



The books on the steps by Matthew Fox



When I opened the door in the morning there was a pile of books on the step. Children's books; five of them, and when I looked at the covers and read what it said on the backs I knew they were for me – they were exactly the sort of books I liked to read. But who had put them here, and why?

Across the road, there was another pile of books on a doorstep – for the boy who lived over there. Then nothing on the steps of the next house, where no children lived. Then more books, two doors down from us, for the little girl who lived there.

Somebody knows the kids who live in this street, I thought.

Somebody's giving us books.

No.

Somebody's giving their books away.

But who? And why?

I went on. There were no books on the steps at the next house – their children were all grown up. But there were picture books on the steps of the house after that, for the new baby.

I came to Lila's house: Lila who was the same age as me, which meant somebody would have left a pile of books for her, too – except when I looked there was nothing on the doorstep.

Lila, I thought.

These were Lila's books.

She was giving her books away.

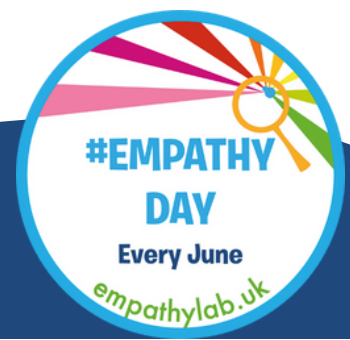
But why?

I went up the steps, and knocked on the door. There were voices inside, and the door opened a crack, and Lila's face appeared.

"Are you alone?" she said.

"Yes," I said.

#ReadForEmpathy





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She came out and looked up and down the street, worried about something. There were bags packed in the hallway behind her; two suitcases and a rucksack.

"Are you going away?" I said.

"Yes," she said.

"When?"

"In an hour."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure," she said.

Lila's mum was a journalist; it was dangerous work. There had been threatening messages online, and someone had thrown a brick through their window. But something else must have happened, something worse, because they had to leave right now.

Lila had been told to pick one book to take, and one toy, and one set of clothes.

That was why she was giving her books away to the other children in the street.

"Where are you going?" I said.

"I can't tell you," she said.

"Are you ever coming back?" I said.

"I don't know."

I felt so sad; I didn't know what to say. I wanted her to know I was sad like her. I wanted her to know I understood what she was feeling. I gave her a hug, and she squeezed me back tightly.

"I have to go," she said.

I nodded. "I'm going to keep your books for you," I said. "I'm going to write your name in them. When you come back, they'll be waiting for you."

Someone called her name from inside the house, but she smiled at me and waved good-bye, and then she went inside.

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