Invisible
Author:
Eloy Moreno
Reader's name:
Danielle Maxson

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Invisible (Invisible) begins with the first-person narrative of an adolescent boy waking in a hospital bed, confused and wondering what has happened to put him there. He struggles to deal with his injuries, his nightmares, and the fallout from the media coverage surrounding his admission to the hospital. The coverage, he believes, has revealed to the world his superpowers, the most powerful of which is the ability to become invisible almost at will. The novel soon begins to switch between his first-person account and a third-person narrative showing the lives of his friends, classmates, and one of the teachers at his school. The interleaving of their stories reveals a sinister undertone to this hospital stay, and the sense of childlike fantasy or magical realism evoked by the boy's belief in his superpowers gives way to a chillingly realistic narrative of relentless bullying at school and the boy's inability to either escape it or find help of any kind. Confronted with the repeated abuse by his tormentors, the complicity of classmates unwilling to become victims themselves, the helplessness of friends who do not know how to protect him, and the denial of the problem by school administration, the boy takes refuge in a fantasy life fueled by the comic books that he reads avidly. Conflating the abilities of his comic heroes with his own life, the boy decides that the apparent blindness of all to his suffering is not a societal flaw or a failure of others, but rather his conscious choice. No one sees him suffer because he has the ability to make them stop seeing him. Eventually, the bullying takes such a toll on the boy's mental health that his fantasy world collides tragically with reality.

In Invisible, Eloy Moreno tackles the universal problem of bullying among youth and explores it through the eyes of a young victim, his friends, his main attacker, and the one adult who sees what is happening and attempts to stop it. This heartbreaking story will surely resonate with US readers, some of whom will recognize their own children or friends in the protagonist. The story is set firmly in a contemporary world where social media and viral video clips exacerbate the problem; like real-world youth, the boy who is victimized here cannot escape the bullying without turning off his phone, avoiding social media, and eventually distancing himself from everyone in his world, even his best friends. Moreno's clever manipulation of comic book tropes to give his protagonist the illusion of superpowers will also work well for an English-speaking audience, drawing from a globally recognizable genre while adding a touch of magical realism to the novel. Despite these fantastical elements, Moreno resists the urge to turn his characters into caricatures. Names are used sparingly, making the characters seem more universal, but each of them has realistically drawn fears and motivations, including the classmate who instigates the bullying. He is not just a comic-book villain but another young person suffering from his own sense of inadequacy and loneliness.

This is the fourth novel by Spanish author Eloy Moreno, whose original claim to fame lay in his success self-publishing his first book, El bolígrafo de gel verde (The Green Pen), which has been translated into English and several other languages. Invisible is a beautifully-told story and an excellent candidate for translation. The plot and style effortlessly evoke the world of adolescence in both its innocence, as the protagonist clings to his comic books and cherished reminders of childhood, and its confusion as he is forced to deal with unprovoked attacks, lack of adult support, and the ever-present smartphones ready to record his humiliation. An English translation would surely do well in the US market and would be a rich and worthy addition to fiction available for English-speaking adolescent readers.