



Rahel, Anders and the Wormholes

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Age 12+

Reeling from her parents' divorce, Rahel goes to stay with her grandma in the countryside and find solace where she spent so many childhood summers. Alas, peace is elusive there as well. Rahel's old friends have grown apart and seem too cheerful for sharing troubles with, anyway. The only good listeners she finds are Joosep and a boy in a wheelchair named Anders, who recently came there for the summer. Even so, her favorite time of all is when she wanders the woods alone. When Rahel's path starts leading to the mysterious Witches' Cave more and more often, she decides to let her friends in on the secret and try to find out what happened to the four children who ventured into it so many years ago, and why only one returned.



Translation sample

[pp. 4–5]

Rahel stared hypnotized at the way that number 8, the opposing team's captain, snaked his way through the defense, made a smooth fake, and scored yet another two-point basket.

His team's lead had stretched to a daunting 15 points with just three minutes left in the game. Three minutes is a rather long time in basketball, but it was obvious that with the way Rahel's school had been playing the last quarter, there was no chance of winning.

"I don't get why they can't get him already!?" Karina hissed, typing irritably on her phone.

Rahel didn't reply. She didn't even react when Romet, one of the boys on their team, scored a quick three-pointer. The crowd went wild. Two minutes and forty seconds were left and they were still down by twelve. Anything was possible. Theoretically, at least.

But then, No. 8 took control of the ball again. Almost toying with the other players, he dribbled casually down the court and casually made another basket. The boy's control of his body and the ball was astounding. He made it seem as if everyone else was moving in slow motion.

"This guy's unbelievable!" Karina murmured.

She wasn't even angry anymore. Rather, she felt a little shocked by the incredible ease with which No. 8 scored yet another basket.

"Have you ever seen anything like this in your entire life?"

Rahel bit her bottom lip. An earthy smell suddenly filled her nostrils. Dusty soil that the ball unleashed every time it hit the ground. The sun was blazing, perspiration streamed down her temples, and the moment the boy came to an abrupt stop, wheels produced a strangely familiar screeching . . . And the ball swished through the net.

"Yes," Rahel said.

She knew Karina couldn't hear her through the deafening hoots and whistles both teams' supporters were making to throw off their opponents.

The answer wasn't meant so much for Rahel's friend as it was for herself.

To convince her. To reassure herself that it hadn't all been a dream.

To remember that it truly happened.

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September 21st

When Rahel arrived at Anders's place, she noticed a big half-packed duffel bag in the middle of his bedroom.

"You going somewhere?"

Anders bit his lip. He looked as if he'd been caught red-handed.

"I've got physical therapy tomorrow back in the city. My dad's coming to pick me up."

"And when were you planning on telling me?!"

"Well, I told you now," he replied softly.

Rahel made no response. A curious, unsettling melancholy draped over her. Would Anders really have just up and left without saying anything? she wondered. Could I have come to visit him tomorrow and found out . . .

Anders seemed to read her mind.

"I know I should have told you earlier.

But I wussed out. I didn't want to ruin your good mood."

Maybe he was right. It would have thrown her off. But at least she'd have had time to get used to the idea. Now, it was like a bolt of lightning in a clear sky.

"How long's your therapy?"

"Two weeks."

Two weeks suddenly felt like forever.

"I'll be coming back to the countryside after," Anders quickly reassured her. "That is if . . ."

"If what?"

"If you're still here."

"Well, if you're coming, then I'll definitely be here," she promised.

"Great!" Anders said and grinned.

"How'd it happen, anyway?" Rahel asked after a while.

"Oh, the usual. Just a twist of fate." Fate. Again.

"It was my fault the accident happened, too, though. I was on my bike and went through a crosswalk. I was running late for practice and since my coach wasn't the biggest fan of anyone not being on time, I was going fast and didn't notice the car. It was already pretty dark. The driver didn't see me, either. He couldn't because I was going so fast. All of a sudden, there was this really loud bang. The next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital. I'd come out of a coma. Ten days. I had a severe head injury. And at first, I didn't even realize I couldn't feel my legs. Just like that, nothing."

Again, Rahel didn't know what to say. "I'm sorry," was such a hollow, pointless remark made in every movie and TV show. Even though she really was sorry it'd happened. Incredibly sorry.

"One second. One second earlier or later and it would never have happened," Anders continued. "Maybe that's what I have such a hard time accepting it. Maybe it would've been easier if it were something that hits you slowly. Paralysis or your muscles simply atrophying. Sure, I'd still ask: 'Why me?' But now, I'm left wondering if I could have prevented the accident from happening somehow. If I'd been going one second faster or slower . . ."

One second . . . Something most people never even notice in their lives. And even then, it's usually only when they're watching sports on TV, Rahel pondered. Here, during this conversation, I've gone through hundreds of seconds and not one of them mattered. It doesn't matter if there's a two- or three-second pause between sentences, or even longer. And even so, it's not a meaningless measure of time. A one-second loss is huge in the 100-meter dash. And I bet a second can mean life or death for an ambulance or the police sometimes, too.

"You can have that!"

"What?"

Rahel realized she'd been squeezing Anders's stress ball for several minutes, just as she had many a time before. He'd noticed it a while ago, apparently. The stress ball looked like a real basketball, just much tinier. For some reason, Rahel honestly did enjoy squeezing it or just rolling it around her palm every now and then.

Rahel looked at the ball, then at Anders. And suddenly, she was terrified. What if something went wrong? What if this was the last time she'd ever see him?

Just like that, she blanked on everything she'd wanted to say to him. Now, while she still had the chance. What if it was her last? What if she were soon wandering through unfamiliar times and landscapes, desperately wishing for the life she almost hated right now?

"You seem kind of sad."

Because we might never see each other again.

Rahel shrugged. The lump in her throat kept her from saying anything.

"Two weeks," Anders said. "It's not that long of a time!"

Rahel nodded.

Sure. It really wasn't such a long time. It just might turn out to be far longer than usual if the weeks didn't go the way she hoped; if they involved disappearing into wormholes where she might accidentally live out the full span of her lifetime, so fast that she barely realized it was happening.

"You said once that if we were meant to meet each other, then it could've happened anytime and anywhere. Why do you think it was meant to be?"

"Because it happened. We met each other."

One second. Because of that one second.

And then, Rahel realized she hadn't asked the most important question of all yet. How could she have nearly forgotten?

"When did it happen? Your accident?"

"Last autumn. I'll never forget the day. It'll stay with me for the rest of my life. September 21st at six fifty-five p.m."

September 21st. The day her father and Veronika met!

Rahel couldn't believe that the two exact things she wanted to change about the past had taken place at precisely the same time.

She could only choose one.

