



Drawn Away

HOLLY BENNETT

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ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

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*To my youngest son, Aaron, with thanks and
admiration (not to mention love!)*

ONE

JACK

The street is completely deserted, except for the girl. And it's dark, darker than it should be given the light that remains in the sky. Everything is gray and brown, as though the buildings, the cobblestones, the air itself have been tinged with soot.

I don't know where I am or how I got here. Strangely, I am not terrified by this fact. I gaze down the street with a kind of calm curiosity, like you do sometimes in dreams. I am dreaming, I guess, but I know it's a dream.

It's hard to tell how long the street is. It fades away into shadow and mist when I try to see the end. I have a sudden conviction that there is nothing beyond the mist, just as I am somehow sure that there are no people behind the grimy windows of the buildings.

Hard to tell how old the girl is from here. She's small, her little stick legs poking out of a bulky skirt.

I nearly jump out of my skin when she calls out. Her voice shatters the still air, and I realize how utterly silent it's been until now.

"Matches...who'll buy my matches?" It's a quavery reed of a voice, but it carries through the silence.

I hitch a breath and walk toward her. Even in my Nikes I can hear every footstep.

"Matches...who'll—oh!"

She stares at me like she's, well, seen a ghost. Wide blue eyes too big for her pinched little face. Scrawny shoulders hunched under a thin shawl tied in the front. She's small, all right, but maybe not as young as I thought. There's a hint of breast swelling against the press of the shawl.

I'm embarrassed to have noticed this and wrench my eyes away. She's looking at me kind of wildly, like the last thing she expected was an actual customer. Still, she squares her shoulders and asks, "Matches, Mister?"

"Um, no thanks."

She nods, resigned, like she expected no more.

"What's your name?" I ask. I can't really think of any small talk that would be suitable—Come here often? Where the hell are we?

"I'm the match girl." She's polite but can't quite hide the "well, duh" tone.

"Yes, but what's your name? I'm Jack." I'm not sure if I should offer to shake hands or something. She just looks at me blankly with those big eyes. I try again. "Where is everybody?"

Her thin shoulders lift in the sketchy suggestion of a shrug.

"Gone. Everyone's gone. There's only me left." A puzzled glance. "And you."

"Where did they go?" I ask.

Again the vague shrug. Then her gaze strays to the nearest alleyway. I can't really see into it because of the gray light and the mist seeping out of its entrance. She sidles toward me. "I think it's the mist," she whispers. "It swallowed them up."

I want to tell her that's ridiculous, that mist doesn't eat people, but I look again at the mouth of the alleyway—the mouth of the alleyway—and I can't suppress the shudder that runs up my back. I glance away quickly so that it doesn't—what? Notice me? There's just something damn spooky about the way that mist oozes out and creeps along the pavement.

A sound snags my ears—very faint, but in the silence of this street I can hear it clearly enough. It's music, music being played somewhere far away...



The opening notes of "Für Elise" rang out in the quiet classroom, a tinny, electronic ringtone that would send Beethoven into despair. I don't know why I never programmed the damn thing. It just always seemed like more trouble than it was worth. I made a quick check of my pump—*low cartridge*—and turned off the alarm.

I looked around, so disoriented I wasn't sure where I was. That dream or hallucination or whatever it was had been so real, it was still alive inside me as I tried to

catch my bearings. Math class. Did I remember being in math class? My textbook was open in front of me, a half-finished problem written out on graph paper: x and y axes waiting to be plotted. A quiz—great. Who knew how long I'd been wiggling out while the clock ticked?

Only then did it hit me. Shit. I had to be low—so low I was in la-la land. I shoved my hand into my jeans pocket and hauled out my glucose meter.

“Hand it over.”

I looked up, and the teacher—Ms. Pritchard, older and no-nonsense in dress and manner—was standing beside me with her hand out.

“Sorry, what?”

“Cell phones are to be turned off during class. I was very clear about that, and the consequence. You can pick it up at the end of the period.”

I was so not in the mood. “It’s not a cell phone. It’s the alarm on my insulin pump.” I flipped up the edge of my T-shirt so she could see the tubing that ran from the pump to the infusion set stuck in my skin.

She looked as flustered as if I'd flashed her. I almost felt sorry for her, but not very. I don't care if people know I'm diabetic, and I don't do anything to hide it, but that doesn't mean I wanted to announce it to the class on my second day at a new school. Plus, I needed to test my blood sugar. Now.

“Oh. I see,” she said. She took a step back as I lanced my finger and squeezed out more blood than was strictly

necessary. “Well, um, anything you need to do about that, you go ahead.”

“That’s okay, it will wait until after class,” I said as she beat a retreat back to her desk. Amazingly, it was true. My reading was 6.5, damn near perfect for three hours past breakfast—but if I wasn’t low, what the hell had just happened to me?

I tried to focus on the quiz, but I knew my results wouldn’t be great. I couldn’t stop thinking about that girl, and the silence...and the mist. I wasn’t worried about the math—it was just a little beginning-of-year diagnostic—but I was pretty freaked out about the other thing. What if I had a brain tumor or some kind of sudden-onset psychosis? I thought about the coffee I’d bought at the caf that morning—wretched coffee, even worse than at my old school. Could someone have dropped a hit of acid in there? *Hey, big joke, let’s dope up the new guy?* It seemed beyond unlikely.

The class finally ended, and as we filed out the door a girl who’d been sitting a couple of seats over caught my eye. She grimaced sympathetically. “Talk about invasion of privacy. Like the old bat would have any right to take your stuff anyway, even if it *was* a phone.”

I gave a snort of laughter. It wasn’t really funny, but it made me feel better, like I was back in the normal world for real—just two students, dissing their teacher.

“Yeah, well, my mom would say I should have told all my teachers about my diabetes the first day, and then

crap like this wouldn't happen," I replied. "Which is true, but..."

She nodded. "Why should you have to?"

I took a more careful look at her. My old school in Montreal had attracted lots of quirky, oddball kids. She would have fit right in. Here in small-town Ontario, she stood out: choppy dyed-black hair, purple tights and black Doc Martens. She didn't look as tough as she should though—her blue eyes were too big, her frame too delicate. She was actually really little.

"I'm Jack."

"Lucy." She extended her hand with an awkward little laugh, and we did this clumsy, jokey handshake. "Welcome to Purgatory," she said. And then she headed off down the hall, leaving me to find a reasonably direct route to room 312.

LUCY

I thought about the new boy on my walk home. It's a longish walk, but a lot of it borders the river, so in spring and fall it's nice. In the winter it can be windy as hell, and I don't even see the river because I'm bent over, trying to keep my face from freezing.

It was nearly dinnertime—I had hung out with my friend Ali for a while after school—so the sun was low, shafting out of the clouds in spears, and the light on the little hummocks and islands in the river was incredibly beautiful.

I thought about painting it, wishing I was good enough to capture light like that without it looking like some sentimental jigsaw-puzzle picture. Mist was rising off the water, which you hardly ever see at this time of day.

The new guy was cute. Not really my type—or more precisely, I didn't suppose I was *his* type—but cute. Nice open smile. Clean-cut though. Probably destined for some blond athletic girl with her boobs spilling out the top of her push-up bra.

I gave myself a mental smack for that last bit. Where do thoughts like that come from? I'd been on the receiving end of plenty of catty remarks, and I did not want to play that game, not even in my own mind.

I was cutting through the park when it started to rain a bit, just a fine drizzle that turned the air silvery. I hunched my head down the way you do at first with rain, even though it's pointless. So I didn't notice the girl floating over the river until I was almost directly across from her—and then I stopped in my tracks.

She was faint, like she was half made of mist herself, but she was definitely not a girl-shaped cloud. I was staring at a skinny waif with old-fashioned clothes and hollow cheeks and wide blue eyes; she was just standing there, her feet swathed in mist and the river running beneath her.

Suddenly spiders were crawling up the back of my neck. My first impulse was to turn around, run back to the road and pretend it never happened. But I couldn't make my feet move, and even if I could have—well, she

was too amazing. My mind was already fighting back the spiders, too curious to run. *What was she?*

I thought back to tenth grade, two years ago—AKA The Year I Messed Up—and wondered uneasily if some drug or other was coming back to haunt me. But that didn't make sense, not really. I never had hallucinations or whatever, not even in the thick of it.

She turned—or more like *drifted*—around so she was directly facing me, but she didn't seem to see me. Her mouth was moving. I stared at her, trying to lip-read, and oh God, then I could hear her. Her thin little voice was right inside my head, and the spiders were all over me, scuttling around like mad things.

She just repeated one name, over and over.

“Jack?” She stared out with her empty, lost eyes. “Jack?”

And that's when I started running.



My mom was at work when I got home, and for once I actually locked the door behind me like she was always nagging me to. I just stood there with my back to the door, panting and waiting for my heart to slow down. Once my legs had unlocked in the park, I'd run pretty much the whole way home—and trust me, I'm not a runner. Now they wanted to collapse under me, but it seemed important to stay upright, like somehow that would help me keep a grip on reality.

I saw some weird stuff when I was AWOL, but there was nothing in my experience to explain a random sighting of a floating girl. I didn't know how to deal with her, so I made tea and ate half a tub of ice cream instead, wondering if maybe I should go back for more sessions with my therapist, Kate.

A flare of the old anger at my mom licked up. I knew she had to work, and I knew she still slept badly and preferred the evening shift so she didn't have to get up at the crack of dawn. I'm not even sure I would have told her what happened if she *had* come home for dinner. It's just, you know, sometimes it would be nice to have some company. No, that's a half-truth. What I really mean is, sometimes I miss having her fuss over me like she used to. Make a nice meal for us to share, ask how my day went, admire my drawings, whatever. Ask annoying questions about where I'm going and when I'm getting home. Be a mom.

Kate said everyone grieves on their own timetable, in their own way. Fair enough. I didn't exactly handle Dad's death well myself. But I couldn't help thinking I might have done better if she hadn't been so...gone.

I knew there was leftover quiche in the fridge, so I didn't need to think about dinner. I put on Tacocat—count on girl surf punk to blow away the cobwebs and fortify your soul—and cranked it up till the bass boomed in my chest. Then I pulled out my sketch pad. Maybe if I put her on paper, I could get that little girl out of my head.