

## ALL THE BLACK DOTS, ALL THE UNIVERSES

Beneath the ice are countless universes, each with its black dot ready to explode.

I tap the ice covering the pond.

‘What you doing kid?’ Mr Archibald asks, hobbling closer to the fence.

‘Frogspawn. It’ll die.’

‘I’d leave it if I were you. Frogs was laying spawn long before you had a pond.’

I stand and the knees of my trousers are wet and cold.

‘How’s your mom?’ he asks.

I shrug, look back at the house, at the closed curtains behind her bedroom window.

‘You look after her, young man. No woman should have to go through that.

Losing...’ Mr Archibald looks up at her window. ‘Sorry, kid.’ Mr Archibald wipes his white stubble so it makes a scratching noise. He looks down at the pond. ‘Mother Nature has her ways, kid. No choice but to leave her to it.’

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I chase a cat away from the pond.

‘CDs,’ Mr Archibald says. ‘Hang CDs around the pond. Cats hate ‘em — the light reflecting off ‘em.’

‘All my music’s online.’

Mr Archibald screws up his forehead.

‘They’re killing the tadpoles,’ I say. ‘Hate cats.’

‘You and me both kid. Forever digging up my garden to do their business.’

Mr Archibald goes into the house and comes back with a handful of something.

‘Here,’ he says, ‘netting.’

I lay it out across the pond, watching the tadpoles swim up to the surface and disappear again. I use rocks to hold the netting in place.

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I see something swimming in the pond but Mr Archibald isn’t around to ask. I look it up on the internet — newts.

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Mr Archibald sits in a wheelchair outside his back door with a blanket over his legs. His face looks strange, lopsided.

‘Know anything about Newts?’ I ask him.

Mr Archibald doesn’t move.

‘Think they’re eating the tadpoles,’ I say.

A lady pushes Mr Archibald into the house.

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The hearse is parked up outside Mr Archibald’s house. I take the netting from the pond; there are no tadpoles or frogs left anyway.

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I hold the rim of the plastic cup against the surface of the pond and the sperm slides out. I've seen it up close on film — small white tadpoles. Some of it sinks, some of it lies on the surface of the water. During the night there are ghost tadpoles swimming in the ink-black pond.

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Mom's curtains are open. She says he was my brother and he had a name: David. She says it's healthy for us to talk about him. I don't tell her I don't like the name.

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Before school I check the pond. There are two clumps of frogspawn — clumps of small jellied balls, each with its jet-black dot.

All the black dots, all the universes.

Mom's curtains are closed again.

I put the netting over the pond.

One of them will make it. In this universe, at least one black dot will explode into being and make it. I promise, David.

Adam Lock