

Whispers in the Dark

(A Cienie Short Story)

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Once upon a time, on a cool autumn day in Sypniewo, a brave little knight and his dearest friend roamed through the rooms of their great castle. From his bedroom to the living room, the sounds of joyful laughter echoed through their domain.

Sir Dawid, clad in his most shiny and gallant suit of armour, charged through the realm, foam sword in hand. By his side was Tomek, his most loyal squire and friend. Together, they set out on a dangerous quest: to retrieve a hidden treasure (ice cream) from the forbidden lands (the kitchen). Now, they closed in on their prize, kept within an elaborate chest (the freezer). Rumours had flown around the realm that for any soul brave enough to venture into such a treacherous domain, there awaited sweet treats beyond one's imagination. And here they were, about to unveil the truth.

Tom stood silently, giddy with anticipation as the black cat's ears flicked and swivelled. He liked coming to Dawid's house for moments just like this.

"YES!"

The hyena, clad in armour, bounced with glee as he pulled free from those frozen depths the prize of their quest: a tub of chocolate chip-flavoured ice cream. Tom beamed at Dawid's elation. At home, his own mother would only let him have ice cream on a hot summer's day, if he'd done well in school or finished all of his chores. At Dawid's, he could have it whenever he wanted. And his parents always bought the best ice cream.

"I told you they'd have it, Tomek!" cheered Dawid, his voice practically wavering with elation as he scrambled around the kitchen, frantically searching for something. Tom knew that Dawid's parents liked a tidy kitchen, and as he heard the loud clangs of shuffling kitchenware, he knew the hyena probably wasn't putting everything back where it belonged. He folded his arms, nervously glancing towards the door.

"You sure your dad won't mind?" Tom asked, as though expecting Mr Wrzosek to be standing there, waiting. Dawid was barely listening, instead too concerned with trying to shove a very large ladle back into place after he had unceremoniously begun swinging it around like a blade. He suddenly jumped up, two spoons in hand, and shoved the drawer shut.

"Relax! He won't care. Besides, my mom isn't home!" He tucked the tub of ice cream under his arm and skipped out of the kitchen, his tail swishing from side to side with excitement. Tom let out a quiet sigh, wishing he could live his life half as carefree as Dawid seemed to. Both of their parents weren't around much, always working, though Tom's father was away in the army. At least Dawid's was around, but he seemed to spend so much time shut away in his office that Tom sometimes wondered if he was even in there at all. It didn't seem to bother Dawid very much that he was often on his own—maybe because he still at least had his brother around from time to time. Eliaz was older than the both of them by a few years, but didn't seem to mind them too much.

It must have been nice, Tom thought, having an older sibling around who doesn't hate you. Or even just having an older sibling at all. He used to worry that Eliaz would be like the other older kids at school, thinking they were annoying or easy to push around. He didn't care if they thought he was annoying. But he definitely wasn't going to be pushed around.

"Hey, are you coming or what?!" came Dawid's giddy tones. Tom frowned, his tail flicking in mild agitation as he snapped back to reality. Rolling his eyes, he followed his best friend's voice, passing several pictures hanging on the wall—some landscapes that looked like they were taken in South Germany, others family photos. He didn't stop to pay them much mind.

“Fine, I’m here. What’s the—” he began to grumble, before stopping in his tracks. There was Dawid, still wearing his outfit, hopping around the room as he tried to pry open the ice cream box.

Uh-oh.

“I think it’s frozen shut... Come on!” Dawid’s expression strained as he fruitlessly tried to yank the lid off the box, his teeth bared in concentration as he paced around the room restlessly, muttering under his breath. “Stupid thing...” The hyena growled with frustration, shaking his head as his annoyance only grew with each passing moment.

“Hey, Dawid, take it easy! You don’t—” Tom began, his tail swishing from left to right with unease. He knew that Dawid could get quite single-minded when he was determined. And he knew that when Dawid was determined, he was...

Careless.

“I think... I’ve almost...!” The lid of the tub began to creak under the strain, before all of a sudden it came flying free. Seeming unprepared for the sudden opening, Dawid started stumbling backwards... before crashing into the coffee table, which was neatly decorated with various ornaments and household items. It began to careen backwards, sending the various items scattering across the carpet, and Dawid sprawled out over the floor.

...Careless.

The sound of scraping wood and tumbling objects pierced their ears, echoing throughout the house. Within moments, they could hear the sound of heavy footsteps getting closer and closer, moving at a brisk stride. Sure enough, Mr Wrzosek appeared in the doorway, a profound scowl adorning his features. He was met with the sight of Dawid picking himself up off the floor, Tom holding a rather expensive vase, and the rest of the table’s contents scattered all over the floor. There was a deafening moment of silence.

“...Outside.”

Dawid reared his head, mouth agape like he’d just been told some shocking news. The ice cream lay on the floor beside him, open but forgotten. “Dad! It was just an accident, we’re sorry! We’ll be quiet, I promise—”

“I said go outside!”

Tom winced slightly at the raised voice, averting his gaze. He looked downward, pretending to be quite taken with the vase in his arms. He’d seen this scene play out plenty of times: Dawid’s father losing his patience with him. Thankfully, he hadn’t looked at Tom yet, so at least none of his anger seemed to be directed at him. In fact, he didn’t seem to acknowledge him at all. “I’m trying to work,

and you boys are causing a racket. I can hear you from my study! Now, go and play outside like *normal* kids!"

Dawid's ears drooped. While he looked a little lopsided and goofy before, he now just looked... sad. There was a moment of silence as Mr Wrzosek remained in the doorway, glaring down at Dawid, before he closed his eyes and reached up to massage his temples with a sigh. "And tidy up before you do." He turned on the spot, moving out of sight. "...not a God damn babysitter..." The fading footsteps left a lingering silence, neither of the boys having the courage to look at each other.

Eventually, the silence broke, and they gathered their things together—the illusion of their quest well and truly shattered. Tom watched as Dawid returned the ice cream to the freezer without a word; all the excitement they had for the tasty treat had long since faded after Mr Wrzosek's outburst. He quietly pushed the door shut, stepping past Tom out of the kitchen, as he beckoned him to the front door.

A very quiet twenty minutes later, they were sitting outside on a bench, staring at the ground. Dawid was quietly fidgeting, shifting and squirming in place as Tom's attention seemed to be caught by a group of people in the distance. He recognised them—boys from their school, walking in their direction. Not anyone he particularly liked, though he usually kept to himself anyway. He hoped they wouldn't notice him or at least recognise him and Dawid. He wasn't in the mood for—

"It's not fair."

Tom's train of thought was completely derailed, his ears flicking as he snapped himself out of his daydream, blinking as he returned to the present. "What?" He glanced over at Dawid, finding himself surprised at just how crestfallen he looked. Tom suspected that this was about more than just ice cream.

"We weren't—It was just an accident..." The hyena's lower lip trembled somewhat as he squirmed in place, seeming to find it difficult to express the words he wanted to say. Tom's expression fell slightly, and he looked away from his friend for a moment. He remembered Mr. Wrzosek as he used to be, telling Tom and Dawid all kinds of wonderful stories and fairy tales about the tale of the wizard who solved the ancient riddle or the knight who saved his town from monsters that came from the dungeon of an evil castle. But since his book came out, he'd been different—stressed and easily agitated. He never had the time or patience for them anymore. Tom had thought it was because they were growing up at first, but...

The group was passing by the pair of them now, hands in their pockets. A Labrador, a hedgehog, a mouse, and a bat. He recognised the bat—Michał. He went to the same school as them and was around the same age, but Tom didn't know him very well. He seemed to be talking, or at least

trying to talk, to the Labrador beside him, who seemed intent on staring at the ground, ears drooped and flattened. “Come on, dude, seriously! There are no monsters in there!”

Dawid’s ears perked up, lifting his head as they spoke. His head tilted to the side in that way it always did when he had an idea. Tom knew it too well. “...Monsters?” The group slowly came to a stop, Michał abruptly freezing as Dawid spoke up. There was a momentary pause as the four kids simply stared at Dawid, presumably because of the knight costume. Tom wasn’t sure if they were impressed or about to make fun of him, his ears twitching as if expecting it to be the latter.

“Eh... yeah, the... the, uhm...” The Labrador boy began to speak up, stammering over his words as though he weren’t confident in saying them. He looked away, his muzzle shifting into a nervous frown as his voice crumbled into an indiscernible mumble. Michał sighed, shaking his head. Tom thought he caught the bat rolling his bright yellow eyes for a moment.

“He’s just a little freaked out. We were hanging out near the old administration building in Kłomino, and this guy...” He jerked his thumb towards the Labrador, who now quietly looked down at the ground. “...got spooked by something. Probably just the wind, maybe a wild animal.”

The Labrador’s expression suddenly shifted—the anxiety replaced with irritation, stamping his foot on the ground indignantly. He spoke up again, much louder this time. “I’m not joking! There was something there! Like a monster!” His sudden outburst led all five pairs of eyes to fix on him, blinking in varying degrees of surprise. This seemed to give him pause, that assertive front quickly crumbling back into the previous nervousness. “...Or something.”

Dawid had that look in his eye, and before Tom could grab him, he suddenly leapt to his feet, tail wagging away. “Monsters, eh? Well, they’ll be no match for *us*!” he declared confidently, provoking another collective of stunned looks from everybody around him—Tom especially, because he knew he’d be dragged into this. The idea was appealing, though. An adventure with his friend. A real one. It pushed what had happened at Dawid’s house to the back of his mind. “*We*’ll go and take care of them, no matter what they are!”

Michał shook his head, rolling his eyes, this time without any attempt to hide it. He let out a resigned sigh as he turned on his heel, beckoning to the rest of his friends. “Fine, whatever. Just don’t blame me if something happens to you, okay?”

As the group shuffled away, Tom and Dawid were left alone again on the bench, the chattering voices of Michał and his friends slowly fading, replaced by the quiet whispers of the wind once again. Dawid turned to Tom, his fangs bared in an excited grin.

And Tom couldn’t help but smile back at him.

The path to Kłomino was well known by kids their age. A place where trees and vines grew unchecked across those crumbling, seemingly ancient walls. Empty and abandoned. Except, of course, for the monsters that the pair had tasked themselves with clearing out—their very own quest, which had long since led them into the woods just off the main road out of town.

Tom had lost track of time a while ago, too busy keeping Dawid on track and going the right way. He'd never been there before, but he'd been told plenty of times exactly where it was by his parents and teachers whenever they warned him to stay away. He looked over at Dawid, happily trotting along in his armour, as they walked through the woods.

"Do you think we'll find any monsters there, Dawid?" Tom asked nonchalantly. He wasn't sure what to make of the rumour. What kind of monsters would live there, anyway?

"Only one way to find out!" Dawid replied, skipping along through the forest. "And we'll find out together, like we always do!"

Tom smiled at that, finding himself laughing along with Dawid before he could stop himself. "Yeah. Like we always do. And we always will, right?"

"Always will!" came Dawid's cheery voice, like the hyena didn't have a care in the world. As if he'd already forgotten why they were out here in the woods, instead of still back in his house.

A few more minutes trudging through the woods, and they saw it—the first of the great, towering buildings of Kłomino. The ground beneath their feet changed from soil and mud to hard concrete, half-buried by fallen leaves. The trees had been replaced by high-rising structures—blank and unremarkable in their appearance. Each floor was made up of the exact same number of windows—windows of blocky, empty nothingness.

Tom cast his eyes over the scene—the outdated shape of the buildings a far cry from the way his and Dawid's homes were built. In some ways, the buildings almost looked like prisons. Like dungeons.

"Sheesh. This place is creeeepy," Dawid jibed, having wandered over to one of the ground-floor windows to peer inside. "Woah, the roof's totally fallen in here! Check this out!"

Tom frowned, turning on his heel to move toward where Dawid stood, his hands covering his eyes so that he could peer into the glass better. Arriving by the window, Tom squinted into the darkness. His eyes were met with a sorry scene—an abandoned kitchen, the doors hanging off their frames, with concrete rubble strewn across the floor, intermingled with scraps of foil and food packaging. It was like somebody had been there recently. Whether that was before or after the ceiling had come down was anybody's guess.

"I... don't think this is the dungeon they meant..." Tom muttered, tugging at Dawid's sleeve. He looked over his shoulder, acutely aware that anything, or anyone, could be looking down on them

from one of those windows—assuming there was any floor on the higher levels left for them to stand on.

“Come on, Dawid. This place is empty.” He pulled on Dawid’s sleeve again, harder this time, and the hyena relented. Eventually, he was peeled away from the window, which had fogged up with his breath.

“Ugh. Fine...”

They continued on, past an abandoned bicycle, as Tom dragged Dawid along by the arm down an alleyway and out into another section of woods.

“They said it was near Kłomino, right?” Dawid asked.

Tom responded with a simple, “Mhm,” as he led Dawid along. They walked past high-rising buildings, adorned with withering vines. The structures seemed to almost leer down at them, their windows like eyes beneath the autumn sun.

The buildings were soon replaced with trees once again—the outskirts, so far, turning up no monsters whatsoever. The buildings had since faded from view behind them, but it wasn’t long before the pair found themselves standing outside another structure, hidden away deep in the woods. A weathered sign hung above the main entrance, barely clinging on despite the Cyrillic lettering having long since faded away.

This must be the administration building, Tom thought.

The boys looked at each other, each wearing an expression of slight unease, unsure if they should continue on their quest. But with a gleeful smile, Dawid charged forward through the doorway.

“Hey, Dawid, wait!” Tom took off straight after him, under the crumbling archway, which looked set to give way any day now.

The interior was dark, adorned with chipped, peeling red paint, along with the dusty outlines of where picture frames may once have hung. Passing the remains of a reception desk, Tom found himself at a fork—a corridor leading left, right, and forward. The corridor ahead of him passed doors and staircases and ended at an empty wall.

“Dawid! Where are you?” he called out, peering left and right.

Silence.

Tom sighed, shaking his head. “Come on, Dawid! We can’t get lost here! We should stick together!”

He did his best to keep calm, but for the first time since arriving in Kłomino, he felt isolated. The sense of adventure was slowly being replaced by the creeping dread of realising he was somewhere he shouldn’t be. A quiet creaking sound broke the stillness, and, dead ahead of him, something caught his eye.

He thought the corridor ended in a dead wall. But as he peered through the dim light, he realised that what he thought was a wall was actually a door. Intact and left ajar, it had been painted over to blend with the surrounding walls, so he probably hadn’t noticed it at first. The door swung slightly open, as if moved by the wind... or as if someone had gone through it recently. *Dawid, probably.*

Tom hurried towards the door, the idea of wandering around in here without Dawid becoming more daunting and real by the minute.

“Tom? I’m here!”

He heard Dawid’s voice somewhere in the distance. He couldn’t quite tell where it was coming from, but it sounded as if it were beyond the door.

“Dawid! Just stay put, I’m coming!”

He reached the door, the Cyrillic lettering also faded—not that Tom would be able to read much of it, anyway. He had never cared much for his Russian classes in school.

He pushed the door open, peering into the room before him, but he couldn’t make out much—the lack of windows made it difficult to see anything. The red paint on the walls was much better preserved here—a deeper, richer shade of crimson.

“Dawid?” Tom asked tentatively. He pushed the door farther ajar, stepping forward into the darkness. As a cat, his eyes would have adjusted fast enough for him to check behind the door—just in case Dawid was planning to jump out at him.

Tom had heard loud things before: a voice being raised, a glass being dropped. But he had never heard such a terrible sound as the door behind him slamming shut. The gloomy light from outside disappeared in an instant, like a candle cruelly snuffed out. Sudden. Abrupt.

Dark.

Tom waited for his eyes to adjust. They always did. Even on the darkest nights of the year, he’d lie awake in bed and make out the ceiling of his room, the shape of his things strewn across his desk.

But there was nothing here. Just simple, empty blackness. Like the moonless midnight sky, when all the glinting stars had faded.

Tom whirled around instantly, the fur on the back of his neck prickling as his surroundings vanished into the darkness. He charged back the way he came, nearly crashing into the door as he fumbled with the lock. Tugging. Shoving. Twisting. Anything to get the damn thing to budge. The faintest sound of laughter echoed in his ears—laughter he didn't recognise.

"Dawid?! Dawid!"

The hyena had come running the second he heard the solid metal door crash shut. No sooner had Tom called his name than Dawid was banging on the cold steel, wrestling in vain with what now separated him from his friend.

"Tom! Tomek! What happened?"

"Dawid! Please! Let me out, t-this isn't funny!"

"I'm trying! I-It won't—"

"Dawid!"

He could hear it in Tom's words. Beneath that urgency, his voice trembled with fear. Desperation. And it damn near broke Dawid's heart. No matter how hard he pushed, pulled, or yanked at the door, it didn't move an inch. As though it had been completely sealed. As solid as the concrete walls surrounding him. Like it was never a door. Not really.

"Tom, I..." Dawid's efforts faltered, the hyena grunting and panting as he exerted all his energy on what was effectively a solid wall.

"I can't..."

"Dawid! Please! Don't leave me!"

Tom's claws instinctively extended now, and Dawid could hear them raking against the metal from the other side. Tom's pleas grew ever shakier as his voice cracked—like when you knew someone was crying, even if you couldn't see them.

Dawid gritted his teeth, baring his fangs, and shoulder-barged the door one more time—to no avail. All he earned was a dent in his pauldron and a jolt of pain shooting up his arm. He thumped the door again with his fist, as if it would make a difference, his fist tightening in frustration.

"I'll... I'll be back, Tom! I'm going to get help!"

“Dawid! Please!”

“I promise!”

It went against every fibre of his being to let his hands fall from the sealed door. To step back. To turn around and run as fast as his legs could carry him. Here he was, leaving his friend behind. But he couldn't do this. Not by himself. He needed help. Even if every step he took brought him further and further away from his best friend. His—

He sniffed, brushing his eyes with his sleeve, and continued out of the administration block at a sprint.

The sound of fading footsteps filled Tom's heart with sinking despair, knowing that the only person who knew where he was had left him behind. The silence overtook Dawid's retreating footfalls, smothering and drowning them until dread truly began to settle within him.

Scared. Alone. Abandoned. *Forgotten*.

The words crept into his mind like thoughts that weren't his own. Tom whirled around, staring wide-eyed into the creeping blackness.

“Who... who's there?”

There was no answer.

His eyes flitted from left to right, searching for something. Anything. Anything but that awful, enveloping darkness.

And that was when he saw it.

Or at least, thought he saw it. Something. Like the slightest disturbance in dark, murky water. A shape. A shape? An outline. Outlines? How could you see anything in pitch-black darkness? Maybe it was just a poor, lost animal. Vermin, skittering about in the dark.

He wondered what else could be in here. Creeping, skulking towards him. Tom could feel his heartbeat rising as breath caught in his chest, helplessly despairing at the thought that something could be mere inches away from him, and he'd have no idea.

Then he heard a scratching sound.

The crunch of dead leaves beneath his feet filled his ears as Dawid sprinted through Kłomino. The hyena remembered the way they came. He had a pretty good sense of direction, and it rarely let him down. It couldn't now. Not while Tom was still back there. Trapped. All alone.

Where he'd left him behind.

Dawid gritted his teeth as guilt shot through him, fangs bared as he seemed to snarl at himself. He shook his head, struggling to see the path ahead. What kind of friend was he, running away when Tom needed him most? Leaving him back there, all alone in the cold dark. Who would do that? Who would abandon someone they—

He reached up to brush something out of his eyes. Warm tears met the back of his palm.

No. He was doing this for Tom. He needed to save him, and he couldn't do it alone. He needed help. Wherever he could get it. He had to try.

Resolved, Dawid discovered a renewed energy and continued through the woods. The lifeless trees silently watched him.

Tom had felt his way over to a nearby corner of the room, hugging his knees to his chest. The words that weren't words had grown louder somehow. They weren't something he could hear, at least he didn't think so, but he knew what they meant. It was as if they were coming not from the room, but from inside him. Fear. Panic. Pain. Anguish. Terror at the thought of what was happening and what would happen next. Tom let out a quiet sob, trying to stifle it as best he could as he brought his hands to his ears. He pushed them flat against his skull, but covering them only made everything louder. He shivered, whimpering a wordless plea to the sounds. The voices.

Please stop. Please, please stop.

That just seemed to goad the feeling of dread in his chest further, his heart sinking into the empty blackness all around him.

"You're all alone."

"Poor little kitty. He left you behind."

"You should have listened."

Another sob. He couldn't remember how long he'd been stuck in here now—it felt like he'd been here forever. He couldn't remember which way the door was—only that, ahead of him, was an emptiness that stretched on forever. And the voices that lurked within it. And that he'd be here forever.

B A N G

Tom recoiled at the terrible crash, scrambling back into the corner. He made himself as small as he could, clutching his legs to his chest even tighter now as he looked around wildly, still only seeing darkness. It took every ounce of strength he had to keep himself from screaming. Because if he screamed, it would find him.

Another awful crash. This was it, Tom thought. The monster that Michał and his friends had talked about. It was real, and it was here. And it was going to get him.

“You're going to **D I E** here.”

A third, ear-splitting crash. It sounded like it was getting closer now, like it knew where Tom was. He felt exposed, as though it could see him perfectly in that pitch-black darkness, and that hiding here was useless. He let out a wail of pure terror, the waves of anxiety having simply grown too much for him to bear. Not that it mattered anymore. It was coming for him now. He could hear it—speaking, mumbling, murmuring in a language he didn't understand. In fact, he wasn't even sure if it was speaking at all. Just making sounds that sounded like speaking.

There was a fourth and final crash, louder than Tom had ever heard before. Like it was right in front of him. He cried out, lifting his arms to cover his head before his ears were met with the sound of scraping metal.

A surge of evening light poured into the room as the door was thrown wide open, slamming into the wall with a thundering bang. A tall silhouette stood in the doorway, its head swivelling from left to right as it seemed to search for something in a panic.

“Tom?! Tom!”

The words almost didn't register with Tom, and the black cat remained cowering in the corner. The darkness before him was banished, replaced with the crumbling walls and broken furniture of that otherwise big, empty room. It was like he'd been pulled back to reality, but his mind was still back there, lost in perpetual blackness.

The figure had arrived in front of him now, kneeling down to take hold of Tom's shoulders. “Hey, Tom! Can you hear me? Are you alright?”

He recognised the voice now, especially when it was accompanied by the face of its owner—features and patterns he knew all too well, but slightly different somehow, and a little older.

Elias. Dawid's brother.

The elder sibling cracked a coy grin as he patted Tom's shoulders, desperately trying to bring the cat's attention back to the present moment. "Hey, Tom! It's alright! We've got you. It's okay." He leaned in a little closer, the teenage hyena's face taking up all of Tom's vision now. The recognition helped Tom focus—like taking hold of a rope and letting whoever held the other side pull you out of dark water. He blinked slowly, tears streaming down his face.

"You gave us a fright there, but we found you. You're going to be alright. Do you understand?" He'd never heard Elias like this. Normally, he was aloof and carefree. But now? Every word he said made all the others seem quieter. More distant. Tom nodded slowly, and he was met with a gentle smile from the hyena as he gave him another pat on the shoulder. "Good."

He reached up, wiping away the tears that blurred his vision, letting him see Elias more clearly and the person standing behind him. He peered past him to get a better look, recognising the armour almost instantly. Dawid stood behind his brother, half-cast in shadow as he looked down at Tom, his lower lip trembling. Tom pushed himself to his feet, and Elias shifted out of the way. Elias smiled as he watched Tom run straight past him towards Dawid, pulling him into a tight hug without so much as a word. There they stood, bathed in the light of the doorway.

Tom sat in the back of his mother's car, back on the main road. He stared out of the window, his eyes now mostly dried. The sun was just about to set, casting a final orange glow across the evening sky that matched the autumn leaves.

Dawid had run into Elias not far from here, who had come looking for them after he returned home. He'd just happened to run into Michał and his gang, who told him about Dawid and the monsters in Kłomino, and he came looking. Of course, Elias called his mother, who, in turn, called Tom's.

Tom had never felt happier to see his mother than when he saw her car waiting for them by the side of the road. He ran to her, where she met him with a warm, gentle hug. She brushed a few stray leaves off him, fixed the fur around his eyes as she wiped away the last of his tears, and told him to wait for her in the car. Now, the adults were standing by the side of the road, having a 'grown-up talk' with Elias in tow, who didn't seem to want to be there, judging by his crossed arms and vague shrugs.

Tom couldn't hear them; their voices were muffled by the window glass, but he could tell by their body language that there was an argument. Both his own mother and Dawid's were snarling and pointing at Mr. Wrzosek, shaking their heads. Mrs. Wrzosek seemed to point at her own head

quite aggressively, like someone does when saying something along the lines of ‘Are you crazy?’ Mr. Wrzosek simply leaned against the car hood with his arms folded, seeming to snap back at his wife. Tom made out the word ‘babysitter’ before Mrs. Wrzosek suddenly raised her voice loud enough for Tom to hear:

“OUR SON AND HIS FRIEND COULD HAVE BEEN HURT OUT HERE, AND ALL YOU CAN THINK ABOUT IS YOUR GODDAMN BOOK!”

Tom winced slightly, looking away from the four of them and pretending not to listen. His eyes moved to the Wrzoseks’ car, where he found Dawid staring back at him, as he had been for a while. The hyena had changed out of his costume now, no doubt due to how dirty and scuffed it had become. The two locked eyes for a moment before Dawid brought a hand up to the window, waving at him. Tom smiled weakly back, returning the wave.

Dawid had come back for him, just like a real knight would. No matter what happened after today, Tom would remember that. He was glad to have someone like Dawid for a friend.

Someone who wouldn’t leave him behind.

THE END



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