

## The Boy Who Could Turn Into Things

By Stuart Baum

Brian was a somewhat overweight seven year-old boy. He wore glasses and a striped shirt just slightly too small for him.

He was the type of boy you'd look past to see which other children were in the room or if someone fun were on the playground.

Oh, and he was somewhat shorter than *most*, but not *all* of the boys in the class. He wasn't even the shortest boy, which would have, at least, given you *something* to notice.

But he could turn into things.

I mean, he could simply decide he wanted to be an object and, **poof!**, he *was* that object. The trouble is that it lasted all day. Imagine being a carrot. Or a leaf on a tree. Or a chair? The one you are sitting on right this moment. Can you imagine that? Now imagine what it would be like being this chair for *an entire day*. A long, boring day of people walking over to you, sitting on you, and then getting up and walking away. Also imagine what it would be like being this chair late, late at night when everyone else is in bed asleep and warm and dreaming of flying through the clouds. But you are a chair, unable to go to bed, sitting in the same place, with no one around. Just being a chair.

But let's get back to Brian and our story.

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It was a Tuesday. Brian was sitting in class and he knew the answer to the question, but the teacher never called on him so he didn't even bother to raise his hand. Outside there were two teenagers playing frisbee and Brian, without thinking, said to himself, "I wish I were that frisbee." And, **poof!**, he *was* the frisbee, flying and spinning through the air.

No one noticed that he disappeared from class. The next day, though, on the way to the lunchroom, a few of the bigger boys *did* notice that he was wandering down the hall in more of a dizzy, circular pattern than a straight line.

"Look!" yelled one boy to his friends. "Four eyes over there is zigzagging down the hall! What a space shot!" The other boys laughed.

Brian didn't care that he was being teased; it was better than being ignored. Maybe.

When Brian got to the lunchroom, he collected his lunch and sat down at a table by himself. He always ate by himself. No one seemed to notice.

He wondered what it would be like to have someone sitting across from him at lunch, a friend. While he could turn into a chair or a carrot or a Frisbee, he could not figure out a way to make friends.

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On Friday, walking home from school, Brian decided he wanted to be a bird. This was not his first time as a bird, but it was his first time as a *red-winged blackbird*. He liked the way the bird looked. It was all black except for a small red and yellow patch at the top of both wings, on its shoulders. It was pretty. And people noticed it. Well, Brian noticed it, anyway.

As soon as he thought he wanted to be a red-winged blackbird, he found himself flying into a tree. And he was incredibly hungry.

Happily, he knew how to land on the tree, which he did. Then he looked around and saw that the Powell's had left their window open and they were not yet home from school. He flew in the window, saw that Mrs. Powell had made a plate of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches cut into little squares, so he took one in his beak and flew off. It was almost too heavy to carry out the window, but it was good eating. Brian knew it was easy being a bird when you could think like a human.

He left most of the sandwich square for other birds, or tried to, since a squirrel quickly ran up the tree and grabbed it. Brian, the human, would have shooed the squirrel away, but Brian, the small red-winged blackbird, was not big enough to fight off a squirrel. Squirrels are terrifying when they are bigger than you!

That night, he slept in a nest by himself, cold and tired, but no longer hungry.

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On Saturday afternoon, *poof!*, he turned back into Brian again. While I expect you'd be happy to turn back into yourself again, on a day without school, it made little difference to Brian.

Weekends went very slowly for Brian, since he didn't have any friends and had not much to do other than look out his window.

Even though his weekends were boring, sooner than he wanted, it was Monday again and he was in Math class doing math sheets.

The teacher, Mr. Belins, said he'd give them a marble for each five answers they got right. There were thirty questions, so that'd be six marbles if he got them all right. Brian was good at math and he liked marbles.

Unfortunately, he wondered what it would be like to be a marble and then, **poof!**, he was in a jar with more than a hundred other marbles. Soon, he was in Larry Powell's pocket, since Larry had gotten enough problems correct to earn four marbles. And then he was at Larry's house, being shot at other marbles, which did not hurt, since he was made of glass like the other marbles, but it *was* scary. Soon he was in a bag with all the other marbles where he stayed, really bored, for a long, long time.

Suddenly, Brian became a boy again standing behind an easel in art class. Just as suddenly, Miss Francis stepped right next to him, looked at his empty sheet of paper and unmixed paints, sighed very loudly, and said, "Why, you haven't even *started*, yet. Did you forget we were painting purple, green and orange fish?"

Brian began mixing paint, but knew it didn't matter if he painted nice looking fish or not. No one would notice.

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A week later, the entire first grade class was on the bus returning from a field trip to the zoo when tragedy struck.

Many of the children were acting like monkeys or snakes or penguins, all of which they saw at the zoo, when suddenly a woman outside the bus was screaming, "My baby, my baby, my baby! My *baby!*" she was running down the hill and pointing forwards.

Brian looked towards her and to where she was pointing and saw that her car was rolling down the steep hill. Brian wondered why she called her car 'a baby,' but then he suddenly understood. Her baby was *in* the car!

Brian looked toward the bottom of the hill, where the car was quickly rolling. At the bottom of the hill was a street with cars and trucks zipping by. If the car wasn't stopped, the car would get crashed into by many other cars and trucks. And there was a baby inside the car!

All the children on the bus, and all the people in the street were watching the car roll down with no idea what they could do to stop it. But Brian knew what he could do. He closed his eyes and, suddenly, he disappeared.

**Poof!** Brian turned into the car!

**Poof!** Brian was rolling down the hill, faster and faster, but since he had headlights and not eyes he couldn't see how close he was getting to the bottom of the hill or to the other cars zipping by that would be sure to crash into him and the baby. He winced, knowing just how much that would hurt him (the car) and the baby.

He could feel the baby seat in his back seat and, oddly, hear the baby crying. Did he have ears?

No time to think about that now! Brian applied the- *his* brakes and, as you would expect, the car quickly stopped.

The woman ran up to the car, opened the back door and quickly pulled her baby out of the car. "My baby! My baby! My baby!" she was yelling, but this time happily.

"It's a miracle!" shouted someone from the street.

"I wonder what made the car stop?" said one of the teachers aloud. Brian, the car, heard this. He also heard the people on the street and the children in the bus cheering. Brian was glad he saved the baby, but it was not the only thing he was thinking.

What he was thinking was this: "I saved a baby. Only I could have done that. I am glad I am *me*." This last thought was he oddest one of all.

And then he had an idea that he had never, ever had before. For Brian, it was a brand new idea. And it was a *great* idea.

He wished he were himself. He wished he were *Brian*.

And, **poof!**, he appeared back in the bus seat. He was Brian again. And he was very, very happy to be Brian, the boy who could turn into things.

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While the excitement *is* over, this story is not *quite* over.

Normally, no one noticed when Brian disappeared or re-appeared. That is, no one ever noticed when he is, one second, sitting right next to them in the classroom and, the very next second, **poof!** he is gone. And the seat right next to them is empty.

Imagine someone sitting next to you right now. Imagine them suddenly, **poof!**, disappearing. Do you think *you* would notice?

That day, on the bus, there was an eight-year old girl who *did* notice. Her name was Samantha.

Samantha was a little Pakistani girl who was teased a lot. Not only because she almost always got perfect scores or because her artwork (remember the purple, orange and green-colored fish?) was usually the one the teacher would show everyone else what they *should* have done. Samantha was not only teased for being smart and artistic, of course, because children do that, but she was also teased for wearing a scarf during class and for having to explain to teachers why she could not take off her *hijab* (which is what the scarf was called). Most of the teachers understood, but most of the other children did not.

Anyway, Samantha was standing right next to Brian, the boy in the glasses and striped shirt, when, suddenly, he disappeared. At first, Samantha thought maybe Brian had moved or, in the excitement, she had forgotten about him. But when everyone else was cheering that the car, suddenly *and amazingly*, had stopped, Samantha was counting the children on the bus. There were only seventeen. She knew there was supposed to be eighteen, since that's the number the teachers kept counting all day long to check that all the children were still there. Samantha knew one child was missing and she knew that it was the smallish boy in a striped shirt and glasses. The quiet boy named Brian. He was nowhere to be seen.

And then, *poof!*, he was sitting in a bus seat right where she was looking and where, a second earlier, *no one* was sitting! And he was doing something very odd, for Brian anyway, that she could not remember his ever doing before. Brian was smiling.

Samantha walked over to Brian and asked, very softly, "Was that *you*? Did *you* stop the car?"

Brian nodded.

Samantha smiled at him and said, "Tomorrow, at lunch, you'll have to explain to me how you did that."

**The End.**