

Warlock - Ruby, Year 6, NSW

They're laughing at me, but my feet are rooted into the ground. They're saying mean things but I can't hear them over the sound of my own heartbeat. Then I start falling, fast. I try but I can't grab onto anything. All I can hear is what they say. The horrible comments and cold jokes at my expense.

"Why does he smell like that?"

"Don't look now, here comes Warlock!"

"Look at me, I'm Warlock!"

"Did you know his dad left him?"

"Ha ha, no wonder!"

I wake up from my dream sweating. My heart is beating faster than ever, and a creeping sense of dread rises up my throat, choking me. I can smell my mother's incense burning; it fills my room, putting a misty haze on everything I can see.

I look at my clock; it takes me a while to read it because it's an old fashioned one. It's 3:00am and I can hear my mother chanting one of her spells, trying to rid the house of bad memories. She doesn't sleep much, my mother. She says sleep is what you do after you've completed your life's purpose.

She does sleep though. She pretends she doesn't, but I catch her when I get home from school. She always has, ever since I was young, but now I'm 10. I wearily put on my slippers, woven from Cattails.

"Mother, are you cooking something?"

Her lips thinned. She doesn't like it when I call it cooking, she likes to say 'Brew' instead.

"Oh! Bruxo! I'm glad you're up! I'm brewing a new stew, I call it Mushrooma!" she said, her excitement clear in her voice. I must have rolled my eyes because she looked visibly hurt.

"I... didn't mean it like that. What are the ingredients?"

She recovered quickly from her hurt and turned brightly towards me.

"It has three teaspoons of basil, a stick of lavender, six sage leaves, some fresh tomatoes and three bay bolete fungi! It will give you a protective shield for the rest of the year."

She looked so happy, like a flame, just beginning to thrive. Oh, the amount of people who would give anything to stamp out that light is hideous.

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I was on my way to school. I could feel the blisters on my feet worsening and the cold Autumn air snaking around my neck, biting viciously. Then I heard it, the horrible sound of footsteps, they were heavy, menacing, a walk with a purpose.

I recoiled, my heart started to beat faster and faster. My pace quickened, so did theirs. I could hear their heavy breathing, I knew better than to look behind me, I learnt the hard way. I started to run. I knew once I'd started I couldn't stop. I hated that feeling. I could hear the gravel being flung around as the person behind me chased me.

The school gates were in sight and I knew all I had to do was keep running. Like I always do. I ran. Sweat beaded on my temple, my breath deepening. Oh, how I wish I was fitter.

“Warlock, what’s the rush? Are you late?”

I felt the sharpness of his voice cut through me before I even heard his words. I turned slowly, only a few steps from the school gate. I took in his black, scraggly hair, steel grey eyes and jutted jaw. His fists were clenched and I watched as he recoiled at the sight of me, as if I was something revolting he found on the bottom of his shoe.

“Oh, Cael, what are you doing? Don’t you have better things to do?” said Macy from inside the school.

Cael grabbed my shirt, ripping the seams. His breath reeked of onions and pepper, and I gagged.

“Yeah, I do,” he replied, spitting at me as he walked away.

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I peered, baffled at the girls lined up at their classroom doors. They all looked the same. They all had hair slicked back in a tight, perfect ponytail, they all had the same nails and same coats and the same length of dress. I couldn't really tell them apart. They all had silver buckles on their shoes and pretty bangles.

As to why anyone would want to look like each other, I am baffled. In year two there was a girl, Coco. She wore her hair out, wore orange shoes and didn't care for jewellery. She was bullied so badly that she was taken out of school.

I miss her. She was different, more kind.

I sat in class, boredom suffocating me like a killer. Cael was sitting at the back of the room, tapping his pencil repetitively against the bench. It was annoying me. Not the kind of annoyance that lives in the back of your mind, only slightly bothersome. No, this was the type of annoyance that festers and builds the longer it is kept inside. That kind of annoyed. My fists clenched, my sharp nails dug into my palms, causing blood to spill from them.

“Bruxo, is there something bothering you?” our teacher asked, clearly unimpressed.

My heart started to thump, fast and terrifying.

“I...um,” I stumbled. I glanced anxiously at Cael, who was smirking. Sweat beaded on my heated forehead.

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I was on my way home when I heard paced footsteps behind me, I know it wasn't Cael. They were too light, and almost mechanical. I turned around and saw the person flinch at my gaze.

It was a girl. I couldn't remember her name. She was just like the rest. Her hair was so perfect it looked fake. Her dress was stiff and box-like, no wrinkles in sight. Once I recognised her, it was my turn to flinch. It was Macy. She was the popularity final boss and Cael's sweetheart.

“M...macy. That's my name. If you don't know. Bruno, right?” she stammered, her usual smooth manner of speech lost.

“Um...It's actually Bruxo,” I corrected her, as I wished that my name was Bruno.

“Bruxo. What does that mean?” she asked, clearly trying to keep the conversation going. My feet shuffled on the dirt road, making a flurry of dust erupt and fly.

“Well... It means wizard, but that's not what I am, no that's just what my mother named me.” I reddened and my nails fell sharply into my palms.

“Oh. I meant to say ... well, and then you kept walking so I kept walking and... I'm sorry for how Cael acts to you!” she spluttered.

“Why do you do it? I mean act the same as the other girls. Look the same?” I asked a question that had been ripe on my tongue for ever so long.

She kicked dust from the road into the air, spiralling to the ground, and said, “Well, you saw what happened to Coco. No one wants to be like that.”

I wanted to ask her. Ask her why she bullied Coco, but I held back.

I froze. I saw Cael some distance away, fighting someone. Someone bigger than him. The figure was rough and burly. Angry, too, it was the kind of fury that you could feel without even looking. It was horrendous.

Macy gasped and whispered, "It's his father."

I watched the burly, horrid man slouch off into his house, slam the door and I had a feeling that he grabbed his flask.

Cael's pupils went as small as a pinpoint when he saw me watching. He spat on the dirt and limped over, it was clear he was in great pain. Once he reached us, he glared at me, so fiercely and with such red-hot anger I was in fear I would melt.

"What are you doing here? HEY! Can you hear me?!" He grabbed my ear, "What are you looking at you scum... you filth, you NOBODY!" He shouted so loud into my ear it felt as if it was bleeding.

I ran. My feet pummelled against the road, pumping fear through my body. I could hear him chasing after me, but soon I lost him. Without his limp, I fear what could have happened.

I reached home out of breath. My hands reached instinctively to soothe my ears, and I felt the oozing, warm blood on my freezing hands.

"Bruxo! What have you done to yourself? Are you alright?" my mother asked, anxiety filling her eyes.

She touched my ear and pain exploded from it, causing a blinding flash of red, my hands started to quake and my hearing was muffled.

"I love you mum." I whispered quietly.

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Things are different now. I had my 18th birthday last week. I have a few things to catch you up on.

Macy has let down her hair and is now my best friend. As for Cael, his father was arrested and, would you believe, came to live with me and mum. She straightened him out. He took calming potions from mum. And me, I, I am a Warlock.