

Translated excerpt

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***All Colors of Light***

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## Somersaults

The five-metre board is Rio's idea. Anything's better than lying here in the half-shade surrounded by the aroma of French fries and the stink of chlorine and fretting that he's so exhausted he might fall asleep. The others certainly won't expect enjoying the summer to include watching Rio cry out for help, or even screaming and howling as he dreams. And he's good at high diving, he feels at home in the water, he knows what he's doing. Everything's like it always used to be up there, and after he's dived he can just stay in the water and swim a few lengths, he can be normal, or at least look normal on the outside.

"So, who's up for it?"

Flip stands up immediately. Nuri clammers to her feet as well, tucking her headphones carefully into her gigantic bag. "Let's go! Lale?"

But Lale just shakes her head lazily. "Sorry, you'll have to do without me, people, it was a late one last night. Ask Jarek!"

"I'd rather not," murmurs Flip, glancing at Jarek, who has been lying on his back on the inflatable the whole time, sleeping or pretending to sleep, you can't tell which because of his sunglasses.

"Well then, you have fun!" Lale gives Nuri a conspicuous wink, and then three more.

Apparently, Flip isn't the only one planning to improve his love life this summer.

The queue for the diving platform is endless, and they're on the point of aborting their mission when Anoush and Coco show up and stand right behind them.

"New bikini?" Coco eyes Nuri closely.

"Kind of." Nuri plucks at the tie of her bikini bottoms as if she's only just noticed it. The bright red bikini is kind of new. The bikini is a big deal, it was a difficult decision, one that took around three hours, and involved extensive advice from Rio and Lale via mobile phone.

"Super-cute!" trills Coco.

"Thank you, sweetie. But hey, I think you need to get out of the sun," replies Nuri "You're already pretty red on your front here!"

Sometimes Rio gets close to understanding why Mavis often couldn't be bothered with other people and couldn't ever deal with big groups. Couldn't.

"Hey Rio! Today's your birthday, isn't it?"

Before Coco can hug Rio, Flip inserts himself between them.

“No,” he says. “It’s not.”

Coco looks irritably at Flip. “But – ”

“No,” Flip repeats calmly.

Coco frowns.

“Whatever!” Anoush chimes in. “In any case, it’s great you’re here Rio!” She looks at him approvingly, as if he’s achieved something special and not just done what the whole town has clearly also done today.

Rio really doesn’t know what to say to this, but for some reason he calls, “It was Flip’s idea!”

Anoush and Coco nod, unimpressed.

But Flip seizes his chance: “Shame the ten-metre board’s closed!”

They take a step towards the stairs.

They spend the next half hour taking it in turns to run to the pool to cool their feet down.

Around the hundredth time, Flip gets his courage up and offers to carry Anoush. Rio’s not sure who looks more horrified, Anoush or Nuri.

“Head first or feet first?” Rio asks quickly.

“Definitely feet first,” says Nuri. “My head’s too important to me!” Anoush and Coco don’t fancy going in head first, either.

“I always just do a somersault,” Flip informs them.

“Now that I’d like to see!” exclaims Anoush, eyeing him. Okay, maybe Flip is in with a chance

after all.

“And so you will.”

Step by step, level by level, they climb the tower. A couple of kindly clouds have now moved across the sun.

“They’re like ants,” says Nuri, leaning right out over the railing. “Yes. And when you’re down

there everything seems so big and important!” says Anoush.

“Stop gabbing, start jumping!” calls Coco.

Nuri doesn’t hang about, she simply sets off, runs up and jumps without hesitation, stretching out like a professional. She’s been doing ballet and tightrope stunts since she was five, she looks pretty great.

Next it's Flip's turn.

"Don't forget the somersault," Anoush calls after him.

Although it's not quite a proper somersault, Flip's dive isn't too bad either.

"I'll go now, okay?"

Rio takes one step onto the springboard, then a second, then slumps to his knees.

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## **Breathe**

His heart is pounding, he can't breathe, the swimming pool rushes towards him, black spots are racing across his vision, he gags. *If you fall you die if you fall you die if you fall you die if you fall you die if you fall-*

"Rio! Rio!"

*If you fall you die if you fall you-*

"Crap!"

*If you fall you die if-*

"What's the matter with him?"

*If you fall you-*

His fingers claw into something hard.

*She's falling.*

"Breathe. Nice and slow. Breathe nice and slow."

How do you do that? How do you breathe?

"Go and get help!"

How do you do it? Tell me! How do you do it?

"Just go get someone, will you!"

"Dude, disgusting, he's going to throw up!"

"No, he's full-on howling!"

"Why's he crying?"

"Didn't have to jump –"

Nuri. Flip. Tell me.

“Just breathe.”

How do you breathe?

“In through the nose –“

Anoush!

“1, 2, 3, 4 –“

“Dude, what if he dies?”

Am I dying?

“Come on, Rio. Breathe. It’s just in through the nose, 1, 2, 3, 4 – hold, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 –”

You’re dying, Ri. You’re going to die now.

I’m dying.

“Breathe out 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, in through the nose, 1, 2, 3, 4 – hold, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 –”

“Great! Great! You’re doing well, really, really good!”

*It can happen any time, at any moment.*

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## **Coming down**

“Right you lot, get back, nothing to see here.”

Giant flip-flops materialise next to Rio’s head. Hairy legs, signal-red swimming shorts, an orange T-shirt, a whistle, dangling in front of his face.

Rio wipes an arm over his eyes, sniffs. Maybe no-one saw? Maybe no-one noticed? He tries to sit up, but the shivers that are more like the full-on body shakes won’t stop and before he can get to his feet, the lifeguard crouches down next to him and puts his hand on Rio’s shoulder. The lifeguard’s hand weighs three thousand tonnes. Crap. Why can’t he stop the damn shivering?

“Gently, gently. Take it slowly, young ’un.”

“His name is Rio, he was okay a minute ago, but he suddenly –”

“Okay, okay, Rio,” the lifeguard interrupts Anoush. “It’s not as bad as you think. Just try to stay calm, okay?”

Not as bad as you think, that sounds okay. The blood is roaring in his ears. *1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 –*

“And just a little tip. You don’t always have to be a hero.” The lifeguard winks at Rio conspiratorially. “It can backfire on you, good and proper. But I guess you already found that out, eh?”

For a moment everything goes blurry again.

“Right then, mate, we’ll just –” The lifeguard beckons to Anoush, who’s standing next to Coco. They both look the worse for wear. No wonder. Crap, crap, how embarrassing.

“And you take his other side.”

The lifeguard grasps Rio firmly under his left shoulder. Anoush’s fingers are ice cold.

Together they raise Rio to his feet. His legs are like rubber. There’s no ground beneath him any more. By rights he should be falling.

“Let’s go, Rio!”

Rio would like to tell them to let go of him, that he can do it for himself. But his throat is too tight, his tongue is far too heavy in his mouth. He’s scared of slurring his words, of making things even worse. They shuffle off at a snail’s pace. Everyone is watching, staring. Someone laughs.

“Move, move! Make room!” The lifeguard waves vigorously with his free hand, but the crowd

parts as slowly as chewing gum. It takes them two million hours to get down the narrow stairs, the whole town is there, everyone, everyone, everyone is watching, they can all see him, every single one of them knows he can’t cope, that he just can’t be normal again. Rio wishes he was invisible and nowhere and any place but here.

Rio takes one step onto the springboard, then a second, then slumps to his knees.

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## **Into the Shade**

The others come towards them as soon as they reach the foot of the stairs. Flip is at the front.

“Buddy!”

“Oh my gosh Rio!” Nuri is looking at him worriedly. “What happened?” But Rio doesn’t know, he can’t explain what it was, or why he’s still shivering, like he and his swimming trunks are standing in a snowstorm.

“Man, Rio-bear! What kind of shit was that?” Jarek thumps Rio hard on the shoulder.

1, 2, 3, 4 –

“It was so intense! Rio just collapsed!” Coco reports, agitated. “Woah, I thought he was going to fall off the platform. I was so freaked!”

“Coco!” Nuri says, a bit too loudly.

“What? What’s the problem? It’s true! It was full-on! And on his birthday, of all days! Wow, what a downer!”

“Coco!” Nuri and Lale and Anoush and Flip shout, all at the same time. Flip and Anoush grin quickly at each other.

“Steady now, take it easy, he’s okay now.” The lifeguard releases Rio. Flip immediately hustles into his place, pulls Rio’s arm over his shoulder, and places his other arm at Rio’s back. “I’ll do it!”

Rio looks at him irritably. What’s going on? But Flip won’t meet his eye.

The lifeguard nods approvingly. “Stay in the shade from now on, drink lots of liquid and rest, take at least an hour’s break. And do yourself a favour, young ’un, stay out of the water today!” He looks around sternly. “I’m warning you, if I see this lunkhead anywhere near the diving platform, I’ll throw you all out, understood?”

“Understood,” murmur Flip and Anoush dutifully at Rio’s side, and the lifeguard stalks away between the sun loungers.

Nuri sighs. “Phew, what a shock! Come on, we’d better go over there, into the shade.”

Flip and Anoush start to move, but Rio stays where he is, digging his heels into the grass.

“You can let go now, really!”

“It’s okay!” says Flip.

“But I –”

“We’ll just get you to the blanket, all right?” suggests Anoush gently. Rio recognises her tone from last year, especially from the time around the funeral. It hadn’t comforted him; in fact, it had made him feel small and vulnerable. People only want to help, Jaime had explained back then. They mean well. And just like he did back then, Rio says nothing, he doesn’t want to offend or insult anyone, and he lets Anoush and Flip lead him over the dry, prickly grass as if he has no strength left, and no will of his own.

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## Legendary

“Stay a while longer!” begs Nuri. Then more quietly, so only Rio can hear: “I don’t want you to be on your own! Not today of all days.”

“We’ll go and get some more French fries, okay?” Jarek suggests.

Rio shakes his head, freeing himself from the enormous towel in which Lale wrapped him, unasked, as soon as they reached the blanket, and slips into his jeans. He can’t imagine anything he wants to do less than eat.

Since last summer, Rio’s mouth has got smaller. He can’t open it wide any more. Since last summer, it’s felt to Rio like only his front teeth are working. He can take little bites, but chewing is difficult. Swallowing has become retching. And if anyone’s watching, he can’t eat anything at all.

“I promised I’d be back for dinner,” he lies.

“But we’ll see you here tomorrow, won’t we?” asks Nuri. Rio forces his face into an extra wide smile. It shouldn’t be looking so sad. “Sure!

Nuri smiles back, relieved. She and Lale each hug him quickly, Jarek, horizontal, gives his shin a goodbye punch. Flip sets his well-thumbed paperback aside and gets up. “I’ll walk you to the exit.”

“But I can walk myself,” says Rio, taking care to make it sound like a joke and not a threat. He hopes Flip will understand.

In fact, this is how it is, how it’s always been: Flip knows everything, Flip knows the score. Flip is Rio’s best friend. Since pretty much forever, since the time in front of the daycare centre, when Rio, who had just turned three, saved Flip, nearly four, from a very small, very loud dog. Flip’s dad loves telling the story of over-anxious Flip and little Rio, the hyperactive hero: he’ll only bite you if you’re frightened! You mustn’t be frightened. Wait, I’ll distract him! I’m great at stroking dogs! See, now he’s nice and quiet again! Oh, look how cute he is! I

love dogs! I really do! Come on Flip, I swear he won’t hurt you! See? He’s lovely, isn’t he? Sooo sweet! Bye, dog! Byebyebye! So. Now you don’t have to be frightened, ever again! I’m Rio, that means river, but I don’t know how to swim yet, and I know what you’re called, I’ve known for ages, you’re Flip, because that’s what everyone calls you and because it’s such a great name. Come on Flip, let’s climb up there! Right to the top! Hey! Look! Maaavis!



Hellooo! Here we are! Up here! Look, Flip! Come on Mavis, come on up! Look, Mavis, this is

Flip. He can climb really fast and already goes to Dinos and he's my friend.

Bam!

Just like that, it was all clear and agreed and decided: friends for ever! Whatever might come, was coming, would come: mean brothers, the wrong carnival costume, secretly feeling homesick, appendicitis, braces that were too tight, all those turbulent changes to their bodies, parents arguing, probably having dyslexia, not having a clue about clothes, definitely having dyslexia, drinking games, heartbreak, concussion, a torn ligament, the worst heartbreak in the world, the fricking divorce, moving house, trying to make out, a secretive twin sister who got more and more distant, death.

BAM.

However hard they try and however much effort they make, and however much they really, really want to, in the face of that fricking death, they're not doing so well. Since the whole death thing, the thing last summer, Flip has somehow been a bit less like Rio's best friend and a bit more like his self-appointed bodyguard. In fact, why is Flip being so weirdly quiet right now, why is he so abnormally nervous? When they get to the path to the exit, near the rickety swing, Rio can't stand it any longer. "Are we being followed?"

"Huh?"

"You keep on turning round."

"Flip laughs. "No, I just wanted to be sure we were out of earshot. So about before —"

Rio groans. "Dude, no! Not that again! I've already told you a thousand times, I'm okay. It was just some crappy dizziness ... maybe the heat or something ..."

Rio hesitates. Come on, this is Flip after all!

"I don't know ... well ... sometimes ... lately ... I'm not sleeping so well and I have such mad

dreams —"

Flip stops abruptly, gripping Rio by the elbow. "She touched my arm!"

Rio doesn't get what Flip's talking about.

"When we were supporting you, before, after your strange turn, she touched my arm! At first I thought it was by chance, but it wasn't, she did it on purpose! She only took her hand away

when we were almost at the blanket!” Flip’s beaming. “Man, I know it, I’m not joking, we’re getting it on!”

Rio doesn’t know what to say. Flip’s head over heels in love, that much is obvious, at least.

“It was intense!”

“I can imagine.” Rio somehow can’t manage to produce a smile. His lips feel like they’ve been

mummified. “That’s so cool! Really good,” he adds hastily. He wants to be happy for Flip, he really does.

Flip nods. “We’re going to have a legendary summer, okay?”

“Okay,” says Rio through his mummified mouth.

“Legendary!” Flip says again, and because at that moment the sun’s rays fall on the pool right behind him, lighting it up orange and yellow, and because Flip looks so puffed up, it all suddenly feels like a Hollywood blockbuster. This is better, Rio decides. This film. Better than the sharp-edged shards of reality he stumbles over every day.

“Legendary,” repeats Rio, like he’s in a buddy movie.

Then they clap each other on the back or the chest or somewhere, and Flip goes back to the others, disappearing hopefully into the sunset. Rio trudges through the turnstile and shuffles past his steed, otherwise known as his slightly wobbly single-speed bike, which is unfortunately locked to the wheels of the others’ bikes, and has fallen over in an inextricable tangle.