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Whispers

by Paul Hunter

Jonathan's parents had been arguing for months, always in whispers. Jonathan caught the odd word. It seemed very important, it must be done but they could not agree how long to wait. Also he heard something about a test or a survey? Jonathan could not stop worrying. Was someone ill? Was he going to a new school? A private school? He could not believe they could afford that. Were they selling the house or perhaps God forbid, getting a divorce? The more they argued, the more Jonathan worried.

Half way through his English homework on 'Horror and Suspense', Jonathan heard whispers. As he crept down the stairs, carefully avoiding the creaky step, he noticed a shaft of light from the lounge door that split the hall in two. He remembered a line from his homework. "The basis of all human fears, he thought. A closed door, slightly ajar". He perched on the third step and listened.

"We have to tell him," his father whispered insistently, "he has to know."

"But it's too soon," his mother pleaded, "he won't be able to handle it. He's not strong enough."

"I knew when I was his age!" His father sounded angry.

“Well, you can blame your father for that!” his mother retorted.

“Blame! How dare you, we only buried him last year!”

Jonathan felt scared and very confused. Whatever it was, affected him, his father and possibly Grandad. A vision of a werewolf and a vampire fighting suddenly appeared in Jonathan’s mind. He hated the sight of blood, he didn't even like tomato soup. So he’d have to be a werewolf, at least he liked dogs.

“That's it, I've had enough, I'm telling him tonight!” shouted his father, “Jon...”

“No stop! You can't!” his mother screamed, cutting him off.

A moment of silence hung in the air. Jonathan had never heard his mother scream, it was as if she had been wounded or had something to protect.

“What do you mean, I can't tell him?” His father sounded more measured, possibly suspicious.

Another long silence, Jonathan heard a sigh.

“He’s not yours,” his mother whispered, as if she did not want to hear it.

“Rubbish! Of course he is, he looks just like me, everyone says.”

“He’s not yours,” she repeated slightly louder.

“Well who is his father in this dream world of yours?” his father said mockingly.

“David, your brother.”

“I was scared, I didn't want to take the risk. I knew David was tested and clear!”

“I did it for us! Jonathan is still your flesh and blood!” my mother was screaming, the words came out in a torrent.

“I'll kill him!”

The house shook as Jonathan's father slammed doors, storming out of the back of the house to the garage. Jonathan heard a hail of loose gravel smash against the garage door as he skidded out the drive.

Jonathan could hear his mother softly sobbing in the lounge. He wanted to comfort her but she would guess that he knew and neither of them would know what to say. It was too soon, too fresh and too raw.

Jonathan stared at the familiar shapes of the parquet flooring in the hall. Six rectangles of wood in each square. Each square at right angles to its neighbours. There were different shades of wood but the pattern never changed. As he watched, sets of squares made bigger squares, the pattern extended across the hall like an impossible giant Sudoku. Jonathan realised his life would never be the same.