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Unusual Boy

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Introduction

Stories rarely begin where we expect them to. This is a story about difference, about being out of step with the rhythms that most people move by. It is about the ways small things—an odd smile, a stray gesture, a question asked at the wrong moment—can shape the way a person is seen, and how being unusual becomes its own peculiar kind of identity.

“Unusual Boy” is a work of fiction, but its sense of truth lies nestled between the cracks of real life. Many of us, at one point or another, have felt the oddity of being set apart. That sense—whether it’s a flicker of discomfort, a deeper ache, or quiet pride—drives the beating heart of this novel. Here you’ll meet a boy whose world both rejects and invites him, whose journey is at once singular and familiar.

The chapters ahead will follow him through quiet hallways, bustling streets, secret gardens, and silent nights. Along the way, unusual friendships will form, small mysteries will surface, and moments of longing and hope will wound and uplift the characters. Pieces of ordinary life—school benches, family dinners, the flutter of leaves outside a window—become spaces where the extraordinary flickers in the light of an imagination that never quite fits.

Through the boy’s eyes, we will question what it means to belong, to stand apart, and to find places of safety and joy in a world that feels distant or difficult. While his story is his own, the fears and stubborn hopes he carries may echo your own. Each chapter peels back a layer of ordinary days, searching for meaning in overlooked details and connections missed by those rushing by.

This book invites you to remember: difference is not a flaw, but a story. Being unusual is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be understood and, perhaps, cherished. I invite you to walk these pages in the company of an unusual boy—who, in ways large and small, might remind you of someone you know, or someone you used to be.

CHAPTER ONE: The Arrival

The old house stood on a hill, draped in ivy like a forgotten secret. It wasn't the grandest house in Oakhaven – not by a long shot. The vicarage had a more imposing air, and Mrs. Gable's sprawling bungalow with its manicured hedges screamed wealth. But this house, number seventeen Willow Lane, possessed a quiet dignity, a sense of having weathered more storms than its cheerful neighbours. It was the kind of house that seemed to watch the world from behind tired, heavy eyelids.

Eleven-year-old Arthur Pumble knew this house intimately, even before his family's beat-up estate car finally wheezed to a stop in front of it. He'd seen the photograph, a slightly faded print tucked into a plastic sleeve, countless times. His mother, Sarah, had carried it with her for weeks, a talisman against the upheaval of their move. The picture showed the house in summer, the ivy a vibrant green, roses climbing a crumbling trellis by the front door. It looked inviting, almost magical. In reality, on this blustery October afternoon, it looked...tired.

The sky overhead was the colour of bruised plums, and a fine, persistent drizzle coated everything in a slick sheen. Arthur peered through the condensation on the car window. The garden was a tangle of weeds, the roses long dead, their thorny arms reaching like skeletal fingers. A rusty swing set stood forlornly on the patchy lawn, its chains groaning in the wind.

"Well, here we are," his father, Robert, said, his voice thin with forced cheerfulness. He killed the engine, and the sudden silence was thick with unspoken anxieties.

Arthur's younger sister, ten-year-old Lily, who had been asleep, stirred in the back seat. She blinked, her eyes wide and confused, taking in the unfamiliar street, the unwelcoming house. "Are we here already?" she mumbled, her voice thick with sleep.

"We are, darling," Sarah said, turning to smile at her. It was a brave smile, the kind that didn't quite reach her eyes. "This is our new home."

Lily looked at the house, then at her mother, then back at the house. A flicker of fear crossed her face. "It's... dark."

"Just a bit of rain," Robert said, opening his door. It groaned in protest. "Come on, let's get this unloaded."

Stepping out of the car felt like stepping into a different world. The air was cold and damp, carrying the scent of wet earth and decaying leaves. The sound of the wind was

a low moan through the bare branches of the willow trees that lined the lane. Arthur pulled his thin jacket tighter around him. He hadn't packed his warmer coat. He never thought about things like that.

He walked towards the front door, his footsteps crunching on the gravel path. The path was overgrown with moss, making it slippery underfoot. He reached the door, a heavy, dark wood affair with a brass knocker shaped like a lion's head. He hesitated. This wasn't just a new house; it was a completely different life. Leaving the cramped but familiar terraced house in the city, leaving behind the only school he'd ever known, leaving behind the vague comfort of routine – it all felt overwhelming.

His father fumbled with a set of keys, his breath pluming in the cold air. The lock was stiff, and it took several attempts before it finally clicked open with a loud, echoing sound. The door swung inward, revealing a narrow hallway steeped in shadow. The air inside was even colder than outside, smelling of dust, damp plaster, and something else... something old and vaguely unsettling.

"Hello?" Sarah called out, her voice sounding small in the cavernous space. There was no reply, of course. The house was empty, waiting.

Arthur stepped across the threshold. The floorboards creaked under his weight. The hallway was long and dark, leading to a staircase that twisted out of sight. To the left was a room that looked like a sitting room, filled with dust sheets draped over unseen furniture. To the right was another room, its door ajar, revealing a glimpse of a fireplace and a grimy window.

Lily clung to her mother's leg, her eyes darting nervously around the dim space. "It's creepy," she whispered.

"It's just old, sweetie," Sarah said, pulling her daughter closer. "It needs some love, that's all."

Arthur didn't find it creepy. He found it... full. Full of silence, yes, but also full of potential. Full of hidden corners and forgotten stories. He ran his hand along the peeling wallpaper, the pattern a faded floral print in muted greens and browns. It felt rough and dry under his fingers.

His father had gone back out to the car to start unloading the first boxes. Arthur could hear his grunts and the rhythmic thud of cardboard on the gravel. Sarah was trying to coax Lily further into the house.

"Come on, Lily, let's see the kitchen. Maybe there's still some biscuit crumbs from the previous owners!" she joked, though her voice lacked its usual lilt.

Arthur stayed in the hallway for a moment longer, listening to the wind rattling the windows and the strange, almost imperceptible creaks of the old house settling around them. He felt a familiar tingle in his fingertips, a sign that his senses were heightened, picking up on things others might miss. He could almost feel the layers of time in the walls, the echoes of past inhabitants.

He moved towards the staircase, drawn by its mystery. The banister was smooth and worn, polished by countless hands over the years. He ran his hand up it, feeling the slight dips and curves. The air felt colder on the stairs. He looked up, but the top of the staircase was lost in shadow.

"Arthur? Are you coming?" his mother called from the direction of the back of the house.

"Yeah," he said, his voice sounding strangely loud in the quiet hallway. He turned and walked towards her voice, towards the promise of the kitchen, leaving the silent, watching staircase behind him.

The kitchen was at the back of the house, a large, draughty room with a cracked linoleum floor and a vast, ancient Aga cooker that looked more like a relic than an appliance. A single, bare lightbulb hung from the ceiling, casting a weak, yellow glow. There was a sink with two separate taps, one for hot and one for cold, and a sturdy wooden table in the center of the room, scarred with years of use.

"Well, it's... spacious," Robert said, setting down a box labeled "Kitchen Essentials."

"It needs a bit of work," Sarah admitted, but there was a spark in her eyes now. She had a talent for seeing potential in things others dismissed. "We can paint the cabinets, maybe put in some new flooring."

Lily was peering into the depths of the Aga, her face serious. "Is this a monster?"

"It's a cooker, darling," Sarah chuckled, pulling her daughter away. "It makes food."

Arthur wandered over to the window above the sink. It looked out onto a neglected back garden, a wilderness of overgrown bushes and tangled vines. Beyond the garden, he could see a stretch of open fields, and in the distance, a line of dark trees silhouetted against the fading light.

He pressed his forehead against the cool glass. This was Oakhaven. A village he knew nothing about. A place where they knew nothing about him.

His father went back out for another load. Sarah started unpacking the "Kitchen

Essentials" box, pulling out mugs and plates wrapped in newspaper. Lily, her initial fear fading, began exploring the cupboards, opening and closing doors with loud bangs.

Arthur turned away from the window and looked at the room again. It was a mess, certainly. Boxes were piling up in the hallway. The air was chilly. But amidst the disarray, there was a sense of possibility. This blank canvas, this quiet, waiting house, felt different. It felt like a place where the ordinary rules might bend a little.

He noticed a small, dark stain on the floor near the back door. It was almost invisible against the dark linoleum, but his eyes were drawn to it. It wasn't a spill. It was more like... an imprint. He knelt down, peering closer. It was roughly the shape of a small foot, but not a bare foot. It looked like it had been made by something with a pattern on the sole, something intricate. He touched it with his fingertip. It was dry and felt slightly raised, almost like a fossil.

He looked up, wondering if anyone else had seen it. His mother was busy with the box, her back to him. Lily was still rummaging in a low cupboard. His father was outside. He was alone with the strange mark on the floor.

He straightened up, a strange feeling settling in his stomach. It wasn't fear, exactly. More like curiosity, mixed with a faint sense of unease. What could have made that mark? It looked ancient, embedded in the linoleum. Had it been there when the previous owners lived here?

He decided not to say anything. It felt like a secret, a tiny detail that belonged just to him.

More boxes were brought in, filling the hallway and spilling into the sitting room. The air grew thick with the smell of cardboard and packing tape. The sounds of their unpacking echoed in the quiet house. The wind still howled outside, and the rain continued its steady drumming on the roof and windows.

As dusk settled in, the light in the kitchen grew dimmer. Sarah rummaged through another box and found a few candles. She lit them, and their flickering flames cast dancing shadows on the walls, making the room feel both cosier and more mysterious.

They ate cold sandwiches for dinner, sitting around the sturdy wooden table, the only furniture they'd managed to uncover so far. The candlelight softened the harshness of the room, making the cracked linoleum and peeling paint seem less daunting.

"It's going to be a lot of work," Robert said, taking a bite of his sandwich.

"But it's *ours*," Sarah replied, a note of defiance in her voice. "And it has good bones."

Arthur listened to them talk, their voices low and tired. He looked around the room, at the flickering candlelight, the piles of boxes, the dark windows reflecting the faint glow within. This was it. This was the beginning.

He thought about the mark on the floor, the silent staircase, the dark woods beyond the garden. Oakhaven felt like a place of hidden things. And he, Arthur Pumble, the boy who always noticed the things others missed, felt a strange sense of anticipation. Perhaps, here, being unusual wouldn't be a burden. Perhaps, here, it might even be an advantage. The old house seemed to hum with a quiet energy, a subtle invitation. And Arthur, in his own quiet way, was ready to accept.

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