

Skellig, by David Almond. Extract.

Chapter Two

I nearly got into the garage that Sunday morning. I took my own torch and shone it in. The outside doors to the back lane must have fallen off years ago and there were dozens of massive planks nailed across the entrance. The timbers holding the roof were rotten and the roof was sagging in. The bits of the floor you could see between the rubbish were full of cracks and holes. There were old chests of draws and broken wash-basins and bags of cement, ancient doors leaning against the walls, deck chairs with the cloth seats rotted away. Great rolls of rope and cable hung from nails. Heaps of water pipes and great boxes of rusty nails were scattered on the floor. Everything was covered in dust and spiders' webs. There was mortar that had fallen from the walls. There was a little window in one of the walls but it was filthy and there were rolls of cracked lino standing in front of it. The place stank of rot and dust. Even the bricks were crumbling like they couldn't bear the weight any more. It was like the whole thing was sick of itself and would collapse in a heap and have to get bulldozed away.

I heard something scratching in one of the corners, and something scuttling about, then it all stopped and it was just dead quiet in there.

I stood daring myself to go in.

I was just going to slip inside when I heard Mum shouting at me.

"Michael! What you doing?"

She was at the back door.

"Didn't we tell you to wait till we're sure it's safe?"

I stepped back and looked at her.

"Well, didn't we?" she shouted.

"Yes," I said.

"So keep out! All right?"

I shoved the door and it lurched half-shut on its single hinge.

"All right?" she yelled.

"All right," I said. "Yes. All right. All right."

"Do you not think we've got more to worry about than stupid you getting crushed in a stupid garage?"

"Yes."

"You just keep out then! Right?"

"Right. Right, right, right."

Then I went back into the wilderness we called a garden and she went back to the flaming baby.

The Nowhere Emporium, Ross MacKenzie. Extract.

Page 64 – (Mr Silver is the name of the man who owns the Nowhere Emporium and Daniel is the main character.)

Silver reached into the pocket of his coat. He placed the battered old book on his lap. “I was writing in this book,” said Silver. He took it up and fanned the pages, causing his wild hair to blow into his eyes. “And what a book. It is the key to this place. The secret behind the Emporium. My *Book of Wonders*.”

Daniel stared at the cracked cover. The title was all but faded away, though there were places where the gold lettering was still visible; he could decipher the letters L, S, W, O and D. He leaned in. Was it his imagination, or could he feel the book pulling at him, drawing him closer?

Silver continued. “For every room that will ever come to exist in the Emporium, there is a page in this book. When I have an idea for a new Wonder, and I’ve thought it through carefully and decided that it is suitable, I begin to write it down. The pages are enchanted and entwined with the shop. When I have finished writing, a Wonder will appear somewhere in the corridors.”

“All the doors I saw on my way here?” said Daniel. “All the wonders? They have a page in that book?”

Silver thumbed through the pages, selecting one passage and placing the open book on the table. The writing within, in deep black ink, was small and neat, and decorated with many curls and flourishes. There was also a sketch, drawn in flowing black lines that seemed to come alive as Daniel gazed at it.

“I recognise this,” he said, leaning ever closer to the book. “It’s my wagon!”

Silver smiled for a fleeting moment, causing the lines around his eyes to deepen.

“Correct,” he said. “I trust you find it comfortable enough? If you wish me to change anything...”

“It’s perfect,” said Daniel. His fingers fluttered hungrily, and he felt a great rush of excitement as he asked, “Can I have a closer look?”

A hesitation.

Silver handed over the book.

It was heavier than Daniel expected. But it also felt familiar somehow, as if he had held it before. He flicked through page after page, noting in his mind a list of rooms he longed to visit. There was an underground lake of gold, and a cove filled with sapphire water where a mermaid whispered the whereabouts of buried treasure. He saw a path through an enchanted forest, and the mountaintop den of an armour-clad dragon, and a grassland populated by lions. There were ancient pages where the ink was worn and could not be properly read. One such passage

caught his attention, and as he stared at the words his stomach told him that they contained something vast and dark and ancient.

“The Library of Souls,” said Mr Silver. “I am a fan of stories. A collector. And there is no greater story than that of life. The Library of Souls holds on its many shelves the life story of everyone who has ever lived, everyone who will ever live.”

Wonderstruck, Daniel tried to imagine a room vast enough to hold such a great number of books, but he was distracted when Mr Silver gasped and breathed through his teeth. He sat forward in his chair and held his hand to his chest.

“What’s wrong?”

Silver closed his eyes tight and took a deep breath. He let the breath out slowly, opened his eyes and blinked. “I’m fine,” he said.

Daniel’s eyes lingered on Silver’s hand, which was still pressed to his chest.

“Now that you’ve seen inside the Book of Wonders,” said Mr Silver, as if nothing had happened, “it is time for the first test.” He held out an open hand. In his palm sat a golden fountain pen. Daniel stared at it.

“I don’t understand.”

“I want you to attempt a Wonder of your own. Write in the book.”

“Me? Make a room appear from nowhere? You’re having a laugh!”

“I certainly am not. It’s the quickest way to judge whether you have any talent.”

Daniel fidgeted in his chair. He had not imagined his first test could be something so huge. He took the pen from Silver.

“What if nothing happens?” he asked. “Will you sack me?” Now that he was holding the book, that he’s seen the Wonders within its pages, his old life seemed so very far away. It was like he had been living in black and white, and suddenly the world was alive with colour and possibilities. He was not ready to return to the grey.

Silver thought about the question. “We shall worry about that if it happens.” He mimed writing. “On you go.”

Daniel found a blank page. His palms were wet.

“What shall I write about?”

“That is up to you,” said Silver. “Though I would advise starting with something small. A solitary room, perhaps. Nothing too fancy.”

Daniel thought and thought. Then, from nowhere, an image appeared in his mind, something comforting from his past, and the idea began to blossom and flower. When he was certain as he could be, he began to write in Mr Silver’s book.

When he had finished, the entire page was filled with the neatest handwriting he could manage. His fingers tingled warmly.

Silver motioned for Daniel to hand the book over.

“Do you think it worked?” Daniel’s heart punched at the inside of his chest.

Mr Silver shook the messy hair from his eyes and went to the door.

“Let’s find out,” he said.

The Emporium was closed, which meant the corridors were deserted and cloaked in shadow. As he followed Silver, sticking close, Daniel imagined that he could hear the walls breathing. A shiver danced down his spine.

As if reading his mind, Mr Silver said, “It’s perfectly safe to walk the corridors – to explore. In fact, I encourage it. Nothing will harm you. In all the years I have been welcoming customers into the Emporium, no one has left with so much as a bruise.”

“It’s just the thought of getting lost,” said Daniel. “I could wander around forever.”

“You will find your feet,” said Silver. “Walking the corridors and passageways will become second nature. And know this: if, by some curious twist of fate, you find yourself in trouble, the Emporium will help you. All you have to do is ask.”

Silver slowed at last. He tilted his head to the side, as if he were listening for some far away sound. He took four slow steps, to the nearest shining black door, and pressed his ear against the surface. He stepped back. His gaze flicked from the door to Daniel and back.

“This is new,” he said. “And it is not one of mine.” He gave Daniel a curious look, like he was staring at an alien creature. “Open it.”

Daniel trembled as he approached the door. Even after everything he’d seen in these past few days, he couldn’t quite believe that a new room had appeared simply because he’d written in an old book. And at the same time, he felt a strange sense of wondrous pride. But was it enough? Would he pass the test?

His hand was slick with sweat as it grasped the door handle. The lock gave a satisfying click. The door opened.

The room was circular and dim and cold, and in the centre stood a column of stone, honeycombed with hundreds, thousands of open compartments. In each compartment sat a glass sphere. A staircase wound up around the column, stretching into endless darkness.

Mr Silver stared around. His mouth hung open a little.

Daniel reached out to touch the column. He half expected his hand to pass through, that it was not real. But his fingers found the cool, rough stone.

“It’s real!” he whispered. “It’s really here, just like I imagined when I was writing in the book!”

Silver selected a sphere from the column and spun it in his hands, watching as a flurry of snow whipped around the inside of the glass.

“Snow globes,” he said. “Why snow globes?”

Daniel had already begun to climb the spiral staircase, staring at the hundreds of shining glass globes. Some were smaller than marbles, others larger than his head. Each was empty, save for the snowflakes inside.

“My mum collected them,” Daniel said. “It’s one of the only things I really remember about her from before Dad died. Before she was sad all the time. When I was little, I’d sit on her knee and she’d tell me each one had a secret inside. That’s what this room is: a place to keep secrets. The globes are empty because they’re waiting to be filled. Whisper your secret into one and it’ll be safe.”

Mr Silver brushed his hands against a few of the snow globes. He stared about, a delighted twinkle dancing in his grey eyes.

“It’s perfect for the Emporium,” he said.

The Nowhere Emporium , Ross Mackenzie. *Extract from the opening. Consider how the author uses speech and the crowd to both build a sense of excitement and to provide description.*

Nice touches – crisp, dawn, November

Building reader curiosity
Description through dialogue and has a dual role of building excitement.

Moving time on ‘by evening time’

Lovely verb – jostled, glimpse and adjectives ‘curious crowd’ ‘mysterious building’ ‘wonderful theories’ ‘darkened windows’.

Repeated use of word bricks to add more detail and use of ‘ed’ verbs for tis.

Great use of the spider.

Prepositions are used to give detail, e.g. over the window, in the entranceway.

Use of a hyphen to add a simile for extra detail. Pupils could practice imitating this.

Notice the pattern within the semi colon list (pairs connected with and) and the power of three.

Draw attention to vocabulary ‘emerged’ ‘soared’ ‘flashing’ ‘climbed’ ‘gasped’ ‘exploded’ ‘dazzling’ ‘enchanted’

Crowd actions – laughing, reach out, gasping, being entranced, touching the brickwork and stepping though the door. These all help the reader to feel like they are standing there with the crowd.

Remember that participle clauses have to have the same subject. They allow you to add extra detail that modifies the noun.

The shop from nowhere arrived with the dawn on a crisp November morning.

Word travelled quickly around the village, and by midday the place was abuzz with rumours and hearsay.

“There were four shops in the row yesterday. Today there are five!”

“Did you hear? It sits between the butcher’s and the ironmonger’s...”

“The brickwork is black as midnight, and it sparkles strangely in the light!”

By evening time, a curious crowd had begun to gather around the mysterious building. They jostled for position and traded strange and wonderful theories about where the shop had come from and what it might sell, all the while hoping to catch a glimpse of movement through the darkened windows.

The shop was indeed built from bricks the colour of midnight, bricks that shimmered and sparkled under the glow of gas streetlamps. Blocking the doorway was a golden gate so fine and intricate that some wonderous spider might have spun it. Over the windows, curling letters spelled out a name :

THE NOWHERE EMPORIUM

There was a glimmer of movement in the entranceway; and a ripple of excitement passed through the crowd. And then silence fell – a silence so deep and heavy that it seemed to hang in the atmosphere like mist.

The shop’s door swung open. The fine golden gate turned to dust, scattering in the wind.

The air was suddenly alive with a hundred scents: the perfume of toasted coconut and baking bread; of salty sea air and freshly fallen rain; of bonfires and melting ice.

A dove emerged from the darkness of the shop and soared through the air, wings flashing white in the blackness. The enchanted crowd watched as it climbed until it was lost to the night. And then, as one, they gasped. The black sky exploded with light and colour, and a message in dazzling fireworks sparks and shimmers spelled out:

THE NOWHERE EMPORIUM IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS.

Bring your imagination...

The writing hung in the air just long enough for everyone to read it, and then the words began falling to the ground, a rain of golden light. The crowd laughed in delight, reaching out to catch the sparks as they fell.

Everybody who’d gathered outside the Emporium was entranced. No one had ever seen a spectacle such as this. One by one they walked forward, touched the sparkling brickwork, examined the tips of their fingers. And then they stepped through the door to find out what was waiting.

Can you also spot the participle clauses (main clause, ‘ing’ verb) and absolutes (main clause, noun + ing verb) There is also a participle clause with ‘ed’ verb.

It is also worth examining the use of semi colons and colons; the use of a hyphen; and the technique highlighted in green. Can they imitate these sentences?

DESCRIPTION FOCUS

An extract from *The Snow Dragon*, by Abi Elphinstone (Winter Magic a collection of short stories)

The setting is described first from the point of view of everyone living in the town and then from the point of view of the main character. This is a great technique as it allows the author to give quite a lot of information about the setting in an interesting way. It also allows the reader to start to get a sense of the main character.

Simple sentences open the start of the paragraphs saying how ordinary it is. Then the author picks out details and uses commas in a list to explain what ordinary is. 'rows of red-brick houses, semi-detached gardens and a park with swings and a slide' – use of preposition 'with' to help provide extra detail.

The author uses the church tower to give more information about the setting – e.g. slate roofs. Note the choice of vocabulary – 'ringed with yew trees'. The last sentence tells us that this is one viewpoint.

The opening of the next paragraph, starting with '*but*' indicates to the reader that there might be another viewpoint.

The author uses **semi colons** to create a list. This allows lots of information to be given in a compact way. **Repetition** is used at the start of each line '**she knew that...**'

Again, the author picks out **specific details**. She uses **preposition** to help visualise – **beyond** the woods, **out** of her house..sat **on** a bench **in** her garden, **on top** of the church spire, **in** the bathroom. She uses what she can **hear** as well as what she could see – creaking weather vane. **Vocabulary choices** – precise nouns (Badger sett, church spire, skylight window), vivid verbs (hobbled, creaking), adjectives (glowed brightly).

She tells that these things don't happen all the time – when you listened hard enough, when almost everyone was asleep.

The author uses humour to consider that when you study a scene you might see things that you wish you had never noticed. The style of this sentence is like the author is letting you into a secret and the use of brackets as an '**aside**' helps to create this - as if the author is giving extra information just to the reader. The last sentence confirms that watching the town is what Phoebe often does and helps us to start to form opinions about the character.

Consider what you know or can infer about Phoebe already.

There was nothing unusual or especially exciting about Whistlethrop. It was an ordinary English town. A string of shops and restaurants lined the High Street and behind them back roads filtered out into rows of red-brick houses, semi-detached gardens and a park with swings and a slide. The town had a church, too, with a steeple that towered above the slated roofs and a graveyard ringed with yew trees. And knew in all most people who lived there, this was all that Whistlethrop was.

But to Phoebe, who peered at things more closely, the town was a very different place. She knew that there was a badger sett in the woods beyond the park; she knew that when almost everyone was asleep and the street lamps glowed brightly, an old lady hobbled out of her house and then sat on a bench in her garden to watch the moon; she knew that if you listened hard enough you could hear the weathervane creaking on top of the church spire. She also knew, although she wished she didn't, that the vicar practices yoga without his robes (or indeed his trousers, shirt, socks or pants) in the bathroom on Wednesday nights. And Phoebe knew all of this because she watched, every evening, from the skylight window of an attic in Griselda Bone's Home for Strays.

She leaned forward onto the balls of her feet, and the tower of books below her wobbled. Then she clung tighter to the skylight and nudged it open, because she knew that although it was dangerous to stand on top of forty-three encyclopaedias, it was also extremely important. She pushed

Again, look at **vocabulary** choices. 'balls of her feet', 'tower of books', 'clung tighter', 'skylight', 'wobbled'. **Action** (although only subtle action) breaks up the description.

A pair of **dashes** have been used to give extra information in a more informal manor, as an aside to the reader. A lovely **comparison** has been used to show the transformation of the town. In the last sentence the author has used an appositive – taking something quite vague 'a promise somehow' and giving detail to it 'a pledge that today...'. The description of the scene is linked to the feelings this provokes in the character.

Notice the **precise details** again. The author has thought very carefully about what it is like when you wake up to snow and perhaps all you can see are bird prints.

A **simile** is used 'spread out like ripples of milk'.

The author uses 'just' to show how **actions are happening at the same time**. As she is looking out – the two boys emerge. Some lovely **vocabulary** helps the reader to visualise the scene – 'craning her neck', 'tinsel strewn', 'clutching sledges', 'hurtled', 'scooped up', 'flung'. And the tiny detail help to further build the scene – the holly wreath, the windowsills, the hats and scarves. At the end of the paragraph the author lets the reader **infer** that Phoebe would also like to play in the snow.

The description here hints at the type of place it is as well as what it looks like and how the main character feels to be there. Consider the choice of words such as 'encircled', 'locking', 'neglected', 'barred' and the type of detail – walls, kennels, tall iron gates.

her elbows through the gap in the window, rested her chin on her hands and let her blue eyes grow large and round.

It was Christmas Eve, and from her perch on the outskirts of town, Phoebe could see Whistlethrop was covered in a thick layer of snow. It was the first snow of the winter and it had come silently in the night – the way magic often does – but unlike the shadows and the moonbeams and the stars, this magic had stayed until morning. It had covered her ordinary world and transformed it into a glittering white kingdom, and as Phoebe looked upon it, her body tingled. The snow felt like a promise somehow, a pledge that today might be different from all the other days and that possibly, just possibly, there might be even more magic waiting for her.

She ran her eyes along the rooftops. They were coated white and pricked here and there by the feet of tiny birds – the redwings, jays and fieldfares Phoebe often left titbits of food for. Pavements glistened in the early morning sun, unspoiled by trampling feet, and the countryside beyond the town – fields, hedgerows and copses of woodland – spread out like ripples of milk beneath the clear blue sky.

A holly wreath had just been fixed to the door of the church across the street and just as Phoebe was craning her neck to look at the tinsel strewn along the windowsills of the house beside it, two boys clutching sledges hurtled out of the front door in hats and scarves. Phoebe watched as they scooped up handfuls of snow and flung them at each other, then she sighed.

She wanted to rush out and join them, but Griselda Bone's Home for Strays wasn't the kind of place you could easily leave. A high stone wall encircled the grounds, locking in the patch of gravel in front of the house, the kennels to the sides and the neglected garden at the back, and tall iron gates

barred the way in and out. Once you were in, you were very firmly in. Until Miracle Day, that was... Because at *Griselda Bone's Home for Strays* the strays weren't actually dogs – they were children – and the home was in fact an orphanage.

Once a month, Griselda opened the gates of the orphanage to parents hoping to adopt a child and they spent the day with them helping them in lessons and talking to them over meals. For some reason Griselda dished out muffins instead of punishments on those days, and she even remembered to turn on the central heating so that Phoebe didn't have wear three vests under her shirt. And at the end of the day, after the parents had left and Griselda had turned the central heating off, the orphans were summoned to the hall and told whether a family wanted to adopt them. A few weeks later, when the paperwork was complete, the child could leave the orphanage with their new family and that day – that marvellous day filled with longing – was Miracle Day. Only it never seemed to happen to Phoebe.

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