

STARBOARD

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**LATE AUGUST**

I think this is the bit where I introduce myself  
and tell you all about me.  
I've never done this before  
so you'll need to bear with me  
because, well, there's quite a lot to tell.

So here goes:  
I'm Alfie,  
Alfie Piper.  
I'm twelve years old.

I'm sitting at my desk in my bedroom at Dad's house  
looking out the window,  
watching light battle dark.

I do that a lot.

From here I can see the tops of the hills  
change as the seasons spin.  
Right now,  
the moor grass is scorched amber  
and the sun's coming up  
like the sky's on fire,  
like yesterday is burning  
and a whole new world's being created  
just for me.

My uniform's hung on the back of my door ready  
for next week.

But I don't want to talk about starting Year 8.

I've been thinking about talking since it happened.  
Trying to find a way to get out what's in my head.  
What it is I want to say.  
So here I am.  
Let's see where we get to.

I can hear my dad, Sam, and his wife, Sophie,  
singing to the baby downstairs.  
Alice is four weeks old.  
She's beautiful.

They'll be trying to get a bottle  
down her  
in the hope she'll settle for a while  
so they can drink coffee,  
listen to the radio  
and smile at each other,  
delighted by what they made.

Eventually Dad'll come upstairs to check in  
on me, so I've not got long.

The next bit of what I need to tell you  
is pretty hard,

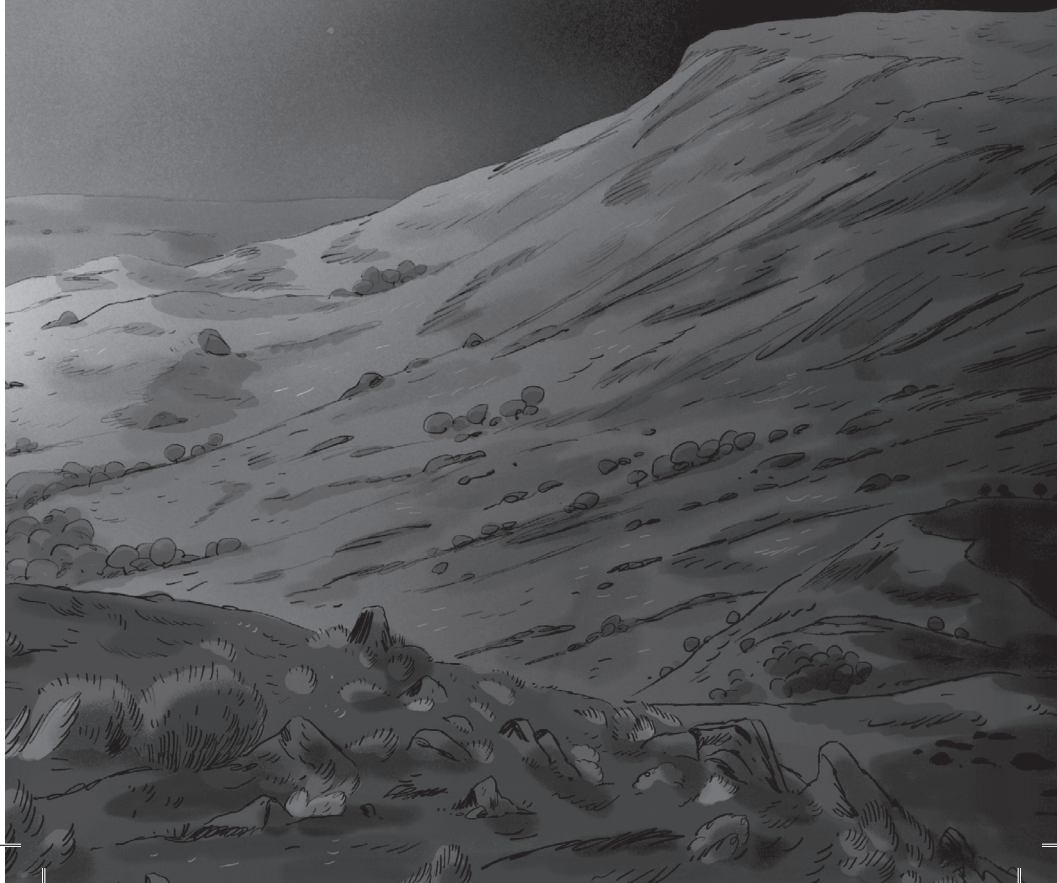
you might need to take a breath.

The day before my sister, Alice, was born,

my mum died.



My mum is dead.



I just need a minute.

Sorry, I said you'd have to bear with me.

If it's OK, I'd like to tell you a little bit about  
her—?

It might be a jumble of stuff but that's how my  
head is.

My mum was called Sally Anne Taylor.

She was thirty-nine years old.

No age at all, people tell me.

She was a social worker.

Her whole life was about trying to help people.

She was my favourite person in the world.

She was my mum.

And I loved her . . .

I **love** her

very, very much.

She died of pancreatic cancer.

Two weeks after we found out she had it,  
she was gone.

I'd been dead busy at school,  
and there was so much to do around  
the baby coming

that I never noticed the stuff  
people've talked about since then:  
how she'd been feeling poorly for a while,  
wasn't really eating.

People said her eyes  
and skin had started to go yellow,  
but she didn't want to believe it  
until her friend who used to be a nurse  
told her she had to go to hospital.

And she never came out.

That's a lot, right?  
Yeah, it is.

And the thing is,  
there's more.

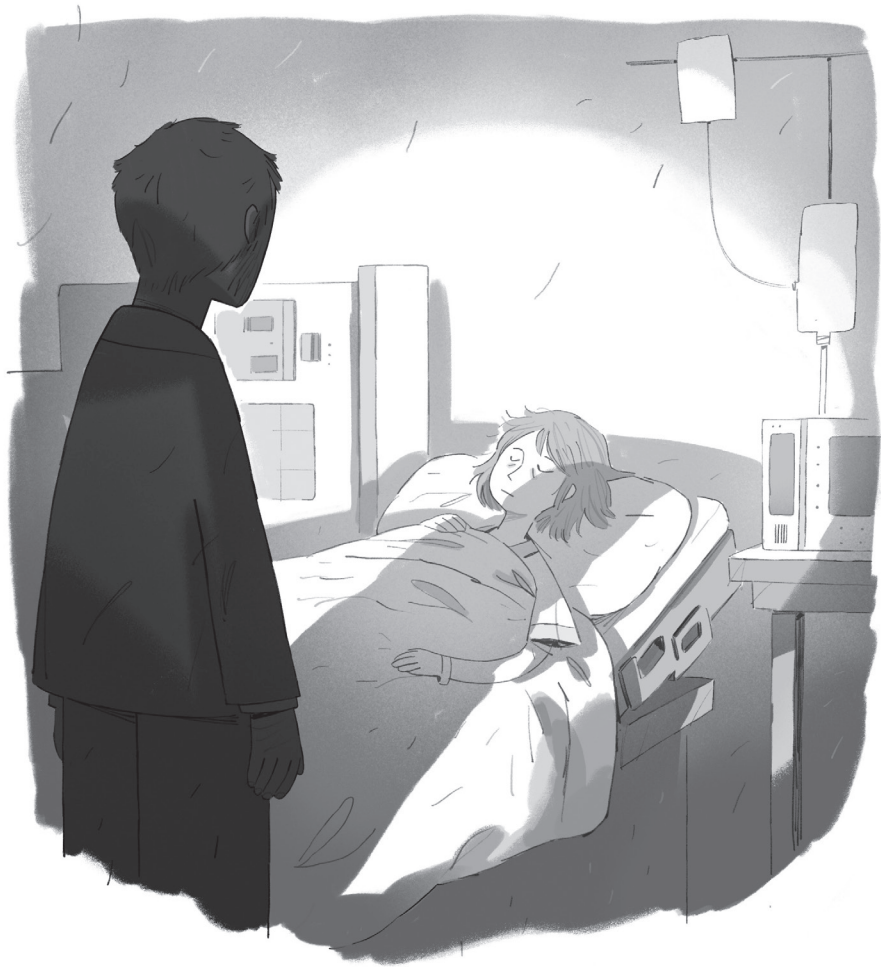
And I'm sorry again if I ramble here  
but

I'm lost

without her light.

She died in hospital  
in the early hours of the morning,  
on the day she was supposed to come home.  
She wasn't coming home to get better  
but they told us she'd have a few months.  
And while I was trying to get my head  
round it all,  
stomach ulcers burst  
and she was so weak that her body,  
my mum's body,  
couldn't take it.

And **he** was with her.



**He** is Mum's partner.  
Was Mum's partner.

**He** appeared in my life  
when I was nearly three,  
the year after Mum and Dad split up.  
And I hate **him**.  
And **he** hates me.

And **he** was there.

And I wasn't.

I'd been staying at Auntie Lisa's,  
Mum's sister,  
because Dad and Sophie  
knew Alice was arriving any second.

Thinking about it now,  
that's the last time I stayed at Lisa's.

There was a knock on the door,  
early,  
too early for it to be anything  
but bad news.  
And  
I heard them downstairs

and it turns out  
Lisa wanted to tell me  
it had happened  
but **he** said no

it needed to be **him**

and **he** called me downstairs  
and I was confused and angry because it was early  
and I thought **he** wanted me to go and help **him**  
sort the house out for Mum coming home  
and **he** was in the kitchen with **his** back to me  
and when **he** turned  
**he** just looked at me

and told me.  
Then **he** hugged me and cried.  
Told me **he** loved her.

And **he** smelt of hospitals

and Mum.

And then Lisa came forward and sort of  
got **him** away from me  
because she knew how I felt.

And from then on,  
it's like I've been in a washing machine,  
tumbling about,  
trying to find a space in the chaos to breathe,  
in places where even the light is dark.

People's faces flashing in front of me  
conversations I'm not supposed to hear  
funeral cars  
flowers  
cards  
Alice

**him.**

None of it making any sense.

And I have a couple of questions  
which I know you can't answer,  
nobody can.

But I need to ask them anyway.

Why did this happen to me?  
And what do I do now?

The only thing I do know  
is I'll never see Mum again.

And after we spread her ashes  
in the valley she loved,

I'll never see **him** again.