

WISPY BOY

By Jerry Rabushka

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CAST: 1 Female

I'd never seen him before. I was walking down the street with my little sister. Well, there's this ice cream stand called The Custard Station down by the railroad tracks. So we'd all go and a train would come by, if you were lucky, and the kids would drip ice cream all over themselves and watch the train.

I walked by this one house. Every street had its one house that wasn't as kept-up as the rest of them. It didn't look poor so much as overgrown. Like Sleeping Beauty lived there and no one had done the yard work in fifty or a hundred years. There was a boy at the screen door. A tall boy, I guess about my age. He was rail thin and sort of gangly and he had long blond hair, brown eyes, looked like he was in prison rather than at home. I'd never seen him at school. I waved to him. He waved back.

And I wanted so much for my sister to be off the planet.

I shoved the ice cream in her face and marched her back home. No train, thank goodness! Then I went to find him. It was like he knew I would come back. He was on the porch. He smiled. A smile came back from deep within my heart. Almost embarrassing.

I launched into this big monologue about my sister tagging along everywhere I go and did he like the Custard Station and how come I never see him at school, and he just smiled and I looked into his eyes and I realized . . . that he couldn't hear a thing I was saying.

He tried talking to me, but it was that way that deaf people talk. I wasn't good at understanding it. He took my hand in his and held up the other telling me to wait. He touched me. It felt electric.

I didn't ask for his name yet. My heart called him Wispy Boy. He was so fragile, so delicate, like wheat on a farm in Nebraska. Like a small wind would knock him over, and like it already had, several times.

He brought out a laptop and we typed messages to each other. We sat on his porch close to each other and typed. His arm brushed against mine at the keyboard. We noticed it but didn't say anything. To say it would destroy it. It's strange. When you don't have to speak it's so

much easier to tell each other your secrets, to fear, to love, to laugh, to feel.

"I really like you." I typed that in. To someone I just met. He looked at me and he smiled, and I wanted to kiss him right then and there, but he backed away a bit.

"Not outside."

We ran the battery down to 3 percent, so we had to be quick about good byes. He said he had to do some housework. That his family was coming home soon and he needed to get stuff done.

So I type "stay here with me."

"I can't. They get very angry. They think I'm a freak because I can't hear."

A car pulled up to the driveway, and he got this look on his face. This worried look. "They are home too soon." He spoke to me.

"When can I see you again?"

"You will. Go. Just go."

I never really paid attention to that house before. You think everyone lives like you do, easy, spoiled, comfortable. I ran off, but I ran back when they all went inside. I hid around the corner of the house. I could do what he could not. I could hear it through the window. The house was shut up, so you had to be close by to hear it, a little screaming, a little crying, someone innocent being beat up by people you thought would love him.

I knew I had to see him again. Soon. I just wasn't sure how. I didn't know what was going on. Maybe I shouldn't get involved.

I know I just met him. But you know if you like someone or not relatively soon. Maybe I was some stupid teenager taken in by thin blond hair blowing in the breeze. Maybe it was his eyes. Maybe it was his words on the screen. Or the uniqueness of it all.

I didn't see him for a couple weeks. I paid more attention to the house, and the cars in the driveway. I'd walk by more slowly. I took my sister to the custard shop every day so my mom wouldn't get suspicious.

Finally he was out there again, but this time I was prepared. I gave him my address and my e-mail. I asked him what happened.

He didn't want to go in and get the computer. He could read my lips. But his eyes darted around like a mouse afraid of an owl. He said "I didn't get my chores done and they got mad at me."

"It sounded a lot more than mad."

"They beat me sometimes. They're mad at me because I can't hear. They used to take care of me and then they got tired of it."

"Why don't they want you to see me?"

"I don't know. The more you mistreat someone the easier it gets to do. They're just used to it. So am I."

I wanted to say *come run away with me!* But let's be real. I'm in high school. The age where you hate having parents in your life but you depend on them for everything. There's no running.

Saturday wasn't date night for me. I wasn't in the "in" crowd. Or the crowd that dated. I liked to read and listen to classical music. And I was eating way too much custard. Having a boy in my life was new. Even like this.

I was out on the porch thinking of him, Beethoven playing on my I-pod. Wispy Boy showed up, stealthy like a rabbit. Lap top in hand. Big smile, fresh battery. We talked again. I told him I had some music playing. I tried to explain what music was to someone who didn't know sound. How it could make you feel happy or sad. How it was a way for a composer to put his heart on paper. How the sound of his own voice could make me feel woozy, even if he couldn't talk "right" like the rest of us. I never realized before how what something sounds like can affect the heart so much. It's a way of talking without words. That you can speak without talking, and with him, listen without hearing.

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