

*The Way to*  
RIO LUNA

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which he didn't mind. The only thing Mother Finnegan had offered to buy for Danny was a new copy to replace his tattered book.

Unfortunately, *The Way to Rio Luna* was out of print everywhere. Even if he could find a shiny new one, Danny wouldn't want it. It wouldn't feel right. This one was Pili's. On the cover was a secret garden with floating fairies between spindly trees. Arrows and a compass rose surrounded the title and the author's name. There were rips and creases on the jacket, but it was nothing a bit of tape couldn't fix. The words on the yellowing paper reminded him of the impossible—of the people in his life who were long gone. Sometimes, the book felt alive.

One time, he thought that he could see the letters on the page glowing. When he told Mother Finnegan about it, she said his imagination was too active. Danny didn't feel very active. In fact, one of his favorite things was *sitting*, which was the opposite of being active. He could sit and read for hours and hours. He loved that the words on the page came to life in his mind, like blobs of watercolor taking shape.

But reading alone wasn't the same as reading with Pili. He missed the way she did all the voices, like the one of the Moon Witch who lived inside a tree. He missed the way she

could always distract him when the house was full of screaming and slamming doors. He missed the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches she'd sneak him before bed. She'd put Cap'n Crunch into the peanut butter so it would taste extra sweet and be extra crunchy. He clung to those memories of her the way he clung to his book. There was only one thing Danny believed in more than magic, and it was that Pili loved him and would never have left him alone on purpose.

He knew he'd find her waiting for him in Rio Luna. He simply needed to figure out how to get there. So he looked for portals in the backs of wardrobes. He even dug a hole in the Finnegans' backyard. But instead of a rabbit hole, he discovered only a septic tank. Danny tried to apologize, but when he went to find his foster parents, he overheard them speaking about him.

"We had to pick the looniest of the bunch, didn't we?" Father Finnegan said. "Other kids read the same drivel and they don't act this way."

Mother Finnegan made a clucking noise, like the neighbor's chicken. "Hush now. He just needs time. After his sister—"

"He's got a new sister and a new brother," Father Finnegan said, cutting her off. "The kid doesn't even try. In the morning,

I'm going to throw that book of his in the trash before he breaks a mirror trying to get to La La Land.”

Danny didn't listen to the rest. He went right to his narrow twin bed, fished out *The Way to Rio Luna* from under the covers, and hid it on a dusty shelf in the garage.

He hoped Father Finnegan would forget about it, and for a few days he did.

But then Father Finnegan surprised Danny and his foster siblings with a fishing trip. Danny had always wanted to go on a boat and imagine what a pirate might have felt like. But then Danny remembered that all the fishing supplies were in the garage, gathering dust from the winter. Before he had time to act, Father Finnegan found *The Way to Rio Luna* next to the box of fishing wire and hooks.

“What's this?” Father Finnegan snatched up the book in his calloused fist.

Danny's heart thundered against his rib cage. He lunged for *The Way to Rio Luna*, but the man was too tall and held the copy up in the air. “It's just a book. It's *my* book, please.”

“You have to be part of the real world, Danny,” his foster father said, deep lines crinkling his freckled brow. “This is what puts crazy ideas in your head.”

“Don't call me that,” Danny said, but it was just a

whisper. It was as if his voice was being turned off completely. His body shook as he waited to see what Father Finnegan would do next.

“Get in the car,” Father Finnegan said.

Danny filed in and ignored his foster siblings snickering. The girl said, “You’re in *trouble*.”

Then Danny watched as Father Finnegan strode past the car and to the row of garbage cans. Before he could think, Danny bolted out of the car and ran down the driveway.

“Please, don’t!” Danny shouted. “Please, it’s the only thing I have left—”

Father Finnegan held the book out of reach. He opened the lid to the metal garbage can. Danny jumped and reached and grabbed for it. He felt like a mad, wild whirlwind. Tears ran down his face.

“It’s for your own good,” Father Finnegan said, and he dropped the book into the trash.

Danny cried the entire way to the lake, and while he held his fishing pole. Girl Finnegan blamed his tears for scaring away the fish. They didn’t catch a single one. By the time they were ready to go back to the house, Danny’s eyes felt puffy and burned when he blinked.