

Winter Pulse

After his parents' deaths, Oscar returns to his childhood woods to whisper his pain to the trees and let his tears fall on their bark like salty rain. Without family to lean on, he has to make do with the swaying branches, the rustling kindnesses they pass along, their significance increased by his dependency.

That January is way too cold for spring flowers. But it's like the energy from his love and grief pulse through the tree roots and mycelia into the soil. Crocus bulbs spark, pushing up through winter's mushed leaves into bright bursts of early purple. Petals open to reveal tiny sunshine hearts.

When Oscar sees them, he smiles. His smile is the mirror image of his dad's, reflected in the light-struck puddle at his feet, while the sound in his head is his mum singing, "You are my sunshine..."

For the first time since he was a child, Oscar takes out his dad's old penknife and starts whittling new life into a piece of dead wood. The ruffled owl that's been nesting inside his heart is stronger than he'd have thought possible. His fingers know the shape of the owlet in his hands before he's even carved it.