

## ***Bruno***

On a cold winter's day, there was a boy named Bruno.  
Bruno was ten years old and was the tallest child in his class.  
But he was the least acknowledged child in the whole school.

The other children avoided him.  
Whenever Bruno tried to talk to his classmates, they ignored him and spoke amongst themselves.  
It made Bruno feel like a spectator, a tall telegraph pole overhearing conversations on the wire.

He lived in a small town named Lewis.  
On the outskirts of town was a cluster of abandoned houses;  
they reminded him of his old posters on his bedroom walls, covered in creases and faded.  
No one ever spoke about why the houses were abandoned.  
Every day, Bruno walked alone between his home and school thinking about them.

One day, after school, Bruno asked his classmates if they wanted to come and explore the houses.  
Before he could finish speaking, someone mentioned going to the shops.  
The boys erupted and jumped in the air, shouting in agreement.  
They left Bruno to answer his question alone.

He mounted his bicycle and rode in the opposite direction.

He went to the far edge of town, riding slowly past the abandoned houses.  
Then he stopped at one that had two broken windows and a tattered purple door, cracks in the wall, and vines engulfing the roof and sides.  
It looked like a face staring back at him —  
a face that didn't ignore him,  
a face that welcomed his presence.

He walked towards the door, half expecting it to be locked, the hinges jammed from the passage of time.  
He placed his hand on the doorknob and felt the smooth orb turn on its own inside his palm.

Bruno felt a strong gravitational pull.  
He tried to step backwards, thinking of his bicycle —  
but then the world changed.

He was surrounded by darkness.

He saw tiny white dots that turned into letters and numbers, fragments of words floating past him.

He looked back — the door was no longer there.

He tried to comprehend what was going on.

Bruno carefully moved around a little and realised he could fly in this dimension.

His fear turned into something else, something new.

He felt good, like a superhero.

Bruno flew to the number seven that was floating nearby.

He grabbed onto it and pulled himself up.

Now he was riding the number, using its surface to glide further into the darkness.

But his euphoria was cut short.

Suddenly, Bruno realised he was slowly fading away.

First his hand disappeared, then his arms, feet and legs.

He looked down, watching his torso slowly eclipse.

The process felt surprisingly warm.

When Bruno's head was about to disappear, he felt calm.

He thought of his bike —

and then he thought he could hear his dad's voice —

but it didn't matter anymore.

In seconds, Bruno was gone.

Bruno's parents called the police.

They searched the town, combing the streets and the forests beyond, but Bruno had vanished without a trace.

Days slipped by.

At school, someone finally noticed the empty chair at the back of the classroom.

*"What was his name again?"* a boy whispered.

No one could quite remember.

Out on the edge of Lewis,

the house with the tattered purple door stood silent,

the vines coiling tighter around a bicycle wheel.