

WHERE I SHOULD BE

by Mars Ochsner

Theodore gasped awake, bolting upwards, the fear of being cast from the sky returning to him all at once. But it was only him, alone and sitting on the floor of a room covered in ivy and moss and ancient stone busts.

Standing up, his limbs felt foreign to him and he shambled awkwardly towards one of the shelves holding a stock of smallish statues. Where was he? The statues were discolored, browned slightly where dirt had stuck onto them, no doubt coming from the open spaces in the dilapidated roof above him. It was so quiet, he stepped carefully with his bare feet over the debris on the floor, afraid to make a sound and disrupt—

The harsh and hollow sound of wood crashing from the roof to the floor sent him reeling back into the shelf. A taller statue dislodged itself and shattered against the floor. The sudden cacophony sent his hands flying to his ears.

“Oof,” said the pile of wood.

Theodore’s eyebrows drew together. Inching cautiously toward the pile, he moved to brush the wood away, but before he could reach down a pale boy emerged, covered in dust and leaves. His eyes caught Theodore’s attention. There was a strange glassy look to them as well as a second brighter ring of color around the pupil. One eye glinted gold against the stream of sun.

Strange eyes focusing on him, Theodore backed away, unsure what to anticipate.

“Are you alright?” said the boy. Despite having several pounds of roofing having fallen on him, the boy appeared to be unconcerned, his face perfectly serene.

“Are *you* okay?”

Surrounded by debris that struck him, the boy seemed confused by this question. After a beat, he smiled a lovely smile.

“I’m fine!” He stood, brushing off his pants and readjusting the bloated bag he donned across his shoulder. “I’m more worried about you! You sure seem fine for someone who fell out of the sky. It was a good thing I saw you when I did, but you were a little heavier than I anticipated, and, well,” he gestured to the hole in the ceiling. Theodore didn’t even know where to begin in his growing stock of questions.

“Wait, what?”

“Well, you fell right outta the sky! I don’t blame you for not remembering, though. You seemed to be unconscious or something. But I figured you woulda been in a worse spot anyway if I hadn’t caught you. So, I caught you!”

He tried to remember this, only to realize he couldn’t remember anything at all. His name was there, sure, but any other detail about himself that he tried to recall turned up blank. It was like trying to hear a song through radio static. It hurt to try, and he grasped the sides of his head.

“Hey now,” said the boy from beside him, hands settling feather-light onto his shoulders.

“I don’t remember such a thing...”

“That’s all right, I don’t blame you. Do you remember anything from before? How you fell outta the sky, or why, or where I can take you?”

“I don’t remember anything...”

“Nothing? Nothing at all?”

Theodore looked at the boy next to him, all at once angry at the question. He stood up suddenly, flinging the boy’s hands away from him. He didn’t know the answers, and he wasn’t getting them by staying here.

“Did you remember something?” the boy asked. When Theodore said nothing, the boy stood up, unbothered. “I’m Matthew, by the way. We should probably be getting you back home soon. My parents will be worried if I show back up much later than sundown! They’re the ones who gave me these!”

Matthew turned around, pointing proudly to a pair of small wings on his back, coming out through small rips in his jacket.

“Those don’t look big enough to carry even you...”

“But that’s how I saved you! It was lucky I was around. Nobody else coulda saved you quick as I did. They took me right to you.”

“You talk a lot.”

“Do I?” Another bright smile spread across Matthew’s face.

An uncomfortable pause drew on for a moment.

“You can probably leave me in this room, Matthew. I don’t know where I belong myself. I need to try to remember where I should be.”

“Aw, I can’t do that! I’m sure my parents can help you out! They’re really, really smart. I’m sure they could tell where you came from. I’ll take you to them!”

“No, really, I feel better staying here.”

Matthew stared at him, concern clear in his strange eyes.

“It’s scary at night, not to mention lonely. I really couldn’t leave you here. It would make me feel real guilty to leave you here to your own devices when you can’t even remember your own name.”

“My name’s Theodore,” he said sharply.

“So you *do* remember?”

“I do not.”

“Oh.” Disappointment was so clear on Matthew’s face that it drew an amused smile from Theodore.

“I suppose I won’t get much farther in remembering anything if I just stay in this room for the rest of time.”

“I woulda come back tomorrow! But, I do want you to meet my parents. I’m sure they’ll know something. They’re really very smart.”

“If you really think they can help me remember,” Theodore murmured.