

TWISTED

**WHERE DID MY
FAMILY GO?**

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WEST 44 BOOKS™



Michael Cooper was sick. Like, *really* sick. He lay in his bed all hot and sweaty. It was about the grossest feeling in the world. His pajamas stuck to his body. And it felt like there was a layer of slime on his skin. If he had to get up, the sheets felt like they were being peeled off of him. And he *reeked*. He couldn't stand anyone who reeked—and now *he* reeked. But he couldn't do much about it. If he took a shower, he'd just start sweating again afterward. So what was the point?

There was nothing he hated more than being sick. He had a very busy life. Far too busy to be lying in bed all day. He went to school like

any other kid. He didn't love school, but he didn't hate it, either. He liked his teachers (most of them). And he liked his classes (most of them). He liked seeing his friends. He liked gym and recess. And his grades were pretty good (most of them).

When he wasn't in school, he did all sorts of fun stuff. He played baseball a lot. Football and basketball, too. He rode his bike or his skateboard. He went swimming every summer, usually in someone's pool. There was also a big lake on the other side of town. It had a rope hanging from a tree and everything. You could swing on it and then drop into the water. That was fantastic. And in the winter, there was sleigh riding and fort building and snowball fighting.

There were a lot of fun things to do at home, too. He had both an Xbox and a PlayStation. There was a huge TV in the living room. And he had a pretty big one in his room,

too. He also had a laptop, an iPad, and an iPhone. His dad even had some cool stuff in the basement. There was a pool table, some vintage video games, and two vintage pinball machines. His dad was always asking him to come and play with him. Michael pretended like he wasn't interested. But he really was. He just couldn't *tell* his dad he was interested. It was, like, one of the most important rules of being a kid. You just couldn't.

With all this stuff in his life, how could he lay in bed all day? Getting sick just wasn't fair. His head ached so much he thought it might crack open. His stomach felt like it had an ocean rolling around inside. And he had no idea his nose could make so much snot. He would've given anything to feel better. *Anything*.

But there was no magical cure. He'd been told this over and over. His dad said it, his mom

said it, even his sister said it. Time—that's what it took. Time and rest and medicine. Michael knew this, but he was still unhappy about it. And because he was unhappy, he was making everybody else unhappy.

It wasn't like this was the first time he'd ever been sick. He had a bad throat infection when he was five. And chicken pox when he was ten. But back then, he liked everyone taking care of him. It was nice to be fussed over. It made him feel like a prince or something. But now he just found everything annoying.

Which was really too bad. If he hadn't been so busy acting like a grouch, he might have noticed some of the strange things that had started happening. Like with his Converse sneakers, which were lying on the floor. When he took them off two days ago, they were white.

Now they were blue.



“Mom!” Michael yelled from his bed.
“*MOM!!!*”

She opened the door a moment later. “Yes, my darling child?” she said, sounding tired. He knew she was being sarcastic.

“I want soup!”

His mom was wearing a plain T-shirt, faded jeans, and flip-flops. Her flame-orange hair was fairly short all around. But she also used gel to make a little point near the front. Michael called this “Mom’s horn.”

“And how do nice kids ask their mothers for soup?” she asked.

“Chicken noodle,” Michael replied, wiping his nose with a tissue. Then he tossed it into the garbage can next to the bed. The can was already

overloaded with about a million others. “And not so hot this time. That last bowl was way too hot.”

His mom put on a smile, but there was nothing cheerful about it.

“Whatever you wish, Prince Michael,” she said. Then she sighed. “Anything else?”

“Yeah, tell Corinne to come in here.”

“Since you’re asking so nicely, sure...”

She rolled her eyes and went out. A few minutes later, Michael’s sister came in. She was skinny like their mom. Her eyes were a beautiful green, and her brown hair was long and straight. She also had a little cluster of freckles on either side of her nose.

She put her hands on her hips.

“What do you want now?”

After she said this, she pressed her lips together hard. This turned them into a short, straight line.

“My tablet,” he said. “You have it in your room.”

“I’m using it to do summer school homework right now!”

“I want to watch a movie online.”

Corinne pointed to the TV. “Watch a movie on *that!*”

“I don’t want to watch on that. I want to watch on my tablet, with my earbuds.”

“Michael, come on...”

“Use your laptop for your homework.”

“It’s at school!” Corinne said. “I forgot it!”

“Then I guess you’re outta luck,” Michael told her. He took a sip of water from a *Star Wars* cup that was on his nightstand.

“You’re such a brat!” she shot back. “Ever since you’ve been sick, you’ve been *impossible!*”

She turned and stomped out before Michael could say anything further. When she

returned, she just about threw the tablet at him. Then she stormed out again, mumbling something under her breath.

His dad came in about ten minutes after that. Neil Cooper was tall like his son. They both also had very dark hair. His, however, was starting to show some silver streaks these days.

“Hey, sport.”

Michael was holding the buds next to his ears. “I’m just about to watch a movie,” he said. “Can you come back later?”

His dad crossed his arms and smiled. Then he leaned against the doorway.

“I understand you’re being quite the grump.”

“I feel terrible.”

“I’m sure you do. I’ve been sick before, so I know how you feel.”

Michael shook his head. “No you don’t.

Not like this. I feel like I'm gonna die."

"You're not going to die, Mike."

"I *feel* like I am."

"Yeah, well, you're not. You'll get better, and everything will be fine. You'll see."

Then his dad came into the room and started cleaning up. He was the kind of person who couldn't help doing stuff like this. If a picture was hanging just a little crooked, he'd straighten it. If someone left a cup or a bowl in the sink, he'd put it in the dishwasher.

He gathered up Michael's dirty clothes, opened the closet door, and threw them in the hamper. Then he took out the garbage can with all the tissues. When he came back, it was empty. Finally, he picked up the Converse sneakers and headed for the closet again.

"Hey, wait a second," Michael said.

"Huh?"

“Those sneakers...” He pointed at them.
“They’re not mine.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Mine are *white*.”

His dad held them up. They were a dark navy with white soles.

“Michael, they’re blue.”

“I know they’re blue. But mine are *white*, so they’re not mine!”

“Mike, you own a half dozen different pairs of Converse.” His dad opened the closet door again. Then he pointed toward the closet floor.
“See?”

“Yeah, but I don’t have any that are *blue*. And I remember taking off the white ones last night.”

His dad shrugged. “I don’t know what to tell you, sport. These are your size. And I saw you wearing them yesterday, not the white ones.”

Michael was about to argue the point further. Then he paused.

“Wait...no. I remember picking out...hang on. Are you sure?”

“Yes, Mike, I’m sure.” He gave Michael a look. Then he added, “And I know these are yours because your mom and I got them for your birthday.”

“You did?”

“We did.”

His dad tossed them into the closet with the others and closed the door again.

“Anyway, I just came in to, um...well, to tell you you’re being a real pain in the butt to everybody.”

“I...feel...*awful*,” Michael reminded him.

“And we’re all trying to help you get better. Just remember that, okay?”

Michael put in his earbuds. “I’m watching

my movie now.”

His dad looked like he was going to say something more. Instead, he just shook his head and went out.

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Michael got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. This was around three o'clock.

He turned himself in the bed and threw his legs over. His toes touched the carpet, and that was good. He loved the feel of carpet under his bare feet. His mom always kept the carpet in their house nicely vacuumed. That was also good. He had a friend, Baker, who lived in a house that was beyond disgusting. It didn't look like anyone *ever* vacuumed his carpet. Michael couldn't imagine letting his bare feet anywhere near it.

He shuffled out of the room and turned

left. His head was still aching like crazy. And his nose still felt about ten pounds heavier than usual. But at least his stomach had stopped churning and turning.

The hallway was quiet and dark except for a small night-light. Michael's eyes were half closed because he was still half asleep. He always thought the same thing during these middle-of-the-night pit stops. *I gotta get back to bed as soon as possible.* He needed sleep. He loved sleep.

About halfway down the hall, he turned left again.

BAM!!!

He bounced away and went down with his arms flying.

“What the *heck?!?*”

His eyes sprung open all the way now. He still wasn't completely awake. But he was getting there fast.

He looked up and saw nothing but a solid wall. It had tan-and-blue wallpaper with lots of flowers. His mom picked it out. His dad hated it. Michael could tell at the time, but his dad never said so. There were also two framed pictures of his Aunt Jennie. In one, she was at the top of a mountain she'd just hiked. There was a huge smile on her face. In the other, she was canoeing down a white-water river. Same smile, like she'd just scored a goal at the World Cup or something.

But none of that's supposed to be there, Michael thought. He felt more confused than he ever had in his life. *It's supposed to be on the OTHER side of the hall! And the bathroom door is supposed to be on—*

He turned and saw that the door was right next to him.

“Wait...what?!” He jumped to his feet. “How is this *HERE*?!” he whispered sharply.

He reached out and touched the door. He did this gently, as if it might explode. Then he pushed it a little. It drifted back an inch or two, its hinges groaning.

He looked to the pictures of Aunt Jennie again. Then to the door. Then the pictures. Then the door.

No, this isn't right...this isn't right at ALL.

Michael pushed the door back all the way and stepped inside. There was another night-light in here. It was a plain one, although it used to be a Mickey Mouse light. His mom changed it one day. She said he was getting too old for a Mickey Mouse light. Michael went along with this and didn't say anything. But

he would've been okay if Mickey had stayed.
Mickey was *classic*.

He looked all around the bathroom. Everything seemed to be where it should—shower, toilet, towel rack, toothbrushes. He opened the cabinet under the sink. Everything in there seemed right, too. A hair dryer was lying with its cord wrapped around it. Extra rolls of toilet paper were stacked in one corner. Next to that was his dad's shaving kit in a worn leather bag.

He looked at himself in the mirror. His dark hair was as tough as the bristles on a brush. And it usually stood straight up. But it spiked ridiculously in every direction now. And he could see how tired he still was. His eyes were red and puffy. They stung a little bit, too.

Have to go back to bed...have to go back to bed...

He decided that he'd been wrong about

the door. It *was* supposed to be on the right side of the hall. A part of him still didn't believe this. But he was in no mood to argue with himself at the moment. So he did what he came to do. Then he flushed and washed his hands.

He shuffled back to his room and fell into bed. As he spun down into darkness, a voice spoke out in his mind.

The door is not supposed to be on that side. And you know it. It's NOT...

He ignored this. Just a wacky part of his brain trying to scare him. It was funny, really—the idea that a door could change places.

Crazy, he told himself.

Then he was snoring away.