Somewhere Else

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Extract

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Tell them. Have to get back.

Her eyes snapped open. Strange, she was already back, in bed, in her room. So had she already told them? But no, the room was all wrong. It wasn't *her* room. Dreaming, that was it, she was dreaming. Close eyes – open them again, slowly this time. Sit up.

No! What was going on? Where was she? This was all wrong.

A fleeting memory of her real room: flowery wallpaper, dark brown wardrobe, dressing table – not much space for anything else. Then this room, imprinting on her senses, overwhelming her. Long, huge narrow room painted pale yellow. Low white ceiling with wooden beams. Attic! It was an attic. Funny furniture perfectly fitted into the irregular shapes of the room. Posters on the walls. Not her posters. Clothes on the floor. Not her clothes. She threw off the bedclothes, which felt all wrong, from a bed that felt wrong. She got up and moved towards the door.

Awake, she was definitely awake – so was the other place a dream? But where was she now, w*ho* was she? She couldn't remember. She could remember the names of things, objects, or at least some of them, but not her own name. She couldn't remember her name or anything about herself. Her body felt strangely light but clumsy, somehow. Ill, was she ill? Her head was hazy, like a mist was swirling inside it, making it impossible to think, to focus. There were images, memories maybe, faces, places caught up in the mist but nothing clear, nothing she could hold on to.

She opened the door and saw another door opposite. It was closed. There was a sign in large green letters. 'ZAN. KEEP OUT.' What was a ZAN? Shivering slightly, she tried to pull the short, long-sleeved nightdress she was wearing down a bit before moving on towards the stairs.

Blue carpet, soft, furry, tickling her bare feet. At the bottom of the stairs there was a hall with more doors, more blue carpet leading to another flight of stairs. Whose house was she in? It was big, far too big to be hers, or at least that's how it felt but she couldn't be sure.

There were sounds coming from downstairs; voices and clattering. Who was it? Who lived here? She walked down the second flight, heart beating too fast, chest tight. At the bottom of the stairs was a slightly bigger hall with paintings on the wall and a large mirror. Someone was standing there, by an open door; a boy, looking at her. A

short cry escaped before she could stop it.

'Hey,' said the boy. 'What's wrong? Why're you lookin' at me like that?'

He was skinny, tallish, about fourteen, she guessed. Younger than her maybe though she wasn't sure how old she was. The boy was wearing a uniform, a school uniform. Ordinary, nothing odd about him except she didn't know him, hadn't ever seen him before.

'Who are you?' she asked.

'Duh!' said the boy. 'Zan. Same as always. Zan. Zander. Alexander. Your brother?' he said, emphasising each word.

'I haven't got a brother.'

She knew that. She didn't know how she knew but she did. Sisters, she had older sisters, two of them. Names, what were their names?

'You wish!' the boy was saying. 'Hey Jade, what is it, what's wrong? Nightmares again, a migraine? Come on! Stop looking at me like that, you're spooking me.'

She looked round to see who he was talking to. There was no one there.

'Jade?' he said. 'Are you OK? You look – I dunno – your eyes are all sort of weird.'

Jade. He kept saying Jade. Was he talking to her, was she Jade? The name seemed sort of familiar but no – the answer came to her in an instant.

'I'm Janet,' she said. 'I'm Janet. I don't live here. I don't

know how I got here.'

'Mum,' the boy called. 'Mum! There's somethin' wrong with Jade again.'

He said 'again' as though this had happened before! A woman appeared but it wasn't Mum. This wasn't Mum. Slim, short hair, gingery-blonde like Zan's. Black trousers. Black and white top. Short sleeves. Slightly tanned arms. Thin face, longish nose, anxious eyes.

'You look tired, love,' the mum-person said. 'Headache?'

Janet shook her head, trying not to cry out. What was happening, what was going on? She pushed past them towards the mirror. This time she couldn't stop herself. She screamed. Not a short scream but one that went on and on, gaining its own momentum as she stared at the mirror. This wasn't her, it couldn't be! The light blonde hair, mid-length, cut all sort of jagged and the eyes, very green, very bright. Too bright, feverish almost, manic, scary, looking huge in a pale, thin face. And that scar on her cheek – what was that doing there? She shouldn't have a scar. She stared at the nightdress, the long legs. How was she supposed to look, why did it feel so wrong?

'Jade,' the woman was saying. 'Come on, come and sit down. You've had another nightmare, yes?'

Nightmare, was that all it was, that other place she'd been in? It hadn't felt like a nightmare though; a dream perhaps, a nice dream, but definitely not a nightmare. She

couldn't quite remember it but it had felt right, somehow – safe.

Hands on her shoulders now, steering her, guiding her into a room with glass doors looking out onto a long garden. The woman making her sit down on a beige settee that she'd never sat on before, didn't recognise, just like she didn't recognise anything else about the room. Television in the corner but it looked odd, not quite like a real television.

'OK, that's better,' the woman said as Janet sat back quietly sobbing. 'You're all right now.'

'She didn't recognise me,' Zan was muttering. 'I don't think she recognised herself.'

'Don't be daft,' Mum said. 'Of course she did. She's just upset, confused. The nightmares – it'll pass in a minute. You recognise us now, don't you, Jade?'

Jade, why did they keep calling her that? It felt familiar, as if she might know someone called Jade but it wasn't her, it couldn't be her. She shook her head and tried to push the woman away.

'She says she's not Jade,' Zan began. 'She says she's Janet. I mean, what's all that about? D'yer reckon it's . . . '

'Stress,' his mum snapped, talking hurriedly, nervously all the time. 'I told you it's just the nightmares. She'll be fine in a minute or two. You'd better get off to school, Zan.'

'Yeah, right,' said Zan, 'and leave her on her own, like this?'

'She won't be on her own. I'll phone work if she doesn't get any better, tell them I won't be in, again.'

'I can stay,' said Zan.

'No, you can't. You're going to school.'

'There's only two days left! There's no point. Why don't you let me stay with her, while you go to work? You can't keep taking time off and we're not doing nothing at school.'

'According to your teachers, you never do anything, that's the problem! Now just go, Zan. I've got enough to worry about, without you kicking off.'

'I'm not kicking off. I'm just trying to help.'

Janet looked from the boy to the woman as they argued. It felt as though she'd heard all this before but she couldn't have done. She didn't know these people, she couldn't stay here. She had to get home, tell them something, but what? Where was home? What did she have to tell them? Why couldn't she remember, why was she so tired? Why was it so hard to move? Why was she so mixed-up, confused?

'I want my mum,' she sobbed. 'I want my mum.'

'I'm here,' said the woman.

'Not you! I want Mum.'

A picture, so brief it was barely there at all before it was gone. Mum in the small kitchen at home. Mum with her dark hair, wavy, slightly messy. Then this new place, these new people, taking over, pushing the memories away.

'Leave me alone! Let me go!'

Those words, she recognised them, she'd said them before! She felt suddenly sick, pressure inside her head building as if the mistiness had turned to thick black fog, creeping over her brain, smothering it, shutting it down not letting her remember.

'Zan, get her tablets before you go,' the woman told the boy who was hovering by the door.

'Do you think we should?' he asked. 'It might be the tablets making her like this.'

'Don't be stupid, Zan,' his mum said. 'It's got nothing to do with the tablets. God knows what she'd be like without them! But bring my phone as well, will you? I think I'll get the doctor to check her over.'

The words sounded distant, as though they were floating round the room so it was hard to catch them and even harder to form her own words.

'I don't need a doctor,' she managed to say. 'I just want to go home!'

'Where's home then?' said Zan, quietly, coming towards her.

'Don't,' his mum snapped. 'Don't encourage – whatever it is. Just get the phone and the tablets.'

'I don't know,' Janet said, blinking, trying to clear away the fog. 'I can't remember. I can see it, sometimes, well bits of it. Not clearly. It's hazy like a dream.'

'That's it,' said the woman, gently, 'that's what I'm

trying to tell you. It was just a dream, Jade. This is home, this is where you live. You've lived here all your life.'

'No! Not here,' Janet insisted.

It couldn't be here, she didn't want it to be here. She wanted to go back – somewhere.

'Somewhere different,' she said. 'Somewhere else.'

Wrong doctor. Wrong surgery. She'd never been here before, never met this man, this Dr Carr, although he seemed to know her, or know Jade. Janet gripped the edge of her chair, wanting to hold onto something, anything solid, while the mum-lady talked.

'It just came on, suddenly, this morning,' the woman was saying. 'It's not quite like the other times, the nightmares. I mean, there's been days, well most days I suppose, when she's woken up totally confused, disorientated, anxious, but it's only lasted an hour or so. Nothing like this! She doesn't seem to know anybody, anything. Couldn't find the bathroom, couldn't find her way out of the house. She cried all the way here.'

Dr Carr nodded, pushing his oval glasses further up his slightly crooked nose.

'All right,' he said, swinging his chair round slightly. 'I just want to take your temperature first, Jade, OK? There's nothing to worry about. I won't hurt you. What are you looking at?' he added, smiling at her, his teeth amazingly straight and white.

'That,' said Janet.

The thing he'd been tapping at ever since they'd come in, watching a screen as he tapped. Something she half-recognised but couldn't name.

'The keyboard,' he said, sounding slightly troubled, slightly amused. 'The computer?'

'She's been like this all morning,' the mum-woman said. 'It's not like total amnesia. She remembers some things but not others. She can still read. She was reading magazines in the waiting room but she was asking questions about some of the people, some of the celebrities. Stuff she should know.'

On and on she went, telling him everything that had happened; every detail of every conversation.

'Zan thinks it might be the tablets,' she finished.

'I don't think so,' said Dr Carr. 'It's much more likely to be . . . '

He paused, nodded at the mum-person, like they were sharing a secret.

'What?' Janet said. 'What is it, what's wrong with me? How can I be two people? How can I be Jade and Janet?'

'You're not,' said Dr Carr, smiling at her again, stretching out, lightly touching her hand with his cold fingers. 'There's only one of you, I promise! It's just that sometimes, after a major trauma, the brain can do strange things, close off a bit of itself.'

'Trauma?' she asked, as a shadow of a memory

surfaced. 'Accident, I had an accident, yes?'

'Sort of,' said Dr Carr. 'I guess you don't remember any, er, details?'

'No, I don't know, I'm not sure. Something happened. I've got scars,' she said, touching her cheek. 'On my arms and – other places,' she added, shivering at the memory of what she'd seen earlier when she was getting dressed. 'But I don't know how I got them. I don't know what happened.'

She didn't really want to know. She could feel the shivering getting more intense, the fog in her head thickening, her limbs getting heavier, everything shutting off.

'That's all right,' said Dr Carr, looking at her, then at the mum-lady again. 'Maybe you don't want to remember. And maybe that's best, for now.'

Was he reading her mind? No, it was lies, illusions, tricks. They were all in on it somehow. Zan, the woman, the doctor, all trying to trick her, make her believe she was Jade, make out she was going mad. But why, who were they, why would they do that? How had they changed everything? Even the way she looked! Had they hurt her, had *they* caused the scars, messed with her body, her mind? She didn't think so but she couldn't be sure. Why couldn't she remember? Almost without realising, she stood up and headed for the door.

'Jade, love,' the woman said, standing up, blocking her path, 'what are you doing, where are you going?'

'Home.'

'I think it might be best if we get Jade back to hospital for a couple of days, Mrs Wallace,' said the doctor. 'Run some more tests.'

Wallace. Janet played with the name, rolling it over in her mind. Wallace, Jade Wallace. Wrong!

'You can't trick me,' she told the woman. 'I know. I know who I am. I'm Janet. Janet Bailey. And I'm not going to hospital. I'm going home. I have to get home.'

'Wait! Jade, Janet,' said the doctor as Janet tried to lurch towards the door. 'Listen, how would it be, if you stayed with Mrs Wallace and her family for a while, just until we find out a few things, eh?'

Did he think she was stupid, that she hadn't noticed him wink at the woman? Fine, let them think they'd got her, let them think they'd won. Until she could work it out, work out exactly who she was and how to get home.

'All right,' she said, sitting down again, 'but I don't have to go to hospital?'

'No,' said the woman, as though she was fighting back tears, 'you don't have to do anything you don't want to do.'

'We'll increase the tablets, a bit,' said the doctor. 'She's already on quite a high dose but it won't do any harm, just for a week or two. And I'll make you an appointment at outpatients to get some more tests done, in case it's anything physical, though I doubt it. There's also a, er,

specialist I'd like you to see, a Dr Mitchell. She's very good. Meanwhile,' he added, turning to the mum-person, 'make sure Jade gets lots of rest.'

'She has been,' Mum said. 'She's done nothing but sleep since the exams finished. But it's restless sleep, feverish, dreaming all the time.'

'Exams,' said Janet, clutching onto the word, holding it in her head. 'I remember doing exams.'

Important exams, exams she had to pass. School hall, rows of desks, teacher prowling, clock ticking, arm aching, brain bursting with facts she had to spew out.

'Good,' said Dr Carr, 'that's good. You'll probably find things will slowly start to come back. You'll see. I'm sure this is only temporary, I'm sure you'll be fine again in a day or two – maybe even sooner.'

He paused, smiling at her again. He was always smiling. He smiled too much.

'I'm going to ask our nurse to show you a few breathing and relaxation techniques that might help you, while I have a little chat to your mum, to Mrs Wallace, all right?'

Breathing! As if that would help! She knew how to breathe. It was the things she didn't know that were the problem. Like who she really was and what she was doing here.