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I'll tell you what I saw today. I saw two women, well it turned out it was a girl and a woman, but it wasn't really clear. They were wearing scarves on their heads so you couldn't see their hair and only a glimpse of white skin. But the way they held each other it was like they were one person because they were so close together, locked in an embrace, sculpted together like they were made of black and white marble. They were standing at the top of a sweep of escalators right at the entrance to a three-storey shopping centre so you had to see them as you came in and they were grieving publicly. I was with Henry because it was the sunset hour so school was out and Henry stood there in his uniform and stared and stared at these two entwined women with the white of cheekbone and forehead shining out from the black of their scarves and their dark gowns falling to their feet. They were fused together.

They do not go forwards into the light of the shopping centre nor out into the grey dusk and rain, but stand frozen. And in her left hand the girl holds tight a lock of hair, dark hair and it catches my eye and makes me stop.

'Henry don't stare at the women I've told you not to stare.'

So I turn my head away as if I'm not looking any more but my eyes are caught by the girl who has raised her eyes to mine. She does not smile. But I have seen the lock of hair in her hand and I have seen her eyes. And I love her madly for her black eyes shining with tears and her red unsmiling mouth and for the way she trembles close to her mother so pale and sad. And so I cannot leave her in the shopping centre and I ignore my mother who wants to drag me away to buy socks on the third floor because instead I am falling in love with a shrouded girl who is seized in an unending embrace by her mother above rolling silver steps.

In his bag he has five sticks and two strands of wire. Henry is thirteen and he has read that thirteen is an unlucky number. Henry does not necessarily believe this piece of information about thirteen being unlucky, not because he has anything against magic but because he doesn't believe what he reads and because he carries sticks and wire. He knows wood is lucky and holds powerful spirits and he knows that wire can be transformed into any sort of key.

And so there were these two women, you'd have to wonder what they were doing there at the top of the escalators at such a busy time blocking everyone's way. But they were so upset about something and they were so different in their black scarves with all their hair hidden and you couldn't see their faces to catch their eye and sort of let them know that they should move on or at least move away so people could get past. And they kept moaning and rocking right there in the shopping centre

between the chemist and the bank which was a busy thoroughfare. We were all pretending not to look, sneaking looks from sliding eyes. Everyone except for Henry, who stood for a minute staring at them. And then did something that was odd even for Henry.

He walked right over to that pair of women and put his hand out to the girl.

'Hey Henry, what on earth do you think you're doing?'

He was rummaging in his bag with one hand and holding out his other hand to the girl, palm upwards like some kind of sign and he was staring straight into her eyes as if he could hold her there forever with his gaze.

And the old woman turned as Henry threw down five sticks at the girl's feet. They clattered onto the marble tiles and rang out through the cavernous shopping centre and where they landed great cracks were opening in the earth. And he reached again into his bag and drew out two strands of wire and held them quivering like swords in each hand. That boy stood there in the shopping centre at the top of the escalators with his sticks cracking the earth at his feet and his swords glinting upright in either hand while the mother gripped her daughter close in grief to prevent contact with the boy who is from another world, a stranger to them both.

But the daughter continues to gaze at Henry and as she is drawn towards him a crystal tear falls to the ground and blooms as a red poppy from the marble where it is open to the earth. And the boy Henry twirls his iron blades above his head until they spin and gleam beneath fluorescent light and he brings them spinning down between mother and daughter. The metal blows them asunder, unlocking their grieving grip.

The mother wilts to the floor and the daughter picks the red poppy.

My dark-eyed girl plucks my poppy in her white left hand and I seize my sticks, one two three four five, throw them high into the moonless sky above the marble floor which slams together as four hooves clatter down and a black tail swirls through the air. My love swoons in my arms and I spin my wires around her neck and breast, peeling the black away and draping rubies across her ivory skin.

Entwined we gallop down the escalators and into the gaping earth.

And in the land of perpetual war a thirteen-year-old boy is gunned down in the southern town of Khan Younis, bringing Thursday's death toll to at least sixteen. Collateral damage in a civil war. It is his hair the black-eyed girl holds as she vanishes into the earth.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jane Gleeson-White.