

"This book is the monster that lives inside your closet."

—GRADY HENDRIX

INCIDENTS AROUND THE HOUSE



A
NOVEL

JOSH MALERMAN

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *BIRD BOX*

BY JOSH MALERMAN

Bird Box

A House at the Bottom of a Lake

Black Mad Wheel

Unbury Carol

Inspection

Goblin

Pearl (previously titled *On This, the Day of the Pig*)

Carpenter's Farm

Malorie

Ghoul n' the Cape

Daphne

Spin a Black Yarn

Incidents Around the House



Incidents
Around
the House

A Novel

Josh Malerman



NEW YORK

Incidents Around the House is a work of fiction. Names, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Published in the United States by Del Rey, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

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Hardback ISBN 9780593723128

Ebook ISBN 9780593723135

randomhousebooks.com

Book design by Diane Hobbing, adapted for ebook

Image on title page by AdobeStock/Pb

Cover design: Caroline Johnson

Cover image: Magdalena Russocka/Trevillion Images (rabbit)

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About the Author

For Finnegans and Elliott
For, when children, seeing things

Author's Note

The unique format of this book is intentional: left-justified for narration/action, indentation for dialogue, with spaces between. All in the name of perspective: This story is told by a child.

—JM

1

Good night, Daddo!
Good night, Mommy!

Mommy and Daddo leave my room.
I pull the covers up to my chin.
Other Mommy comes out of the closet.

Hi, I say.
I'm so excited to see you again.

2

Bela, Mommy says to me. Eat.

I'm not hungry, I say.

But still. Eat.

I'm not—

I've got minutes, only minutes. Then work. Remember? That's the place I go to make all the little money so we can buy things like food. So, you? Eat the food. Help me out here.

Little money? I ask.

Sometimes it feels that way, hon. Like the money I make is physically smaller than what other people get.

I eat. Mommy always gives me oatmeal. Daddo never gives me breakfast because one time he gave me eggs and sausage and I ate till I threw up and Mommy got mad at him and so now only Mommy gives me breakfast. But Daddo does the dishes.

I love you, Mommy says. Bela?

My mouth is full of oatmeal.

Say I love you too, Mommy says. Don't make me ask you to say that, 'kay?

'Kay.

I love you, Bela.
Love you too.
What's on your mind? she asks.
Nuthin'.

But there is something on my mind. I'm looking at the recycle bin.

Bela, Mommy says. *Eat*.
Where does it go? I ask.
Where does what—

But she looks to where I'm looking.

Are you seriously asking me about recycling right now?

I nod. She looks impatient.

I don't know where it goes, she says.
Is it a better place?
Better place than what?
Than where we are?

Mommy looks at me the way she does when I say something that surprises her.

I don't know what that means, Mommy says. The whole point is that it comes back, as...something else, I guess.

Something else.
I think of carnations.

Bela—

But she doesn't need to tell me again. I eat. Then she's up from the table.

Be good for your daddo, Mommy says.

When will you be home? I ask.

I don't know yet. Might be late. I don't know.

She looks frazzled. That's the word Daddo uses when Mommy looks like this. She's wearing her brown leather coat. Her black pants. I don't have to go anywhere because it's still summer. Daddo works all the time. Mommy's schedule is all over the place. That's how she says it.

Bye, Bela, Mommy says.

Bye.

She leaves the kitchen. Daddo is in the den working already, and I don't hear her say goodbye to him before she leaves out the front door. I go quietly upstairs to my room. I wait for a second by the table with the flowers in the hall.

Other Mommy is already standing outside my closet doors.

I don't want her to make the face I think she's about to make. She gets impatient like Mommy does.

I know she wants to talk about carnations.

I go into my bedroom.

And I wave at her.

And I sit on the end of my bed, where I know she likes to talk.

She's been coming out of the closet a lot more lately.

She walks over to me now. Sometimes it's like she floats.

She sits on the bed too. Slowly. Next to me.

And she asks:

Can I go into your heart?

3

The first time I told Mommy and Daddo about Other Mommy they laughed. It was good-night time and I told Mommy good night and then I said it again and Mommy said,

Why did you say that twice, Bela?

And I said,

I was saying good night to Other Mommy.

They both smiled and their eyes got wide and Daddo made a funny sound like from a spooky movie. Then Mommy's smile went away and she asked,

Who's Other Mommy, Bela?

But I was embarrassed. So I said,

I'm tired!

Daddo laughed again and shut the light and they left my room, but I saw Mommy look back once through the crack in the door. Her eyes looked right at mine. Then she and Daddo went to their own bedroom.

Then Other Mommy made the grunting sound she makes when she stands up on the other side of my bed, in the space between my bed and the wall, when she's been crouched down there on the carpet waiting for them to leave.

4

Mommy only left for work ten minutes ago, but Daddo already calls to me.

Bela, you up there?

Yeah.

Bela?

Yeah!

Come on down. You don't have to play alone.

I'm not alone.

What?

You're in the house too.

Come on down. We'll find something for you to do.

I'm doing stuff.

Daddo comes up the stairs. Other Mommy steps into my bathroom.

The kids at school say I'm lucky I have a bathroom connected to my bedroom.

What are you doing in here? Daddo asks.

Stuff.

You're just standing in the middle of your room.

No, I'm not.

Bela.

I was thinking what to do next.

Daddo sniffs the air like he smells something bad. I don't want him to see Other Mommy in the bathroom. I don't want her to talk to him. I don't want her to ask him what she always asks me.

What's that smell? Daddo asks.

I don't smell it.

Are you serious? It's totally disgusting.

He sniffs again. He goes toward the bathroom.

I'm ready to go downstairs, I say.

Hang on.

Now, Daddo!

No. Hang on.

I hang on as Daddo goes into the bathroom. He goes in far enough so I don't see him. I wonder if Other Mommy is making that face at him.

Then I hear the toilet flush and Daddo steps out again.

He taps my belly.

You okay? he asks. Smells like a gas-station bathroom in there.

What does that mean? I ask.

He looks once back to the bathroom. The noise of the toilet stops. It's done flushing.

Come on, Daddo says. Let's hang out downstairs. You can play a game in the den while I work. We got that amazing Michigan puzzle.

It is a great puzzle. All the roads and cities and the state bird (the robin) and the state flower (the apple blossom) and the state flag, my favorite flag of any flag in the world.

Okay, I say.

He smiles, but he looks at me the way Mommy looked at me that one night through the open bedroom door. Like he thinks there's more to what I'm saying than what I'm saying.

Behind him, Other Mommy is peeking out of the bathroom.

Let's go, I say.

You get as restless as your mom, Daddo says. I guess energy needs somewhere to go.

I think of energy going someplace else. I think of carnations.

Am I wrong in saying you used to play outside more often? Daddo asks.

I don't know.

I'm not trying to make you feel weird, he says. I just have many memories of you through the den window, seeing you on the front lawn, running around.

I don't know.

What's Deb doing today?

I don't know.

What about some other friends?

We both just kinda look at each other because we both know I don't have any other friends. There's Mommy and Daddo and Deb. And Kelvin too. Other Mommy has been my friend as long as I can remember. But lately she won't stop asking me the same question. It used to be she'd wait till night to come out of the closet, but now she's out before I even get out of the bed in the morning.

Whatever, Daddo says. I just wanna make sure you're doing as much as you used to do. Exercise. That kind of stuff.

He's right. I used to do more. I used to play outside. But then I'd see Other Mommy watching from the windows upstairs. And what if she came downstairs to talk to Daddo in the den while I was outside?
Daddo rubs the top of my head.

No worries, he says. We all go through phases. I mean, when's the last time I exercised at all?

He smiles and I try to smile too.

The puzzle, he says. Think of it as...*mind* exercise. I say that counts.

I follow him out of my bedroom. We head downstairs and I don't look back because I know she's still peeking.

It feels like she's always peeking these days. Night or day.