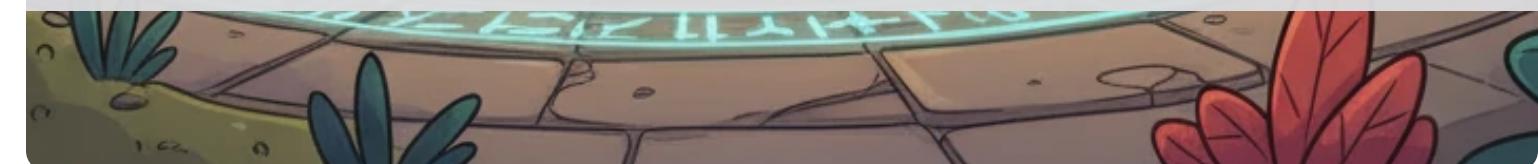




The Unspoken Price

Paul Watt





Felix, a bright-eyed boy with a spark of mischief, uncovers an ancient, glowing scroll nestled amongst dusty relics in a forgotten corner of his attic. The scroll hums with a faint energy, its strange symbols promising powerful magic but warning of an unknown price. His heart pounds with a hopeful, secret plan.



Under the cover of night, Felix carefully recites the spell, his voice a hushed whisper as he stands over a peacefully sleeping Oscar. A gentle, shimmering light envelops Oscar's room, swirling with magical energy, as Felix pours all his desperate hope into the incantation.



The next morning, Felix hides behind a tree, his eyes wide with joy as Oscar, with a look of pure, unadulterated surprise, leaps and spins, effortlessly running across the sunny park. Tears of overwhelming happiness well up in Felix's eyes, his secret wish having come true.



Days turn into weeks of blissful normality. Felix, Oscar, and Ellen are inseparable, their laughter echoing through vibrant meadows as they play without a care. No one, save for Felix, remembers a time when Oscar couldn't run and jump, and Felix basks in the perfect world he created.



Suddenly, a terrifying rumble shakes the ground, and a colossal, whimsical clock tower begins to dramatically crumble into a cloud of dust and debris. Amidst the chaos, Ellen is seen trapped under a heavy, fallen beam, her face etched with fear and desperation.



With a burst of fierce determination, Felix pulls out a glowing talisman, its light pulsing with ancient power. He holds it high, and a brilliant flash of magic engulfs him, transforming him into a magnificent, cape-swirling hero with exaggerated strength and a valiant pose.



As Felix soars towards Ellen, ready to rescue her, his hero form suddenly flickers and begins to rapidly reverse. His cape shrinks, his muscles deflate, and he barely manages to catch himself before crashing down, his face a mask of shock and confusion.



Felix lands clumsily, desperately trying another spell with an urgent wave of his hand, but only a pathetic, tiny spark appears, quickly fading into nothing. The stark truth dawns on him: the price for Oscar's ability to walk was the loss of his own magical powers.



With a heavy heart, Felix finds Oscar and, his voice thick with regret, confesses everything about the spell and its terrible cost. Oscar's playful expression slowly melts into one of profound shock, then a simmering anger as the gravity of the situation sinks in.



Oscar, his eyes burning with fierce resolve, grasps Felix's shoulders, his voice firm and unwavering. He demands that the spell be reversed, no matter what it takes, to save their friend Ellen, presenting Felix with an agonizing, impossible choice.