happy mix of hand-made furniture, Mama's opera posters and records, a squeaky staircase and a well-stocked kitchen.

As I eat my eggs, a little flutter of nerves rises up in my stomach but I do my best to push them back down. I'm in Year Five now! It seems silly to be nervous about school.



After a hearty breakfast I grab my school bag and head out into the garden to find Mum. She's in her shed, completely absorbed in finding the perfect rivet in a box of loose screws.

“Oh, Tito! Time to go already?” she says, finally noticing me. She grabs her keys from a hook on the wall and we make our way to the car.

I don't say anything when we get in, I'm too focused on keeping the nerves at bay. But Mum knows something is up.

“You got first-day jitters?” she asks, reaching out to pat my leg.

I don't want to talk about it so I just say, “I had a strange dream.”

“Well, you're probably just a bit nervous about going into a new year. Like Mama always says, you are sensitive.”

I cringe a little bit at that word. “Maybe.”

Sometimes I wish I wasn't so sensitive. It's a

new year at school but it's not like anything's changed. I've had the same classmates since Reception and my best friends Tiffany and Murray will still be there. We've been BFFs our whole lives. We went to nursery together, caught chickenpox at the same time, star in every nativity as the three wise men and now we're at the same primary school.

This summer was one of our best yet. We spent *every day* together, (apart from when Tiff was rehearsing for the local theatre group play and Murray was at football practice). We built a shelter out of massive branches near the river in the woods and hung out there. Murray and I went to watch Tiff perform on the opening night of her play and she was *really* good. I even managed to convince Tiff to come and watch one of Murray's matches and we shouted so much that I lost my voice.

But now it's September. The new school

year came round quickly.

My tummy lurches again and I know for sure that I'm nervous.

Everything at school will be the same, I tell myself. At least, I hope it is. I've never liked surprises.



When I walk into my Year Five classroom it's buzzing with the excitement of different haircuts, brand-new stationery and tales from the holidays.

"Tito, over here!" Tiff shouts, waving to me from the back of the class.

"Nice glasses, Tiff," I say, admiring the green frames.

Tiffany smiles and wiggles her eyebrows. "Thanks! I saw the lead singer of 2True wearing them so I *had* to get some just like it."

"They remind me of snot," Murray says.

“Murray!” Tiffany and I shout, before cracking up laughing. When you’ve known Murray for as long as we have, you learn he isn’t being rude. Murray just says exactly what he’s thinking and sometimes it comes across a bit ... blunt.

The classroom door creaks open and Ms Branberry, our class tutor, walks in carrying an impossibly tall stack of books. Next to her is a girl I’ve never seen before.

“A new girl,” Tiffany whispers in awe. We haven’t had a new student join the class since Year One!

“Hi, Year Five!” Ms Branberry says loudly. “I’m so happy to be your form tutor this year and even happier that we have a new student joining us!”

I like Ms Branberry but she does get excited about *everything*.

“Now our new student is called –” Ms Branberry gestures to the girl to introduce

herself, but the girl's cheeks go pink and she stays quiet so our teacher continues.

“Her name is Neena and she has just moved here from Chitral in Pakistan. Who has heard of Pakistan?”

A few people put their hands up, including me.

I watched a documentary about Pakistan with my mum. Travel shows are our favourite.

Ms Branberry scans the class and her eyes settle on me. Uh-oh.

“Tito, since you have your hand up and because I know you are a very sensible boy,



would you look after Neena today?”

I mean ... I can't really say no, can I? I want Ms Branberry to like me and I don't want to upset Neena. I force a smile and nod but my stomach is churning. I was already nervous and now I have to speak to a new kid. I can't remember the last time I spoke to someone new. Our town's so small that everyone knows each other.

“Thank you, Tito,” Ms Branberry beams, ushering Neena to sit next to me. “We want Neena to feel extremely welcome here so I expect everyone to be *very, very* kind to her. OK?”

“Yes, Ms Branberry,” we reply as one.

Neena scuttles over to our table at the back and sits on the empty chair next to me. I try not to stare at her but I notice she keeps her eyes down the whole time. If *I'm* feeling nervous about the first day back, then Neena must feel even worse, being completely new.

Come on, Tito, be brave. I'm sure she doesn't bite.

I take a deep breath and ignore the uneasy churning in my belly. Ms Branberry has trusted me to look after the new girl so I'm going to do my best to make her feel welcome.

I can feel Tiffany and Murray's eyes on me as the class starts chatting about their summer holidays again. They want me to say something to Neena.

"So..." I begin, turning to look at the new girl. "When did you move here?"

Neena opens her mouth but then quickly looks away and starts rummaging around in her backpack.

I try again. "Uh... Did your parents move here for a job?"

Neena doesn't reply but pulls out a leather-bound black notebook.

I can feel my palms start to get clammy. I need backup! I turn to Tiff and Murray and mouth "help" with wide eyes.



“Neeeeeeennaaaaa,” Tiffany sings, her pigtail bunches bobbing as she warbles up and down a scale. “What bands do you like?”

I jump in to explain the singing. “In case you haven’t guessed, Tiffany loves performing. She’s going to be a pop star one day!”

“Um, pop *icon*,” Tiffany corrects me, and busts out some moves right there at the desk.

I watch Neena’s face for a reaction, *anything* to show she’s feeling more comfortable. She gives us a small smile and

then immediately looks back down at the pages of her notebook. Her wavy dark hair falls in front of her face like a curtain.

I try again. “This is Murray. He’s the best rugby player in our school. Actually, he’s the best at every kind of sport.”

Murray squints at Neena. “Maybe she doesn’t speak English.”

Eeeeeek. Murray’s habit of saying whatever’s in his head is *not* helpful right now.

Neena looks up, turns to Murray and Tiff and says, “Hi. Nice to meet you.” Then she goes back to her notebook.

“OK, progress,” Murray says, clapping his hands together.

Tiff whacks him on the arm.

They begin bickering in the way they often do, like brother and sister. I can’t help but feel a little deflated... Neena didn’t say hi to me. But I won’t give up just yet. She can’t go a *whole day* without speaking, can she?



I'm pretty sure Neena hates me. It's the last lesson of the day and she *still* hasn't spoken to me. I hope I haven't done anything to upset her. In my head I run through my attempts to get her to speak. I told her my best Mum jokes and offered her some of my pesto gnocchi at lunch. I even joined in with Tiffany's lunchtime performance as a backing dancer to make her laugh. But she didn't crack a smile! She just sat and wrote in her notebook, her fingers anxiously fiddling with the spine. I feel like I've failed.

In maths, I try to focus on equations but the numbers keep going fuzzy on the page and my eyes droop. Being back at school is tiring enough without trying to help a new student settle in.

Then there's a sudden ruckus at the back of the class and my eyes fly open.

A chair falls to the floor with a clang.
I whirl round and am shocked to see Leonard and Harry, hands flapping in front of them, in the middle of a fight!

“Oh my gosh,” Tiffany gasps.

“I can’t believe it,” I whisper. “They’re usually so quiet.”

“They’re not even fighting properly, they’re too small,” Murray says, a bit too loudly.

Leonard and Harry slap each other’s hands in a messy rumble, their faces bright red.

Ms Branberry rushes to the back of the class, yelling, “Boys! Stop!” She pulls Leonard and Harry apart and stares at them, her mouth agape. This fight has sent her into a *whole new level* of dramatics.

“I cannot believe what I’m seeing,” she shrieks. “Both of you to the head teacher’s office NOW!”

Leonard and Harry sulkily troop out of the room.

I agree with Ms Branberry. I can't believe it either. They're best friends! And Leonard is Head of Year for goodness' sake. He's the best-behaved boy in the school.

No one can concentrate for the rest of the afternoon, and when the school bell finally rings, Neena quickly packs up her belongings and rushes out into the playground. Ms Branberry watches

her leave and then beckons me over to her desk.

“Neena seems to be struggling to settle in...” she says, tapping the table with her pencil.

My heart sinks. “I know, I'm sorry. I tried everything I could. Maybe she needs more time?”

I feel like I've let both her and Neena down.



“Could you keep an eye on her for the rest of the week?” Ms Branberry asks.

I nod quickly, happy to have a second chance.

“Great.” Ms Branberry lowers her glasses and peers at me over the top. “I’m counting on you.”