



# BookBrowse

**The Night Tourist**

by Katherine Marsh

The Night Tourist

I The Accident

It was just after dusk when the accident happened. As usual, Jack Perdu was walking through the Yale University campus with his nose buried in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Although he was only in the ninth grade, he had an afterschool job helping the head of the university's Classics department on her new English translation. It was the day after Christmas so there were no professors around, which meant that there was no reason for Jack to look up out of his book. But suddenly he heard a shout.

"Hey, Jack!"

Jack stopped walking and looked up. A girl in a puffy blue parka was running toward him across the brick walkway between the Yale library and Elm Street. Her hair was in braids, and she was frantically waving at him.

"It's Tanya," she panted when she reached him. "I'm in your English class."

"Oh," said Jack. He knew who she was, but, like most of the kids at Hyde Leadership High School, she'd never spoken to him before.

"I was just going to the store to return this pair of pants my mother got me for Christmas," she explained, pulling a pair of brown corduroys out of a plastic bag. "They're pretty awful, aren't they?"

Jack, who was wearing a pair of pants very much like them, didn't say anything. Tanya didn't seem to notice. "Anyway, I can't remember what book we're supposed to read over break. When I saw you, I knew you'd know." "Of Mice and Men," said Jack.

Tanya grinned. "I bet you've read it already." Jack gave a noncommittal shrug. He'd actually read it a few years earlier.

"You live here, right?" Tanya pointed vaguely at the stone residential colleges, which surrounded the walkway on either side.

Jack nodded.

"And let me guess, your dad's a professor?"

"He's the chair of the Archeology department."

Tanya smiled. "That's why you're so smart. You know every poem in class before we even read it."

“Not really,” he murmured, though he usually did. “Is your mom a professor too?”

Jack shivered and pulled his cap tighter over his unruly thatch of hair. “No,” he said. “She’s dead.”

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry!” said Tanya.

“It’s okay. It happened a long time ago. I was six.” Tanya’s eyes widened. “What happened?”

Jack looked around her for an escape route. “A scaffold fell on her in New York City,” he murmured. “It was a windy day.”

“That’s horrible!”

“It happened a long time ago,” he repeated. Eight years ago this month, he thought, but didn’t say it. He looked down at the book in his hands.

“What are you reading? It doesn’t look like the Mice and Men book.”

Jack held up the book so she could see the spine. “Metamorphoses.” Tanya wrinkled her nose. “Is that a book about insects or something?”

“It’s a book of Greek myths.”

Tanya shook her head. “You’re too smart to be in high school, Jack. You should be a professor or something yourself.”

“I’ve got to go,” he said. And before she had a chance to say anything else, he flipped open the *Metamorphoses* and started walking toward Elm Street. He’d heard it all before.

As he hurried away, Jack focused on how to properly translate the Latin word *occidit*. He had just started Book Ten of the *Metamorphoses*, which contained his favorite myth, the story of the musician Orpheus. After a snakebite kills his bride, Eurydice, Orpheus descends into the underworld to bring her back. Jack had gotten as far as the snake attack, after which Eurydice *occidit*. *Occidit* could mean that the snake “killed her” or “cut her down,” but it could also mean that she “perished.” Some people might not think there’s much of a difference between these possibilities, but Jack did. You could perish in an accident and no one is to blame. But when you’re killed, a killer—in Eurydice’s case, the snake—is at fault.

Jack stepped onto the crosswalk, his feet feeling ahead of him as his nose stayed pointed like a weather vane into his book. “To be killed, to perish,” he murmured, weighing the possibilities. Just as he registered the grammar and settled on the word “perish,” exonerating the snake from any intentional wrongdoing, he heard Tanya shout, “Jack!” But he lifted the book closer to his face, pretending not to hear. The next thing he knew, there was loud, heavy metal music, and he was knocked off his feet and into the air.

Jack barely had time to register what had happened.

He caught a glimpse of the car that hit him, heard panicked shouts, and closed his eyes as his body hit the ground. A loud rushing sound filled his ears. Then he blacked out.

When Jack came to, he could hear voices talking over him, at first high-pitched like insects and then slow and demon-like. A wave of nausea passed over him, and he felt too tired to open his eyes. His ears began to adjust themselves to the voices. "He's a very lucky boy," said one. "He has a few bruises on his chest and legs, but no internal injuries. He should be waking up. . . ."

"Are you sure he's okay?"

Jack's eyelids flickered. This voice was his father's. "The medics . . . when they found him . . ."

Jack could hear a loud snuffle. Even in his semiconscious state, he wondered if his father was going to cry—the way he did late at night after Jack went to bed. The one time Jack had mentioned it, his father had stiffened and told him that he had been dreaming.

"We'll keep him here overnight for observation just to be sure. But I can assure you, Professor Perdu. We did CAT scans, X-rays . . . a dozen different tests. It was a shock to his system, but he's a strong, healthy boy."

"Thank you," his father said softly.

There was the sliding noise of a curtain being closed as the doctor departed.

With great effort, Jack opened his eyes. He was lying on a cot surrounded by a white curtain. He looked at his father, who was blinking back tears.

"Dad?"

His father gripped Jack's hand in his own, something he hadn't done in years. He had a full, gray beard, and was much older than the fathers of Jack's classmates. He cleared his throat. "How do you feel?"

Jack carefully stretched his arms and legs. Nothing hurt, but he felt stiff, like he'd just run a marathon. He propped himself up on his elbows. "Not too bad for being hit by a car."

His father chuckled. The tears in his eyes, Jack noticed, had dried. "Tough kid," he said, letting go of his hand. "You scared that girl, though, half to death." Jack suddenly remembered Tanya and lay back on the cot. He imagined her telling the other kids at school about the accident. He pictured them laughing as Tanya explained, "I was shouting at him, but he wouldn't even look up from his book."

His father leaned over him. "Are you okay?"

Jack nodded, unable to explain.

His father frowned. "What's your last name?" "Perdu."

His father looked unimpressed.

"Perdu," Jack repeated, propping himself back up on his elbows. "It means 'lost' in French, from the Latin perdo. To destroy, to do away with, to lose."

His father nodded. "How old are you?"

“Fourteen. I’m fine, Dad, really.”

His father continued to stare at him. “What’s your mother’s name?”

Jack paused. His father hardly ever talked about his mother. And Jack never mentioned her, even though he had hundreds of questions. He wished there were someone he could ask about her, but there was no one else in New Haven who had known her. Neither of his parents had siblings, and his grandparents had died long ago. “Anastasia,” Jack answered.

He waited, but his father just nodded and then looked away. “Get some rest,” he said. “We’ll take you home tomorrow.”

Jack tried to stay awake in case his father wanted to talk more, but his silence—punctuated by the beeps and pages of the hospital—seemed only to grow louder and more resolute. Finally, Jack gave up, and closed his eyes. At first, when he woke up, he didn’t know if it was day or night. The fluorescent light of the hospital hallway was inconclusive. His father was lolled in a chair by his bed, snoring. The white face of the clock in his room read four a.m. A nurse in a white uniform stopped in front of the door to his room to greet an emaciated old man in a hospital gown. Jack closed his eyes and tried to fall back asleep, but he couldn’t help following their conversation. “My brother died in New York,” said the old man.

Jack thought he heard the nurse say, “We should all be so lucky.” But that seemed like an odd thing to say. “Oh, things aren’t perfect there, either,” said the man. “The fountains were down the other week. And there’s concern that someone who”—the man whispered something Jack couldn’t hear—“could find a way—”

“Down to the ninth floor?” interrupted the nurse. “You know that can’t happen.”

“But some people say . . .”

“That’s just an urban myth. Are you getting out tonight?”

“You bet!” said the patient. “I was thinking of flying around the city.”

“Maybe I’ll join you. Nobody’s dying here,” said the nurse with a laugh.

Jack smiled with relief as he realized that the conversation didn’t make any sense because he was dreaming.

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