

The Wolfe Experiment

January 2014

Porton Down, Wiltshire, UK.

The doctor entered the interview room. He looked tired today, his face grey and haggard as he sat opposite Ethan and unpacked his notes on the table. He glanced at the wall to his left and Ethan's eyes followed. The mirrored glass was dirty and smudged. Ethan smiled but the doctor frowned ~~and,~~ adjust~~ing~~ his glasses, perhaps embarrassed at the drab state of the facility under his management. Even his whites were grubby, showing dark stains around the collar and cuffs. A red biro poked out of his chest pocket alongside an ageing identification badge. There was a number and a barcode ~~but n=~~No name.

Ethan noticed all of these things with familiarity and without comment. He sat in silence and waited for the questioning to **begin**.

~~"Is it on?" said T~~he doctor, rais~~ed~~ing his eyebrows and cast~~ing~~ his eyes around the room. "Is it on?"

"It's on," said a muffled voice from behind the mirror.

"Good. ~~Shall we~~Let's get started ~~shall we~~, Ethan?"

"If you like," said Ethan.

"OK," said the doctor, hunching over the desk. He scribbled something on the notepad. "Can we pick up where we left off last week?"

"If you like."

Comment [E1]: Necessary sentence?
You already say 'without comment' in the previous sentence.

The doctor adjusted his glasses again and put the notepad down. Ethan glanced at it and saw that it had a photo clipped to the cover. It was a picture of him, taken many years ago before his capture, his brown hair and olive skin overexposed in the poor quality print. His sister Tilly stood next to him, still a child — they both were — but she appeared carefree, blonde hair blowing across her face, masking her huge blue eyes. She held his hand and they looked like normal siblings, dressed in normal clothes, reluctantly posing for a family photo.

Comment [E2]: Photo or picture?

Except they had no family, and they were far from normal.

“This isn’t about what I like, Ethan,” said the doctor. “This is about establishing the record. Over six hundred people died. Six hundred and eight, to be precise. Many of them women. Many of them children. Those who survived... well, you know what happened to them.”

“I read the reports. You put the newspapers in my cell.” Ethan gripped the arms of his chair. The straps stopped him moving his hands any further.

“But you killed them, Ethan,” said the doctor. “You and your sister.” said the doctor. “You don’t deny it.”

“I don’t deny it. Doesn’t mean it was our fault.”

The doctor paused, picked up his notepad again and scratched his nose.

“You have a lot of deaths on your hands, Ethan. If you don’t take some responsibility it’s hard for me to trust you.”

“I don’t care if you trust me. I don’t trust you.”

“But you should. We’re all you have. Eighteen years old. No parents, no friends, no life. Locked in this facility twenty-four hours a day in a cell. All you are at the moment is an unfortunate freak.”

“You seem interested in me.”

Comment [E3]: Ethan doesn't react to being called a 'freak'?

“I am interested in you, Ethan. In your ability. You’re my responsibility. B—but make no mistake, my interest is scientific and my role is containment. That’s all. I’m not your friend.”

“I’m not asking you to be my friend.”

Ethan fell silent. He felt hot and his head throbbed ——it did all the time these days ——a side effect of his medication. His heart rate increased and his mouth became dry. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and blew it out. He opened his eyes.

“Let me see Tilly. Then I might talk to you.”

The doctor narrowed his eyes and sighed. He =presseding a buzzer on his side of the desk.

“I can see we’re going to get nowhere today.” He c-he said, e-crosseding his arms as two orderlies came through the door. “Please relax Ethan and see him back to his room.”

Ethan didn’t bother struggling as one of the orderlies produced a syringe and plunged it into his exposed upper arm. The Valium cocktail took effect almost immediately and his heart -rate dropped. He relaxed, and the adrenaline faded. Now eEven if he had wanted to use his ability, this ability was gone for another twenty-four hours.

The orderlies wouldn’t look at Ethan so he stared at the ceiling lights as they pushed him along the corridor. Sixty-five lights. That’s how many there were between the

interview room and his cell. Four of the bulbs were out this week, ~~t~~. The fluorescent tubes hanging lifeless from the dirty ceiling.

They paused under a lit bulb and Ethan tried focusing. He held his breath and attempted to grip the bulb. It was small, but he was weak. His head was swimming, foggy and dazed by the drug pumping ~~around~~ ~~through~~ his bloodstream. His breath came out in a cough and he gritted his teeth, pushing with everything he had.

The orderly to his right kicked one of the wheels, cursing that it was stuck. Ethan glanced away from the light and at the same time saw it flicker. His eyes darted back again but the bulb held fast. The orderlies moved him on and the bulb stayed lit.

Ethan remained strapped to the **gurney** while they checked his cell. It was the same routine every day: toilet, basin, cot, sheets and folds in the pillow. Anywhere he could hide a pen, a paper clip, anything. When the ~~orderlies had~~ ~~ed~~ finished one of them threw some new sheets on ~~his~~ ~~Ethan's~~ cot and left him to it.

Comment [E4]: First time you mention he's strapped to a gurney. Please mention earlier.

The cell door closed and locked. Ethan staggered to his **cot** ~~—~~ he couldn't walk quickly pumped full of **diazepam** ~~—~~ and lay on his back.

Comment [E5]: You don't mention the orderlies releasing him from the gurney.

Comment [E6]: Continuity. Earlier you say 'Valium'. Diazepam is marketed as Valium, but your reader may not know this.

In the months since their capture Ethan and Tilly hadn't been allowed to see each other. Despite his protests, threats and attempts at force, the doctors had managed to keep them separate. Ethan worried for Tilly more than himself. He could handle the loneliness, the waiting and the incessant questioning by the doctors. But that's all it was. The doctors weren't hurting him and they couldn't keep them here indefinitely. They were military ~~—~~ **MoD** ~~—~~ so they were accountable to somebody. As long as Tilly held out they'd be OK.

Comment [E7]: Spell out as 'Ministry of Defence' for your foreign readers?

That's what he kept telling himself. As long as Tilly can hold out.

In the moments before sleep, ~~Ethan~~~~he~~ glanced around his cell, looking for cracks, chips, or anything that gave away some activity. But there was nothing and he sighed. He wasn't the dreamer, Tilly was. She'd always been most active when sleeping. Something to do with reduced amino acid levels in her brain. That's what **his** parents had said. It prevented her central nervous system going into proper sleep. It caused anxiety, epileptic episodes and, for Tilly at least, catastrophic consequences.

Comment [E8]: 'their'? They are brother and sister, so have the same parents.

~~Ethan~~~~He~~ drifted off. The dream was always the same. Different ages, different situations, but the same. They all pretended to care and they all tried to deal with him and Tilly. Just an ordinary family. The dream was lucid ~~--~~perhaps the drugs were helping ~~--~~ and Ethan knew he'd wake up again soon.

He usually ~~did-woke~~ at the point when his parents died.

Comment [E9]: Changed this so not to have 'wake up' and 'woke up' in consecutive sentences.

April 2005, Nine Years Earlier

Misadventure

Ethan climbed into the booster seat and belted up.

“This is so exciting,” said Tilly, jumping into the car next to him. ~~Hi,~~ her blonde hair ~~was~~ tied back in plaits ~~and=They~~ bounced around her face as she swung herself in.

“Mummy, can I have two ice-creams today?”

“Two?” said Grace, slamming the boot and smiling through the open window.

“Why two?”

“Because Daisy wants one.” ~~TillyShe~~ held up her white bunny and wiggled its nose.

“She’s going to miss our old house.”

“I get two as well then,” said Ethan. “If she’s having two I’m having two.”

“One ice cream,” said Grace, laughing as she climbed into the driver’s seat. She tugged her dark hair back into a pony=tail and checked her makeup in the mirror. “One each; ~~if~~ if you’re good all the way there.”

“Fat chance,” said Ethan, prodding his sister and leaning back out of reach.

“Mum!,” shouted Tilly, “Ethan just ~~—~~”

“Enough,” said Charles ~~as he climbed in~~, his deep voice booming through the car. He eased his tall frame into the front passenger seat and turned to face them. “Ethan. Matilda. We haven’t even got out of the driveway yet. Honestly.”

“Sorry Dad,” said Ethan.

“Did you pay the movers?” ~~asked~~^{said} Grace, running through the checklist she had on her lap.

“Yes, cash.”

“Doors locked?”

“Yes.”

“Keys?”

“With the agent.” He waved at the estate agent who was climbing into an Audi across the street.

“Keys to the new place?”

“Right here.” He waved them at her. “The office sorted all this out, I told you.”

“I know, but ~~—~~”

“But what?”

“Nothing. I’m not used to people organising our stuff for us, that’s all.”

“Well, we do work for the military now. They’re bound to be a little obsessive about this sort of thing. We’re government assets.”

“I’m not a government asset,” said Grace, raising her eyebrows. “I’m a scientist and I intend to stay that way. I’m not wearing military dress and I’m sure as hell not going to salute anybody.”

“Mum you shouldn’t say ‘hell’,” said Tilly, “and what’s an ass-ett?”

“Nothing Tilly,” said Charles, “it means we work for somebody else now and they have a different way of...~~n~~aming things.”

He smiled thinly at his wife. “It won’t be too bad. We’ll have so much more time with the kids. That’s why we’re doing this ~~Grace~~. It’s all about the kids, remember?”

“I know,” said Grace, glaring back at him. “I just wish we didn’t need to move so far away.”

#

Ethan stayed quiet as they began the two-hour journey to their new home in Hampshire. He knew why they had to move. Too many awkward episodes and too many awkward questions. They didn’t have a choice.

You’re special. That’s what his parents told them, over and over. You both have a special gift and it makes you important. Nobody else has this ability so we must keep it a secret; a special family secret which we promise not to tell, no matter what happens, no matter where you are or who you’re with. When something bad happens, stay still, stay quiet and wait for us. We’ll come and take care of it.

Ethan and Tilly repeated the promise every morning after breakfast. They never told their secret and the bad things kept piling up. Attempts to make friends failed fast, and life got harder. Ethan struggled to comprehend, and at five years old Tilly wasn’t old enough to understand any of it. **It was getting serious.**

Comment [E10]: Delete sentence? Unnecessary? They’re moving. It’s clear that it’s serious.

The car swerved as they changed lanes. Ethan looked at his mum.

“Sorry,” said Grace, “I wasn’t concentrating.” She looked at the steering wheel in surprise then back out onto the road.

“Ethan?” whispered Tilly.

“Yes?” said Ethan.

“I feel a bit shy about moving.”

“Shy?” ~~said Ethan.~~ “Do you mean nervous? You feel nervous about moving.”

Formatted: Highlight

“Yes,” said Tilly, nodding. “I feel nervous. My tummy feels funny.”

“Like butterflies?”

“Butterflies? No silly. More like bees. Bees buzzing around. I feel a bit happy and sad.”

“I know what you’re feeling, Tilly. I feel it a bit too.”

“You do?” Tilly perked up a bit. “Oh.”

She clasped Daisy to her chest and hugged her tight.

“Why don’t you two read or something?” said Charles over his shoulder. “Tilly, you’ve got your books and games. Ethan, you know your job. It’s a long way. Remember to stay alert.”

“Sure Dad,” said Ethan. He smiled at Tilly and stuck his tongue out. Tilly stuck hers out back and snuggled into her car seat. She opened a book about rabbits and bit her lip as she studied the words. Ethan relaxed, but kept his eye on Tilly as they headed out onto the main road. It was his job to stop Tilly falling asleep on car journeys.

#

Half an hour passed and Ethan watched the cars roll by, thinking about the latest incident at school. The final straw was what the head teacher yelled at his parents as they left the school gates. It didn't matter that lanky Aaron was the school bully. It didn't matter he'd picked on Tilly for weeks, taunting and teasing until she broke. If he'd just left her alone, just gone and found somebody else to bully. But Aaron wouldn't leave her alone. He knew there was something weird about the Wolfe children. He didn't know what, but it was enough to mark them out as different, which is usually enough for a bully to start work.

~~He~~ Ethan remembered seeing Aaron's right forearm broken, the bone bending at an impossible angle, breaking the skin at his elbow, the white shard of bone turning red as the blood dripped over it and onto the carpet outside the classroom. He remembered the look of panic in Aaron's eyes as he lay on the floor and the same look of panic in Tilly's eyes as she stood over Aaron, ~~apologising~~, sobbing that she was sorry.

Ethan ~~He~~ remembered Tilly's fifth birthday party the week afterwards. Eight empty chairs and a table of party food. Not a single child turned up, their parents all making excuses one-by-one until only Tilly and Ethan remained. "Why doesn't anybody like me?" is a question no five-year-old should ever have to ask. It was time to move.

Ethan was startled out of his daydream as the car swerved and his head hit the side window.

"What the ~~...?~~?" said Charles.

"I didn't do anything," said Grace. "I told you we should have had this serviced last month."

“There’s nothing wrong with the car,” said Charles. “Are you sure you didn’t drop off?”

“I wasn’t asleep,” said Grace, glancing at her hands on the wheel. The wheel wrenched to the left. The car followed and screeched across two lanes.

The car swerved again and sped up. Ethan could feel the acceleration.

“Grace!”

“It’s not me, it’s the car.”

“Mum, ~~yelled Ethan,~~ “what are you doing?!” ~~yelled Ethan.~~

“It’s not me,” said Grace. She looked with surprise at the rear-view mirror. “Tilly, are you awake?”

“Er...~~...~~” ~~said Ethan,~~ look~~ed ing~~ over at Tilly. Damn it, he thought. She was fast asleep, book loose in her hands, eyes twitching as she dreamed. She was mouthing some words, moving her head left and right.

Comment [E11]: Should inner monologue be in italics?

“Wake up Tilly,” he screamed, feeling a wave of guilt for letting her fall asleep, mixed with panic as the car lurched to the right, back across the lanes. They struck the central reservation with a screech of metal and bounced off, still hurtling along. There was a thump and rattle as part of the front bumper detached and fell by the roadside. Grace jammed her foot on the brake and the car slowed, but only for a second. There was another crunch of metal under the car and they lurched forward.

“The brakes,” screamed Grace ~~screamed~~.

They were accelerating again. The car pitched to the left. They were headed across the road. There was no barrier on the inside lane, only a narrow hard shoulder followed

by a thick wall of trees. The branches whipped by as the car shifted again towards the road.

“Tilly,” shouted Ethan, “wake up!”

“Wake up Tilly,” yelled Charles and Grace together. “Wake up!”

Tilly stirred as the car sped up. She was fitful now, in one of her regular nightmares.

Ethan **leaned** over and grabbed her arm. Shaking her sometimes worked, but not today.

She was deep under and the background noise of the car only served to keep her asleep.

She angled her head to the left, then to the right. The car followed as if on rails, jerking

Ethan towards then away from Tilly. His hand hit the inside of the door and he yelled out

~~in~~with pain.

“I can’t wake her up,” he said. “Mum, what do I do?”

Ethan saw Tilly tighten her grip on the toy **rabbit**, her knuckles whitening to the point they blended with the soft fur. She grimaced, her mouth opened and she mumbled a few more words. The car bounced and Ethan saw his mum wrestling with the steering wheel. His dad was fumbling with his mobile phone, trying to turn it on.

A few seconds later the steering failed, **and** the wheel ~~wentgoing~~ limp in Grace’s hands. Ethan felt the lurch as they accelerated, swerving towards the trees. They were travelling at sixty miles per hour when the wheels left the road. The car was lifeless and unresponsive; the brake pedal was on the floor as they crossed the hard shoulder and ploughed through the long grass at the side of the road.

Ethan braced himself, ~~his~~ hands on the seat in front. He saw a row of trees approaching at a dizzying speed. He looked at his mum who was staring in the rear-view mirror at Tilly.

Comment [E12]: Continuity and accuracy. Is it OK not to have an exclamation mark in the first piece of dialogue if it is shouted or screamed?

Comment [E13]: Or ‘leant’?

Comment [E14]: Continuity. ‘bunny’?

“I’m sorry, Matilda,” said Grace. “I’m sorry.”

#

Ethan regained consciousness before Tilly. He was holding her hand when she woke up, puzzled but otherwise OK. The harnesses buckling them to their child seats held fast, and other than being covered in broken glass and smelling of petrol, they were unhurt.

If he’d been asked to describe the crash later, the word Ethan would have used was *silence*. When cars crash they make an awful racket, but after the crash, silence was all that confronted Ethan and Tilly. Silence as they sat there, breathing the fumes, watching the birds flutter back down after such a rude interruption. Silence from the front seats. Silence until the sirens broke it and the men in uniforms peered through the windows, asking them their names, telling them to speak if they could.

Comment [E15]: Not sure about this word. Suggest revision.

Ethan knew his parents were dead. Their bodies had been hurled into the unforgiving wall of dashboard and windscreen, which had caved under the force of hitting a thick tree at a shade under sixty miles per hour. He knew from the silence, and from the faces of the rescue team who pulled him and Tilly out and put them in the back of an ambulance. He knew because the ambulance drove away silently without his parents.

Comment [E16]: Why ‘a shade under’? Seems unnecessary. Suggest deletion.

As they threaded their way through the traffic towards hospital, Ethan put his arm around Tilly, who was looking at him, her small face frowning.

“Are we going to be OK?” she asked. She swallowed hard and a single tear ran down her cheek. Ethan wiped it away and put his other arm around her too, squeezing her closer.

Ethan didn't know if they'd be OK. All he could offer her was silence.

In The System

Ethan sat on his bed, gazing out of the window. A taxi approached, slowing as it entered the gate. It pulled up outside the front door and Sarah, their social worker, strolled out to meet it.

Ethan liked Sarah. She was one of the good ones. A friend even. He liked her scruffy clothes – always ripped jeans and tight t-shirts. Today she had a ‘London Marathon 2005’ top faded to a grey blur. He liked her dark hair too, tied back into a ponytail, a few messy wisps escaping onto her face. It reminded him of his mum’s hair; she’d worn hers the same way.

~~Ethan~~ He felt he was treated like a normal person when Sarah was around. An orphan still, but a normal one. Probably because she didn’t know the truth.

Sarah had been assigned to them three weeks after the crash. The first thing she’d done was to sit on the ground in front of Tilly and start talking to her toy bunny. Despite everything, Tilly thought this was particularly wonderful and proceeded to talk through the bunny at Sarah. Ethan added Sarah to his list of people-to-be-trusted. It was a short list.

Comment [E17]: Call her ‘Daisy’?
You established the bunny’s name earlier

He needed to talk to Sarah today. Their medication – the pills he and Tilly took for their bipolar condition – had stopped since the crash and the ensuing chaos. That was six weeks ago, and although the doctors at the hospital hadn’t mentioned anything, Tilly would surely get worse without them. ~~He~~ Ethan wasn’t sure about himself, although he’d

had the dream again last night. A bright light, first in one eye, then the other. A smell of disinfectant, then the white coats leaning over him. The white coats scared him and so did the face **masks**, but then he saw it was his parents. His mum leant over and promised it would be OK. He took the pill and he let himself be examined. They gave him a present. ~~W,~~ what was it again? Oh, that's right – ~~Lego,~~ ~~that's right~~. Then he looked over to the next bed and saw Tilly. He smiled, relaxed, and woke up. The dream bothered him, but like most dreams, it was gone in a moment, and he had other things to worry about.

Comment [E18]: 'they wore'?

Since arriving at their foster home there had already been an incident. That wasn't why they were leaving, Sarah had assured him, but nevertheless, things were strained, the funny looks were **evident**. The special treatment had started.

Comment [E19]: Tricky flow. Recommend rewriting sentence for better flow.

“Are you going to tell her?” Tilly appeared at the doorway. Her eyes were downcast, as they had been for weeks now, her brow furrowed in a mixture of puzzlement and anxiety. Ethan was battling his own emotions after the crash, but found himself locking them away in order to make room for Tilly. She was younger. He was the older brother. He was responsible.

“Do you want me to?” Ethan wondered if telling Sarah would help. He trusted her, but it would break the promise they'd made to their parents. Their secret must never be shared.

Tilly's eyes widened. “You can't,” she said firmly.

“Then I won't,” said Ethan, ~~and saw~~ ~~seeing~~ ~~the~~ flicker of relief on her face.

“It was an accident,” said Tilly.

“I know.”

“And they can get another dog, can't they?”

Ethan pictured the black Labrador – the family pet of their foster home – lying on the patio near the swing, its back broken and its huge eyes pleading up at him for mercy. Tilly had been scared, that’s all. The Lab had bounded up to her and given her a fright. She’d reacted, that’s all.

“The dog isn’t in pain anymore,” said Ethan. “The vet fixed him.”

“Fixed him?”

“Put him out of his pain,” said Ethan, turning away. He felt sick. So many incidents made him feel sick. He wondered again about the medication, and stared out of the window.

Comment [E20]: Revise? You say ‘put him out of his misery’ or ‘stop the pain’.

“Ethan, Tilly,” ~~shouted~~ Sarah ~~shouted~~ up the stairs. The two of them glanced at each other ~~with the~~ silent acceptance they wouldn’t tell Sarah the truth.

It was a short hop across town in the taxi. Ethan wondered why Sarah didn’t have a car until she explained it was in the garage, or she would have driven them herself.

“It’s a very nice family,” she said. “They have an older son, Alec, who’s thirteen.”

“Why can’t we stay where we are?” ~~asked~~ Tilly, glancing at Ethan. Ethan knew what she was thinking, that they were sending her away because of the dog.

“That was just a short stay, Tilly,” said Sarah. Her eyes flicked to Ethan but she didn’t mention the incident. “The Taylors provide what we call emergency care, for when terrible things happen. They look after children like you and Ethan until we can find a family who can care for you longer term.”

“So we’ll be at the next house forever?”

“Not forever,” said Sarah, “but perhaps a little longer. Don’t worry about that now.”

Tilly looked worried. Ethan saw it in her clenched jaw, which made her cheek bones pop out. She did that when she was holding back the tears. He probably did it too.

“Can we see a doctor soon?” ~~asked~~~~said~~ Ethan, keen to change the subject.

Sarah turned in her seat, ~~concerned~~.

“Is something the matter? I didn’t know you ~~were feeling~~~~felt~~ ill, you ~~r~~ poor thing.

What is it?”

“I’m not ill,” said Ethan, “but our medication, ~~y~~ ~~Y~~ou know, ~~o~~ ~~O~~ur parents always gave it to us…” Ethan gulped back the hollow feeling in his throat. “We need it every day, I think.”

“Oh,” said Sarah, looking puzzled. She pulled out a paper file from her bag and leafed through several pages. She shook her head.

“OK, there must be some information missing. I thought we had it all.”

“Information?” ~~said~~~~asked~~ Ethan.

“It’s nothing” said Sarah. “Just stuff from your GP – your family doctor. It should have said what medications you’re both on. It must be missing, that’s all.”

She pulled out her phone and left a message with the GP surgery. Ethan heard her spell out their names and then her name and number. She dropped her phone back in her bag with a huff.

“Hopefully I can get it sorted today,” she said. “Do you feel OK? What is the medicine for?”

Ethan didn’t see any harm in telling her. “Bipolar,” he said. “We both have it. Have had from birth. We take something. I can’t remember what it’s called. In the morning.”

“Oh.” Sarah looked a little more alarmed. “But if that’s the case you’ve been without it for weeks now. What happens if you don’t take it?”

“I don’t know,” said Ethan. “Tilly’s always taken it. I have for a few years. I dunno.”

Secretly Ethan thought he knew. He needed them both to be back on the medication, or it could be worse than a dog next time.

#

The Stevens’ welcomed them with smiles of sympathy. Even the son, Alec, was grudgingly nice to them, offering Ethan access to some of his books and magazines. Ethan suspected he’d been told to do so, but it was still kind.

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On the first day Sarah spent a lot of time talking to Frederick and Beth, who would be their foster carers for the foreseeable future. Ethan and Tilly stayed out of earshot, up in their new bedrooms, which quickly became one shared bedroom after Tilly’s point blank refusal to be separated from Ethan.

Alec shrugged but didn’t seem to care one way or the other, and helped them move all the stuff around. Beth and Sarah both popped up later and if Beth was annoyed about the rooms she didn’t show it. She looked on with kindness and more sympathy, and Ethan considered adding her to his trusted list.

Comment [E21]: Continuity. Earlier you write 'list of people-to-be-trusted'.

“I haven’t been able to get your medication details,” said Sarah, “but I’m taking you to the local doctor tomorrow. She said she’ll squeeze us in on a Saturday as we’re a special case. She should be able to find your records and prescribe what you need.”

“Do I need to come?” Beth looked concerned. No doubt she was a little worried at this revelation of possible mental illness in her two new guests. Ethan wondered what she’d been told about their first placement.

“Not this time,” said Sarah. “We missed it, so we’ll fix it. It shouldn’t take long.” She turned to Ethan. “The appointment is at four fifteen, so I’ll pick you up around four. OK?”

Tilly ran over and hugged Sarah. Ethan sauntered over a little ~~more~~ slowly and put his arms on top of Tilly’s. Sarah was the closest thing to stability they had at the moment. Ethan couldn’t help but feel upset she was leaving, even if only until tomorrow.

#

The next morning Ethan woke up in a sweat. There was something heavy on his chest, which, on examination, turned out to be Tilly. At some point in the night she’d left her own bed and crawled into his. Ethan nudged her over and sat up, reaching for a glass of water.

← --- Formatted: Indent: First line: 0"

The dream again. Was it every night now? Sarah told him bad dreams are just your mind trying to make sense of the day. If you’re upset in the day, the dreams will be

bigger, stranger and scarier, but that's all they are: dreams. Paper tigers. They can't hurt you.

~~He~~ Ethan thought he knew why he'd dreamt of the hospital again. They were going to see the doctor, and his mind was trying to warn him. ~~But w~~Warn him about what? The bright lights and his parents in white coats? The masks and the monitors? Background beeps and hisses. Then the tests.

He sat up straighter and struggled to remember. In the hospital bed he'd been given tests on a laptop computer. ~~They'd~~ His parents had described something ~~his parents~~ and asked him what he thought. He couldn't remember what was on the laptop though. Just a blur. Words, perhaps, or numbers, whirring like clockwork, cycling through sequences, stopping when he wanted them to...

"Is it morning?" Tilly dashed his dreamy thoughts and they disappeared to wherever they go when consciousness returns.

"It's six ~~o'clock~~ ~~AM~~," Ethan tapped the alarm clock, also brand new, and nudged Tilly a little more. "Sleepwalking?" He smiled ~~and~~ ~~turned~~ ~~ing~~ the nightlight on so she could see his face.

Comment [E22]: I don't think you would use 'AM/PM' on a small child. 'O'clock' would be more common and easier for them to understand.

Comment [E23]: Reference. What else is brand new? Unnecessary. Suggest deletion.

Tilly looked embarrassed. "No. I just ~~—~~"

"I'm joking," said Ethan. "I don't mind. I'm scared too."

"You are?" Tilly seemed comforted. "I can look after you too, then. If you like."

"That would be nice," said Ethan, and he hugged her close again, quickly so she didn't see the tears welling in his eyes.

"Are you worried about the doctor?" ~~asked~~ ~~said~~ Tilly in a small voice.

Ethan considered this. "No. ~~—~~ ~~he said.~~ "It's a family doctor. They'll be friendly."

“They won’t shine lights in our eyes?”

Ethan shivered, realising Tilly might also have the same dreams.

Comment [E24]: Revise slightly for flow. Also, expand on this concept?

“I don’t think so.”

“OK,” said Tilly, seemingly satisfied. “I need the loo.”

Beth popped her head in while Tilly was in the bathroom.

“Early risers? That’s good. Alec is always up and about early. I think he wants to take you out today.”

Ethan smiled. Beth was trying very hard. He should too.

“Tilly doesn’t sleep so well,” he said, shrugging.

Beth nodded, and opened the door. She came in and sat on Tilly’s unmade bed.

“You’ve been through something terrible, Ethan. Something very sad. It will take a long time to feel normal again. Not sleeping is to be expected, so soon after...you know.”

Ethan felt like saying they ~~would~~ never been normal. This was just more of not being normal, but with a load of other things thrown in, like not having parents or a home of their own.

“The doctor might help,” said Ethan. “Once we’re back on our medication, we might sleep better.” He hoped very much that was the case, but didn’t elaborate because Tilly came back in.

Beth stood and asked what they’d like for breakfast, reeling off a menu fit for a restaurant. Ethan doubted bacon and eggs would always be on offer, but he smiled at Beth’s efforts.

Tilly smiled and talked when she was spoken to, but was otherwise the same. Ethan kept his eyes on her constantly, and despite enjoying his breakfast, he felt a sour taste in his ~~throat~~mouth, like a feeling of dread that couldn't be swallowed. Sarah said they'd be seeing more people soon ~~— g. Grown-ups~~ used to dealing with children when terrible things happened. They'd help him accept what happened and help them become happy again.

Comment [E25]: Subject switch – 'him' then 'them'.

Ethan ~~only~~ knew of only one thing that would make them happy: for their gift, their curse, to disappear and ~~For the curse to be lifted and~~ for them both to be normal children.

#

"I'm going out," said Alec, holding a newish ~~—~~looking skateboard under one arm, and an old tatty one under the other. "Want to come?" He held out the old board to ~~wards~~ Ethan.

It was a Saturday morning and Alec had the look of weekend freedom in his eyes. Ethan and Tilly hadn't started school again yet. Sarah said everyone agreed it was more important to settle in and, particularly for Tilly, feel secure before introducing any new factors.

Ethan hadn't skated for years, but he felt the excitement surge through his stomach. This is what normal children did, right?

"Yes," he said. "Sure."

Tilly glanced over the top of the row of dolls she'd lined up on the bed.

"Are you going to play?" she ~~asked~~said. "Can I come?"

"Not really. ~~---~~" said Alec.

"Sure you can," said Ethan, grabbing the board. "She can watch us. ~~---~~"

Alec shrugged. "OK, if you want. It's hot out. Mum said you need to wear suntan lotion."

The three of them traipsed out the front door, Alec leading them away from the house towards the end of the road before jumping on his board. He flew off the curb and turned expectantly towards Ethan.

Ethan tentatively placed the board on the pavement and tested his balance. It had been a long time – he'd had a board many years ago, but Tilly broke it. Accidentally, of course, but his parents decided it might be best to avoid skating around Tilly. He considered this as he pushed away and drifted across to the opposite side of the road. Tilly sat cross-legged on the grass verge and waved. She appeared OK. He'd keep an eye on her.

The sun burned and the boys grew more confident. Ethan's concentration improved his mood, and he found himself escaping as he weaved in and out of parked cars, apologising to the infrequent pedestrians and motorists. After an hour or so the heat finally got to them and they both collapsed in a heap next to Tilly. She smiled and reached out to hold Ethan's hand. Ethan held it tight. It was the first time she'd smiled in weeks.

"You're alright," said Alec, panting, the sweat pouring off his brow.

“Thanks,” said Ethan, feeling a burst of pride in his chest. When was the last time another child had complimented him? “You too,” he said.

Comment [E26]: I would phrase this as a statement instead of a question – ‘He couldn’t remember the last time another child had complimented him.’

“If you practice a bit more you can jump off the curbs, like me.”

Ethan shrugged, but inside he smiled at the thought of playing regularly with Alec. Perhaps this could be a turning point. If Tilly could settle then they stood a chance.

“I’m sorry your parents are dead,” said Alec. He looked concerned. He’d obviously been told their situation and practised his apology.

“I’m not supposed to mention it,” he continued, “but if we’re friends I figure it’s OK.”

Ethan shrugged again and didn’t know what to say. The thought of his mum and dad caused tightness in his chest. His throat felt dry and Tilly’s grip tightened. He could see her eyes welling up.

Alec’s eyes flicked between them both. “Oh, heck, I didn’t mean to…” He stood up and shuffled his feet.

“Can we go inside now?” ~~asked said~~ Tilly, sniffing. Ethan gave her a hug.

“It’s OK,” he said, aiming the comment at both Tilly and Alec. “We’re ~~re going~~~~we got~~ ~~to go~~ to the doctors soon. Let’s just stay out here ~~for~~ a bit longer.?” Ethan thought the sun would be nicer than sitting in a dark room. His mum always said the sun was good for the mood.

“We can skate some more,” he said.

Alec relaxed slightly. “Why are you going to the doctors? You don’t look sick.”

“We’re not,” said Ethan. “We just have this condition, that’s all.”

“We need medicine,” said Tilly.

“Oh,” said Alec, sitting back down. “Mum said that’s just grief.”

Ethan frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Mum and your social worker were talking. They said it’s probably just, you know, what happened. You’re not really ill. Or a condition, or whatever.”

Ethan was surprised. “Sarah said that?”

“My mum did,” said Alec. “She’s fostered lots of kids. She knows these things.”

Ethan sniffed and straightened. “Well she’s wrong. We do need medication.”

Alec shook his head. “My mum’s not normally wrong.”

“She is this time.”

Alec’s face reddened and he stood. “Suit yourself,” he said, and threw his board on the pavement, skating off into the road.

Ethan considered shouting after him but managed to stop himself. Alec wouldn’t understand, and friend or not, he could never know what was wrong with them. He squeezed Tilly’s hand and made to go after Alec, deciding to smooth things over.

Alec was at the end of the street, flipping his board on and off the curb. He turned towards Ethan and slowly headed towards him. Tilly stayed on the grass and Ethan glided in the middle of the road. He glanced over to one of their neighbour’s driveways, where a family was climbing into their car. Mum, ~~d~~ Dad and two young girls. They waved at him and he waved back, stopping as he lost balance, putting his foot down and, crouching to adjust his shoelace.

He heard Tilly’s shout at the same time as he heard the van. It must have driven up behind, failing to see him ducked near the parked cars. He turned to see a large red

delivery van bearing down on him. The driver was talking into his phone and staring at the dashboard. He hadn't seen Ethan.

Ethan had a split second to jump one way— onto the parked car, —or ~~an~~the other way —into the road, to avoid being hit.

He made neither, for in that instant Tilly reacted.

-It sounded like a small explosion. The van rocked violently as the side of it facing Tilly caved like tin foil under a fist. The van was pushed sideways out of Ethan's path and he felt the wind as it flashed by him, barely centimetres from his face. He spun to see the back of the van slide away, but his brief relief was shattered as he saw what had happened. With Tilly's push she had shoved the van half-way across the road and veered it off course. It was now heading towards the curb and the houses, still travelling at speed; the driver obviously hadn't reacted yet and hit the brakes.

Comment [E27]: 'inches'? I think a British audience would say 'inches' before 'centimetres' in this example.

Ethan looked with horror as the van mounted the curb with a bang and headed towards the neighbours who were pulling out of their driveway. The neighbours who had waved to him ~~only~~ seconds before. He glimpsed the shock of the man in the car, seeing the huge van speeding towards him.

Ethan had maybe two seconds to act, but that was enough. He'd done this before, many times. The adrenaline was already pumping through his bloodstream, his breathing elevated, and his heart thumping. The conditions were right and his body responded.

Everything stopped. The sound of the cars, the birds, even the wind, as his hearing muffled then popped. Ethan's eyes watered, narrowed and lost focus. The pain hit him right between the eyes as the pressure built. The familiar sensation in his head spread down onto his face, the feeling of static, the sense of energy. He could feel the van. He

could sense the mass, the weight, the resistance as he started to wrap his mind around it.

He'd normally struggle with something this size but this time he ~~found~~~~was finding~~ it easy. He grappled with the motion but he had it. He'd got it in time. The van was moving...=would move.

Comment [E28]: 'object'? Can he control people as well as objects?

He *pushed*.

His breathing slowed and he crouched again as the thump in his head hammered behind his eyes. He felt Tilly's hand on his shoulder.

"Ethan," she said.

Ethan looked up and ~~immediately~~ his eyes searched for the van. It had missed the family in the car, who were emerging, shocked expressions on their faces, the mother already reaching for her phone.

Thanks to Ethan, the van had veered again and hit a parked car ~~fa~~urther down the road. ~~The van~~ was stationary now, steam pouring from the bonnet. The driver's door opened and a man jumped down, staggered, then fell to the floor.

The neighbour ran out to him, urging him to lie down. The two girls stood in the drive and watched, transfixed ~~as~~, their mother ~~tried~~~~ying~~ to usher them away. The driver shook off the man and stood up, screaming for somebody to call an ambulance. He rushed around to the front of the van, out of Ethan's sight. Ethan wondered why he needed an ambulance so desperately and started ~~to~~walking towards him.

As he got closer he could hear the man shouting over and over. He was kneeling over something. Ethan had a terrible thought there may have been a passenger in the van, somehow thrown clear in the crash. He hadn't seen anybody else in the van as it bore down on him, but he might have missed them.

Only as he rounded the front of the van did Ethan's heart stop and his stomach lurch.

Comment [E29]: I don't think you need this. I would delete it. Ethan would have seen a passenger, and he didn't. Also a passenger would have gone through the windscreen and Ethan would be able to see this.

The parked car was smashed, its front bumper collapsed and hanging off. Pieces of light fitting were scattered on the tarmac, along with glass and fragments of plastic. But there was something lying there that didn't belong. It was broken, scratched and splintered in the middle.

Alec's new skateboard.

Ethan screamed and pushed his way forward. He grabbed the shoulder of the van driver and yanked him back.

Comment [E30]: Through what?

Alec was lying on the tarmac in front of the smashed car. He must have been caught in between the van and the parked car when it hit. He was lying on his back with his eyes closed. His face was untouched save for a smear of dirt. His clothes were fine. No tears or blood.

But when Ethan looked back ~~at~~ Alec's face, his own face drained and he felt the bile well up in his throat. A thin bead of blood was trickling out of Alec's nose, another from his right ear.

Ethan turned and vomited on the road. Tilly rushed up and held his hand. She was crying now, screaming his name, but he couldn't react. He sunk to his knees again and, when he'd finished being sick, he cried. He cried until he heard the sirens, until the world turned grey and until he felt arms around him, carrying him away.

#

The first face Ethan saw was Sarah's. She looked down at him, her eyes worried. He sat up quickly and she tried to push him back down again. He was on a hospital bed, in a ward. His eyes darted around until they found Tilly. She was asleep on a chair next to his bed.

"Why am I here?" he ~~asked~~~~said~~ "Is Alec OK?"

Sarah's eyes darted around the ward and she cleared her throat.

"I'm sorry, Ethan," ~~she said~~ "Alec's in a coma. Induced...do you know what that means? They're keeping him asleep for now, until his head's a little better."

Ethan felt the nausea again. A coma. Not dead. At least that was something.

"Will he be OK?" He silently pleaded for some assurance. Something to indicate he and Tilly were not going to be responsible for Alec's death.

Sarah shrugged. "I don't know, Ethan. I just don't know."

Tilly stirred. Her eyes flickered before she settled back again.

"I'm not hurt," said Ethan, indicating the bed. "~~So w~~Why am I here?"

"Just a precaution," said Sarah. "You were in a pretty bad state when the ambulances arrived. You'd been sick. They weren't sure what had happened."

"How long have I ~~---~~"

"Four hours, or so. Shock, they concluded after checking you over. I got here two hours ago."

Ethan nodded. He knew what this meant.

"Where will we go now?" he ~~asked~~~~said~~.

Sarah rubbed her eyes. She looked exhausted. It was late on a Saturday afternoon. Ethan was pretty sure she worked every day of the week. Just like a mother, although the thought brought a pang of guilt with it. Sarah wasn't his mother. She was just another grown-up, albeit a nice one.

"I don't know, yet. We'll find somewhere. Another family. There are plenty of kind people willing to help you. The Stevens are very sorry, but they won't be able to look after you at the moment."

"I understand," said Ethan.

"I'll be taking you later today. They've discharged you. We'll pick up your stuff next week."

Sarah shuffled off the bed and stood up. "Oh, about your medication," ~~she said.~~

Ethan raised his eyebrows.

"Look, I'm sorry. We missed the doctor appointment today, but I asked them to go through your NHS records. They can't find anything for either of you indicating bipolar disorder or any related conditions. There are no current prescriptions from your family GP, nothing."

Sarah looked on with a puzzled frown. "So I'm stumped."

Ethan didn't know what to say. He couldn't elaborate on why he thought they needed the drugs so badly. He slumped, glancing again at Tilly, wondering how she felt. Their first chance at a new family dashed in one day. Their curse had risen up and bitten the first people who took them in. He felt the anger well up in his chest and forced it back down.

Comment [E31]: How about 'rise' to break up the usage of 'well up'?

“Look,” said Sarah, glancing at her watch. “I’ll write to the mental health trust and see if they can shed any light on things. In the meantime,” she indicated them both, “you both look pretty healthy, all things considered. Perhaps just see how things go?”

Comment [E32]: ‘matter’? Typical usage is ‘light on the matter’.

Ethan nodded but couldn’t quite bring himself to reply. He lay back on the bed and turned away. Sarah excused herself with a promise to return in an hour.

Tilly slept soundly, fidgeting but otherwise peaceful. She’d be devastated when she woke and Ethan told her the news, but she’d get over it. This wasn’t the first incident, and it wouldn’t be the last. Ethan was convinced there’d be no such thing as a proper family life for him and Tilly. Not until he’d figured out how to stop it. Not until they’d figured out how to live without endangering the lives of everybody around them.

Risk Assessment

“Focus on the block.”

“I am focusing.”

“How do you feel?”

“What do you mean ~~“=how do I feel”~~? It’s a block.”

“Does your head hurt?”

“Not at the moment.”

“Do you have any other sensations?”

“Yes.”

“What?”

“I need to go to the toilet.”

David Stephens sighed and leaned back in his chair.

“Ethan, do you think you could try a little harder?”

“Maybe,” said Ethan, “but I’m not sure what you want me to do.”

David ran his hands through his hair and blew his cheeks out. “Do you know what?

You’re right. To tell you the truth I have no idea.”

“Then why bother?” ~~asked~~ Ethan. “This is stupid. Why can’t I go and watch TV?”

David rolled the chair over to his desk and opened his laptop.

← --- Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.38"

“Because I want you to help me understand. You’ve been at this children’s home a year and I still don’t know where to start. I’ve got reports here: social services, psych, GP reviews...” David made a show of picking up a bunch of folders and waving them at Ethan.

“Some of this makes for startling reading, Ethan. It says here you’ve got an IQ equivalent of one hundred and thirty. That’s way above average. I’m impressed. But all these incidents. These injuries. These families you’ve hurt. I really don’t know what to make of it. It’s my job as a psychologist to help you, but I don’t know how.”

Comment [E33]: I would say here ‘an IQ equivalent to 130’ or just ‘an IQ of 130’ because it sounds more natural.

Ethan sat and let David talk. The psych was studying them in his own mild-mannered way, but he was still studying them. He and Tilly had long since agreed how to respond: We don’t trust. We don’t tell our secret. We definitely don’t perform.

“You’re in separate rooms now, ~~isn't~~” said David. “I see Tilly has agreed to that. It must be nice for you to have some space, ~~isn't~~”

“I don’t mind,” said Ethan.

~~And~~ he didn’t. If she wanted to stay close that was fine by him. As they carted themselves around from one family to the next, they stuck together like twins. When they had arrived at Grosvenor House Children’s Home, it had taken ~~took~~ a long time for Tilly to settle.

Comment [E34]: Do you cart yourself around or are you carted around by others?

“OK,” said David. “You’re maintaining your silence. You’re consistent, I’ll give you that. But you must understand— I need to get to the bottom of some of this. Not all of it — we all have our secrets — but some of it, otherwise I’ll never be able to sign a release for you. You don’t drink, take drugs or sniff solvents. You’ve got no illnesses or

disabilities. You don't do anything I'd expect the majority of troubled kids in this place to be doing. So why are you here?"

Ethan shrugged.

"You do want that don't you? To be released? Go back out to a family?"

"Maybe," said Ethan.

"Maybe?" ~~said~~ David, ~~tilted~~ his head to one side ~~and~~, ~~pursing~~ his lips. "I don't--"

The alarm on the wall went off. Ethan glanced at the flashing red light above the door and pushed himself to his feet. David also stood as one of the security guards ran into the office.

"What's the matter?" ~~said~~ ~~asked~~ David.

"It's yours again doc," said the guard. "The girl Tilly, she's out in the playground."

"Is she ~~OK~~?" asked David.

"I think so," said the guard, "but you're the senior doc on duty. They're asking for you."

Ethan and David raced along the corridor and out through the double-doors into the concrete playground. It was thirty metres square with a high fence, opening out onto the small playing field. Ethan could see several other children huddled together at one end next to the fence with one of the supervisors. They all looked terrified and were staring across the playground at Tilly, who stood on her own, crying, her face red. Ethan rushed over to her, knelt and held her by the arms.

"It's OK Tilly. It's OK. ~~he said.~~ "What's wrong? ~~W~~ what happened?"

“They wouldn’t let me play in it,” she sobbed. “All they had to do was let me play, but they wouldn’t. I couldn’t help it. I couldn’t! I’m sorry.”

She collapsed against Ethan, sobbing. Ethan saw David and Ellie ~~—~~the playground supervisor ~~—~~ walking over to them.

“What happened?” ~~said-asked~~ David. “What wouldn’t they let her play in?”

“That.”

Ellie pointed across to the Wendy House, ~~the~~ the huge, two-storey structure donated by a local fundraiser the previous summer. Or at least what was left of it. It was in bits, collapsed entirely into a pile of broken planks and debris. The walls looked as though they had folded in on themselves; the roof had buckled. The remains of a toy kitchen were smashed and the plastic frying pans had rolled out into the open. Dust was still rising from the centre of the heap. Ethan’s eyes were drawn to a small white toy bunny sitting a few feet to the right, seemingly undisturbed by the devastation. It was Tilly’s bunny.

Comment [E35]: Identify. Is this Daisy, the white bunny from earlier in the story?

“Is anybody hurt?” ~~said-asked~~ David, not taking his eyes off the Wendy house.

“I don’t think so,” ~~said Ellie.~~ “A couple of the children are complaining of headaches, but there was nobody inside.” ~~said Ellie.~~ “I’d called them all over here to talk. I heard a huge bang and turned around. I saw her standing there staring. The Wendy House...”

“Get everyone inside,” said David, walking over to the debris. He frowned and looked over at the huddle of children.

“The ones with headaches – get them to the medical room. I need to check them out. And get the alarm turned off.”

The other children whispered to each other as Ellie hurried them inside. They threw worried glances over to where Tilly and Ethan were standing. Tilly had stopped crying and buried her head in Ethan's neck. They both fell silent as David turned to face them.

#

And so it continued. Jumping between homes. That was their life. Concerned faces staring at them from behind clipboards and laptops, whispering and planning, but never helping (?).

It was time to jump again.

Ethan sighed ~~and~~ took his earphones out, and shoved ~~the~~ iPod into his rucksack. Metallica wasn't working today, his normal daydreams distracted by the worry of moving again. Tilly's anxiety was worsening. It rubbed off on him to the extent he couldn't concentrate on much else, let alone packing. He scanned the magazines on his bookcase, most of them unread, wondering which to take. After flicking through several he realised he wasn't interested in any of them. Fast cars were for normal boys. Not him. Football was for people with friends. Not him. He threw them back on the shelf, leaving them for the next occupant.

He thought of ~~w~~andering along the corridor to say his goodbyes, but most of the other children were scared of him and Tilly. They shunned them, whispered, and

generally avoided contact. All of the children in the home were special, but none more so than the Wolfe children. Ethan tried to accept it. Tilly struggled to.

Schooling was difficult and classes were restricted to those provided by the centre, which weren't great because Grosvenor House wasn't a 'secure unit', so it didn't have its own classrooms. That meant they didn't get to mix with other children and didn't get to make friends. Ethan often stood in front of the mirror in the morning and dressed – surprisingly there was no shortage of new clothes, trendy even, donated by various clothes shops – and wondered who would notice what he looked like. Sarah always said he looked nice, handsome and mature, but that didn't count. There were only three girls his age in the home. Two of them had drug problems; the other had a mental illness he'd never heard of. None of them wanted anything to do with him.

Ethan shrugged this off, but inside it hurt. He buried it, like he buried everything else. His focus was Tilly. She would always come first because he promised he'd always take care of her. She didn't have anybody else.

"Ethan?"

He turned and saw Tilly leaning through the door. Her face was red. She'd been crying.

He beckoned her to sit on the bed and held her small shoulders.

"I didn't mean to do it Ethan, I promise. It just happened."

"I know you didn't, Tilly. It's not your fault." He could see the tears welling up again. This was too much for her to deal with. Didn't they get understand the? ~~The~~ effect of shunting such a young girl around from home to home?

“We’ll be fine,” he said. “Just trust me.” He wrapped his arms around her body, as he did so often these days, and held tight. She was shaking.

“But where will we go?” she ~~said~~ asked.

“To another home. A better one. They’ll be nicer at the next one, I swear.”

He heard footsteps and there was a knock at the open door. It was Sarah.

“Come along, Ethan, Tilly. It’s ten o’clock. Have you got everything?”

“I think so,” said Ethan, indicating the bags next to the bed. “Do you know where we’re going?”

“Yes,” said Sarah. “We’ve found a place for you in Surrey. Not too far. They’re used to dealing with special cases like this.”

Tilly stiffened and glared at Ethan. He knew she hated being called special.

Sarah looked awkward. “You know what I mean, Tilly...”

Ethan gave Sarah a reassuring smile. “Meet us down there?” ~~he said~~

“Sure,” said Sarah, grabbing two bags on her way out.

Tilly waited until she’d gone. “I don’t want to go, Ethan. I get scared around new places. What if the children aren’t nice to us?”

Ethan didn’t have any new response to that. Any comments about wonderful new friends would probably be untrue. Most of the children in homes had their own range of problems, and were often hostile towards newcomers. The early weeks in a **new** home were hard, no question.

Comment [E36]: Repetition. Three ‘new’s’ in one paragraph.

“I’ll be with you the whole time,” he said. “I won’t leave your side, and nobody can get to you without going through me. OK?”

“OK,” said Tilly, looking unconvinced.

“Let’s get on the bus. I’ll let you sit by the window all the way if you like?”

Tilly didn’t respond but shuffled out of his room and down the stairs. Ethan took a last look around his bedroom and followed. The lack of staff or other children to see them off was telling. Another item to bury. Ethan was used to it.

He checked their bags before climbing into the minibus next to Tilly, who was already staring out the window in a sulk. Two large suitcases and a couple of small rucksacks. Their entire belongings, stuffed in the boot, ready for their next destination.

“Ethan,” said Sarah, walking over, “hang on a sec. There’s somebody I’d like you to see when you get there. Her name is Wilma. She’s a psychotherapist. She thinks she can help you both. Really get to the bottom of what’s troubling you.”

“Ok, whatever,” ~~replied-said~~ Ethan, fastening his seatbelt. He’d heard it all before. Whenever they started at a new home, the psychologists, family aides and doctors swarmed all over them. They all talked to them as if they were aliens; they ran their tests and wrote their reports. But none of them were told the secret Ethan and Tilly had promised to keep. And

none of them ever managed to figure it out for themselves.

Only one person had got Ethan’s attention. He was a doctor, but he wore military uniform. He didn’t run any tests; he just read the old reports and asked a couple of strange questions and left. He looked Ethan in the eye and held it. His gaze was frightening. All he said was “I’ll be in touch,” then he left. That was some time ago and Ethan hadn’t seen him since.

Sarah broke his train of thought as she slammed the door and popped her head in the window.

Comment [E37]: He can’t leave twice.

Comment [E38]: To what?

Comment [E39]: Through?

“I’m going back to the office now,” she said, “but I’ll be driving over later to make sure you get settled in properly. I’ll be there around five. See you then.”

“See you,” ~~said~~~~replied~~ Ethan, winding the window back up.

The driver twisted round in his seat. “Hey kids.”

“Hey,” said Ethan. Tilly stayed silent.

“It’s about a two hours’ drive,” said the man. “Make yourselves comfortable. Shout if you need a toilet stop.” He twisted back ~~ar~~round and started the engine, tuning the radio to Power FM. The minibus trundled out of the driveway and into the early-afternoon traffic.

Comment [E40]: ‘Midday’ or ‘lunchtime’ – more common usage than ‘early-afternoon’.

#

The music was annoying Ethan. Eighties tunes over and over. The driver was humming along to it, making strange high-pitched noises as he tried to emulate the lyrics to Billie Jean.

Tilly was staring out the window, eyes glazed. The stress of the move was taking its toll. He ~~would~~~~de~~ need to be careful not to let her drop off. It was a familiar drill now. Nerves, cars and sleep were the forbidden three. Ethan wished she could sleep, because then he could too. He had so much on his mind ~~that~~~~,~~ the weariness and worry was starting to consume him. Grosvenor House was supposed to ~~have been~~~~be~~ their last placement. They could stay there until he was old enough ~~-~~ only a few more years until

he could get a job ~~and~~ a place of their own. Somewhere he could keep Tilly safe. Perhaps a different country, or at least a different part of England. Somewhere their past couldn't find them. Perhaps somewhere he could behave like a normal person.

But there was no hiding the latest accident. It ~~had~~ happened in the middle of the night ~~--~~Tilly had been dreaming, a nightmare perhaps ~~--~~ ~~and while~~ the fire service ~~had~~ gotten there in time, ~~but only just.~~ The ceiling ~~had~~ collapsed and only one supporting wall remained. Thank God for steel joists.

The girl in the next room, Sian, had suffered, but not physically. Ethan had seen it before and it worried him. Although lucky enough to avoid the falling masonry, Sian was found writhing on the floor, holding her head. Ethan heard the paramedics telling the doctor her eyes were dilated and fixed, she appeared to be able to hear them but she was otherwise unresponsive. Six days later Sian was admitted to the child psychiatric ward at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London. It was the first time Ethan heard the term 'persistent psychosis' and he wondered what it meant. There was no doubt Tilly caused it, but how or why was a mystery.

The manager of the children's home said vandalism on such a scale was too serious for a facility like theirs. He demanded answers, first questioning them and then bringing in Sarah and the police. Ethan and Tilly knew how to respond ~~--~~ with silence. They held their ground and refused to cooperate. The police had no evidence of wilful destruction and were forced to move on to other cases they had a chance of solving. Sarah wrote her notes, submitted her reports but said nothing to incriminate the children. The result ~~--~~ a different home was recommended with more secure facilities. One that could cope. So

here they were, travelling again to a place full of people who wouldn't understand and who wouldn't cope.

Ethan gazed out at the sky, trying to focus on what they would do next, how he would calm Tilly and settle her into yet another new environment. It got worse when she was nervous, worse for both of them.

He stared at a strange cloud formation drifting overhead. He shivered and realised he was nervous too, more than he'd felt in ages. He glanced over at Tilly. She looked so helpless, her small body wedged into the seat and her tiny head bouncing on the window frame as the bus **wallowed** along the road.

Comment [E41]: You can get away with this word, but I recommend changing it.

Ethan had been protecting Tilly since her earliest event. He remembered it clearly. ~~It was~~ a week before her first birthday. A Tuesday. Ethan remembered because he had school dinners on a Tuesday. They got home from school and Mum put Tilly in what Ethan called 'the cage' ~~—at least that's what Ethan called it—~~ the hexagonal playpen at the centre of the living room. Mum bought it because they were renovating and ~~the~~ house was a mess. Not the usual mess when the toys, paints, crayons and bikes were strewn across the floor, no, this was a building mess. The ceilings were held up with scaffolding poles and there were deep holes smelling of mud and cement where the floor should have been. Rusty nails protruded from half-finished skirting boards and brick dust lined every surface like an orange haze. Builders were in and out all day and it was a dangerous place for a crawling one-year-old.

Tilly was put in the playpen every day when Mum cooked the dinner, prepared the packed lunches for the next day and did the washing. Tilly hated it. She hated watching Ethan running around outside the cage, jumping on the sofa and changing the TV

channels. She hated it when Ethan grabbed her bunny and dangled it over a hole in the floor, or when he hung ~~her teddy~~ it from the scaffold.

She cried and she screamed at Ethan. Mum screamed at Ethan. Ethan reluctantly rescued the ~~bunny~~ teddy and placed it in Tilly's outstretched arms. That was the game. No harm done.

Except for that Tuesday.

~~Perhaps~~ Tilly was over-tired. Perhaps ~~Ethan~~ he held out just a little too long with the bunny-falling-off-the-scaffolding routine. Perhaps.

Ethan was sitting on the sofa and Tilly was screaming ~~because~~ for ~~her~~ bunny. ~~Bunny~~ was perched on a scaffold peg four feet off the ground. Ethan had tied ~~her~~ the toy there with some string. A hostage, although he hadn't quite figured out what the ransom should be ~~was~~ yet, so he watched TV instead.

Tilly continued to scream. Her face was blotchy and red. The tears were streaming and so was her nose, snot running into her mouth.

"Give her the bunny, Ethan ~~Now~~!" shouted Mum from the kitchen. "Don't make me come in there."

Ethan pulled a face and slid off the sofa, pausing halfway for effect. Before his feet hit the floor, it happened. Tilly, for an instant, stopped crying. She reached out for the bunny. Ethan heard a deep scratching noise and saw the base of the scaffolding pole slide outwards. The pole slammed onto the floor with a clang and rolled towards the playpen and Tilly's outstretched arms.

Tilly, with a smile, put her arm through the playpen bars and picked up the toy.

“Buh,” she said as the ceiling between the living room and the kitchen collapsed in a pile of plasterboard and dust.

Nobody was hurt, apart from the builder who got the telling-off of his life. He protested his innocence — he **had** fixed the scaffolding properly. It must have been one of the kids, he ~~’d~~ said, looking at Ethan with raised eyebrows. Mum sent **him** away, but she never put Tilly back in the playpen. Tilly was put upstairs in her cot, out of harm’s way. The ceiling was fixed by a different builder.

Comment [E42]: Who?

After that the events came thick and fast, as if Tilly had discovered a new talent. Learn to walk, learn to talk, **and I** learn to move the world around you with your mind. Ethan knew Tilly wasn’t like him though. **H**er talent was different: violent and unpredictable. She had much less control and often did things without realising. Anxiety normally afflicts the sufferer far worse than the people around them. **But i**n Tilly’s case it was the opposite. Ethan knew her anxiety had the power to kill.

The thought came rushing to the front of his mind as he found himself staring at Tilly’s face. Her eyes were tearful. She was crying, mumbling to herself and clenching her jaw. Her breathing was fast. **T**oo fast. The hairs on the back of Ethan’s neck stood up. All the signs were there. She wasn’t asleep. She was having a panic attack.

Not now, he thought. Please not now.

Tilly took a **huge** breath and let out a wail. The driver let **out** a grunt and the minibus lurched to the right. It drifted across the lanes, heading towards the central reservation. Ethan loosened his seatbelt, put one hand out to Tilly and with the other reached over to tap the driver on the shoulder.

Comment [E43]: Deep?

Comment [E44]: Repetition – ‘let out’.

“Are you OK?” ~~h~~He asked, ~~to~~ both of them, but there was no response from the driver. He appeared slumped, unresponsive in his seat, chin on his chest.

Ethan grabbed the man’s ~~h~~head.

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“Hey,” he shouted into the man’s ear. The driver showed no signs of life, but by the sound of the engine his foot was planted on the accelerator. They swerved ~~;~~ more violently this time and there was a screech as the driver-side front wing caught the metal bars of the central barrier. Ethan swore and looked over the driver’s shoulder at the speedometer. It was showing fifty miles per hour and speeding up. Fifty ~~-~~two. Fifty ~~-~~five. He tried in vain to shake the driver from behind, glancing frantically at the trees and other cars racing past them.

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Back inside the minibus, Tilly ~~-~~shaken from her attack ~~--~~ was staring through the front window into the distance.

“~~A lorry~~~~Ethan!~~” she screamed, ~~;~~ “~~a lorry~~~~-Ethan, w~~“We’re going to hit a lorry!”

Two hundred yards ahead of them a huge articulated lorry was stationary in their lane, hazard lights flashing. They were speeding towards it. The back of ~~his~~ Ethan’s throat went dry. His heart rate rose, his adrenaline levels soared. He started to hyperventilate.

In the minibus, everything stopped. The pressure built behind Ethan’s eyes and the pain shot through his temples. His vision blurred and his hearing muffled. The familiar sensation in his forehead spread down onto his face, the feeling of pressure, the mass, and the resistance of such a huge object as he took hold of it.

He placed his mind around the lorry, ignored the pain, and *pushed*.

There was a screech followed by a thump like **thunder**. It reverberated through Ethan and left his ears ringing. Then silence. His heart rate slowed, the anxiety calmed, his breathing returned to normal.

Comment [E45]: 'thump like thunder' or 'thump-like thunder'?

The minibus rocked back and forth. Ethan's vision sharpened and he saw the driver still slumped, not moving. The minibus was slowing and screeched to a halt against the central barrier.

Ethan turned to look out of the rear window. A few hundred metres back the lorry lay on its side in the hard shoulder, well off the road. The cab was twisted where the trailer had jack-knifed and the trailer itself was dented, damaged, as if it had been hit by a huge hammer.

"Ethan," said Tilly.

"I know," he ~~said~~ replied. "I know."

Curious

Dr Simon Lewis stood in front of the Colonel's desk. He wore dress uniform, his beard trimmed and his hair combed. He tapped his foot impatiently as the Colonel skimmed over his initial report. Lewis hated being summoned to the Colonel's office. It stank of stale biscuits and he couldn't figure out if it was the Colonel or the office itself. Still, everybody had superiors and the Colonel was his.

The Colonel placed the report neatly ~~on~~ the desk, lining it up with the edge. He plucked a speck of dirt from the paper and eyed Lewis with concern.

"Are you OK?" he ~~asked~~~~said~~.

"Of course," said Lewis.

"It's just...it's the anniversary this week isn't it? Matthew? I haven't forgotten."

Lewis swallowed hard. He wished the Colonel would mind his own business.

"The ~~G~~ulf ~~W~~war was a long time ago," he said. "Lots of soldiers died."

"Only one was your son though," said the Colonel. "Look, ~~i-~~ If you need a few days ~~to-~~"

"I don't," said Lewis. "Not now. Please, let me continue my work."

The ~~C~~olonel paused, ~~and then~~ ~~n~~odded.

"OK then," ~~He he said,~~ ~~pointed~~ ~~ing~~ at the report. "It's a lorry. What about it?"

"It was damaged," ~~replied~~ Lewis ~~replied~~. "The sub-frame almost snapped in two, the cab flung twenty metres into a tree. It's a wonder the driver didn't die."

“So what hit it?”

“Nothing hit it.”

“Nothing?”

“No. It broke down. Two tyres blew out and the driver couldn’t get it off the road. He stopped in the fast lane and put the hazards on. Approximately eight minutes later the driver regained consciousness and the lorry was on its side, in the hard shoulder.”

The Colonel sniffed and picked another speck of dirt from the page.

“So you think... —”

“Yes, I’m sure of it.”

“Why so sure?”

“The signature of the damage. We’ve got the whole rig in the labs now. It looks like it was hit by a huge pressure charge. Similar to a conventional explosion but with zero heat. It matches previous events. The tyre marks on the asphalt were also incredible.”

“How so?”

“The lorry skidded sideways for about two feet, then nothing. The whole rig, all thirty-eight tons of it, was lifted clear off the ground. Like I said, incredible. We took over as soon as the police were on-site to stop their forensics looking too closely. I don’t think they were particularly interested. We told them a military convoy including a couple of old tanks had gone through and reported a collision. That was enough. The police prefer to stay out of our business if we stay out of theirs.”

“So I won’t get any awkward calls from the Met demanding answers?”

“No. We’re clear.”

The Colonel exhaled, his fat cheeks billowing. “You know we can’t afford any screw-ups on this, Lewis. This programme is closed. We can’t risk loose ends exposing us all. You understand?”

“Yes I know.”

“So what are you asking from **me**?”

Comment [E46]: ‘So what do you need from me?’ OR ‘So what are you asking of me?’ Please choose.

“I might need to extract two civilians. Bring them here to the facility.”

“So ~~w~~^h~~at~~’s the problem? You have resources available to you. Who are the subjects?”

“The Wolfe children.”

“*The* Wolfe children?” The Colonel looked surprised. “Why?”

“Because I think they may have been treated.”

“Nonsense. They weren’t subjects. Scientists’ families are never involved due to conflict of interest.”

“I know,” said Lewis. “But we monitored them on and off anyway. It was protocol. And you’re right, ~~u~~^p until now ~~t~~^hey never raised any suspicions.”

“Until now?”

“Until **now**. They were travelling along the same road as the lorry at the time of the event. Their driver had a massive heart attack and died at the wheel. This articulated lorry was hurled onto the side of the road. We don’t think it was a coincidence.”

Comment [E47]: Repetition – three ‘until now’s’.

“So where are the children now?” The Colonel rubbed his forehead **and** ~~p~~inched his temples. He always did that when he was stressed.

“In the local council care system since their parents died. Jumping from home to home – a familiar story. The boy is unusually intelligent – top three per-cent. The girl is too young to assess, but they’ve been causing problems for years and have a case history as long as my arm. We’re beginning to suspect the problems are events. The police record shows a string of incidents with event signatures. I don’t think the authorities have any idea what to do. The children are currently in a secure children’s home in Surrey under the care of a psychologist. They were on their way to another placement when the crash occurred. I don’t want them going back and spending more time with the psychologist...for obvious reasons.”

~~The Colonel’s eyes widened.~~ “You’re asking if we can go in and take them?” ~~The Colonel’s eyes widened.~~

“Yes.”

“Christ, Lewis!” ~~he said.~~ “You want to storm a children’s home and kidnap two of the children?”

“These might not be normal children, Colonel. I’m not sure what they are but if we leave them at the home we have no idea what will happen. If the psychologist makes any progress this whole thing might get blown wide open. We can’t let that happen.”

The Colonel pulled off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He looked tired and fraught.

~~“No, Lewis,” he said.~~ “No fatalities, not this time. Not in a children’s home.”

“But sir” ~~he said.~~ ~~“No fatalities, not this time. Not in a children’s home.”~~

“No,” ~~he said.~~ ~~“No fatalities, not this time. Not in a children’s home.”~~ It would be a political nightmare and let me remind you the project was illegal. If it hits the fan and we’re implicated I don’t need to remind you what would happen to us, and to this facility.”

Comment [E48]: Repetition – ‘remind’.

Comment [E49]: Some description to separate dialogue?

“You can attempt to extract these children through the proper means. I will permit that. Approach their doctor and social services. Request they be transferred for their own good and well-being. Exhaust all avenues before you even think about taking them by force. If, and I mean *if* it comes to that eventuality, I will make the decision. Am I clear?”

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“Crystal,” replied Lewis.

Comment [E50]: If the Colonel is his superior, and Lewis is a doctor and an officer, then why doesn't he call him 'sir' or 'Colonel'?

He saluted, turned and opened the office door. Once in the safety of the corridor he flipped out his mobile and dialled his office. There were many ways Lewis could orchestrate his plan to fit within the Colonel's parameters, and many contingency plans for when ~~as~~ as he fully expected ~~it~~ all went to hell. He'd be left to clear up the mess and he'd be damned if he wasn't prepared.

Comment [E51]: 'wouldn't be' prepared (?)

“We're moving on the Wolfe children,” he said. “I want all possible scenarios drawn up and presented to me within forty-eight hours.”

Comment [E52]: Establish who he's talking to or that he's connected.

“Yes sir,” was the reply. The line went dead.

Comment [E53]: A subordinate does not hang up on a superior. It's the other way around.

Lewis put the phone in his pocket, checking the time. He wouldn't have time to visit Matthew's grave today. Perhaps tomorrow, or the next day. It didn't help. It never had. But it helped ease the guilt that came from outliving his one and only son. That and his work here. To research and improve the fighting capability of his country. To prevent more sons and daughters dying because of a lack of advanced capability or equipment.

That's what he wanted. He wished the Colonel would just let him get on with it.

September 1998, Ten Years Earlier

Adverse Effects

The screams were deafening. Charles held the young girl down while Grace plunged the sedative into her arm.

“Thirty seconds,” said Grace, putting weight on the girl’s shoulders and holding her forehead down. The fit would resolve quickly, but they needed to stop her hurting herself.

Charles nodded and studied the EEG monitor, biting his lip, counting down. The girl’s screams subsided into moans, then faded to gasps before she lost consciousness. He waited until the readings were normal and her heart rate stabilised before standing back. He took a breath.

“~~“~~Damn it, Grace,~~”~~” he said, pulling off his latex gloves and walking over to the workbench of the small lab. He flicked on the PC monitor and brought up the video surveillance software.

“What are you doing?” ~~asked~~~~said~~ Grace.

“Making sure I didn’t imagine it,” he said.

“You didn’t imagine it. That’s the fifth time now.”

He pressed play, then rewind, watching the lab video backwards until he found what he wanted.

“Shit,” he said, watching the grainy black and white video image. The girl was sitting up on the bed. He and Grace were standing to one side, facing away. The girl

Comment [E54]: ‘in’?

hugged herself, shivering — not an uncommon side-effect of the current batch — then closed her eyes. She whipped her hands out in front, grasping at the air.

“There it is,” said Grace, pointing to the tray in front of the girl, half out of shot.

“She’s seizing. Do you see it?”

“I see it,” said Charles, hitting stop. He glanced over to the girl, who was now perfectly stable but asleep. She wouldn’t wake for another hour or so, after which she’d be transferred to recovery. Her parents would collect her tomorrow morning.

“And the obs?” he asked, indicating the paper file at the foot of the hospital bed.

“Nothing exceptional,” said Grace. “She responded well to batch A-1, her manic episodes reduced by sixty percent in duration and forty percent in severity. We’re helping her. It’s working.”

“Until she seized, like the others.”

“Yes, but I think we know what’s causing that.”

“Too late for this batch.”

“But not for the next.”

Charles sat and clasped his hands behind his back. He closed his eyes.

“What if her parents had seen this?” he asked. “What exactly are we supposed to say?”

“Her parents never stay for the treatments,” said Grace. “Most don’t want to, you know that. Treatment for bipolar in children is experimental and unpredictable. They just want the results — they leave the details up to us doctors. Besides, we’re doing good work here. Did you see how quickly her mood stabilized?”

“Before the ~~—~~”

“Yes before that. That’s real progress. Ninety-three percent of subjects show significant improvement. This drug works Charles. *Our drug.*”

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“It’s risky Grace, ~~,” said Charles.~~ “We don’t have enough data.”

“We know exactly what we’re doing Charles.” Grace spat the words out, turning away. “Don’t go chicken on me now. When we go up in front of the MHRA with the next variant we need to be united on this. We’ll get recognised for what we’ve done here. University College London is now the world leader in bipolar research, thanks to us.”

Charles said nothing, the uneasiness gnawing at his stomach. It had for weeks now, plus the headaches were getting worse. He winced and went over to the fridge, pulling out a bottle of water.

“Headache?” ~~said~~ asked Grace.

“Yes,” he replied, grabbing some aspirin out of the cupboard. “Lack of sleep.”

“Mm,” said Grace, studying him before turning back to the girl.

Charles downed the bottle and joined his wife, checking the girl’s stats and physical condition. She’d be OK. She was the last of the test subjects for trial twelve: a double-blind, randomised, parallel-group clinical trial involving children under the age of ten with diagnosed bipolar disorder with acute mania. The trial had run for eight weeks at UCL Hospital and during that time the effects of drug A-1 were analysed for efficacy and safety. Grace was right; there was no doubt the drug worked, but that’s not what he was worried about. What he’d seen earlier in the girl had happened in earlier batches, and it was happening again. The younger the children, the more pronounced the effect, and the longer it lasted.

The door buzzed. Charles could see a lab technician standing outside. Grace walked over and unlocked the door.

“Doctor Wolfe?” ~~said~~ asked the woman.

“Yes,” said Charles and Grace at the same time.

Comment [E55]: ‘in unison’?

“Grace Wolfe,” ~~she said~~ said the woman. “There’s a phone call for you.”

~~“Sure,” said~~ Grace, turning to Charles. “I’ll be right back, honey. Don’t go anywhere.”

Charles locked the door behind her and returned to the girl. Close observation was required for all test subjects ~~=~~ continued funding required them to play by the rules and accidents would be unacceptable. But how much longer could they do this? The next drug variant was almost ready. Grace was adamant they needed fresh subjects, younger than before. That would be difficult. There were only so many children in the UK with bipolar, and the rules required them to be severe cases. Using the same children again so soon wouldn’t be permitted.

Comment [E56]: Who? Identify subject.

Unless we break the rules. It went unspoken for weeks before Grace brought it up. Extend the list of viable conditions, make the entry requirements vaguer, perhaps include other conditions that we know can’t be treated but we say they can. That’s the only way we can accelerate the research. Our children need quicker results than this. They can’t wait. Is that so bad?

Comment [E57]: Why switch from interior monologue to first-person? Explain in past dialogue between Charles and Grace?

It’s bad, Charles had said. It’s illegal, in fact. But it depends how much we want it.