

I can see the future

I read all of the books they had in my old school library about people being able to see the future. Some of them said that everything you could ever do was already decided and you couldn't change it, even if you tried really hard, but others said that nothing was set and every tiny little choice you made changed what was going to happen. I think it's different every day because sometimes I can see everything and I know what I'm going to do, but sometimes there's a thick grey cloud inside my head and I can't see anything and that scares me a little bit because I don't know what to do.

Today is one of those days.

I'm in the back of the car. Dad's in the front and we're waiting for mum. She comes out of the house and stops at the door and keeps hold of the handle. After a while she goes back inside. Dad watches her then turns around to talk to me.

'You're going to be alright today,' he says.

I can't tell if this is a question or not so I nod.

'Because we can't keep doing this, Robert.'

Mum comes back out of the house. I smile at her. She does up the buttons on her coat. Dad turns back around and twists the rear-view mirror. I can see his face reflected in it so I wave. He looks away and mum gets in the car and dad starts the engine and we drive to my new school and nobody says anything else.

'Everyone,' my new teacher, Miss Cranbourne, says, 'this is Robert Jones.'

She has black hair and a long face and a red cardigan. She clasps her hands together when she smiles.

'Maybe you'd like to tell us something about yourself,' she says to me.

Sometimes the day isn't all one way. Sometimes it starts out grey and then the clouds clear and I can see exactly what I'm going to do. I look around the room. Everyone stares at me and I can feel the clouds lifting. They push inside my head until I can't think about anything else.

'I'm Robert,' I say, 'and I can see the future.'

The class laughs. Miss Cranbourne hushes them and points to an empty seat in the middle of the room. I drag my bag behind me and sit down and pull out my books and a pencil. I feel sick and I want to run away and I wish I'd known what was going to happen so I could have stayed home, but mum wouldn't have liked that, so I keep my head down and my mouth shut until the clouds come back and the bell rings for break and I can go outside and read and be by myself.

My book's about a man called Alan Campbell. He can see the future, just like me, so the government track him down and snatch him away to a top-secret lab where he helps save the world again and again until he discovers that they're doing experiments on other people who can see the future and they all decide to escape and find a way to use their powers to make the world better. I've read it three times already. It's my new favourite story.

'Hey Jonesy,'

There are two of them. I know one of their names because Miss Cranbourne shouted at him this morning. It's Daniel. I don't know the other one. They stand too close to me. The clouds inside my head start to clear.

'What you reading?'

He moves fast and grabs my book. I know I don't do anything.

'You know he was going to do that?' the other boy laughs.

Daniel holds my book out and shakes it. I know they want me to try and take it back so they can throw it at each other over my head. I swallow. That isn't what's going to happen.

'Don't you want it back?'

I can't change the future. Daniel throws the book. I move towards him. He laughs and shrugs.

'I don't have your book Jonesy.'

I try to hold back, but I can't. I know what's going to happen. Daniel's smile changes and he tries to push me away but he's too slow. I punch him hard on his face and he falls back. Blood drips onto the ground. He drags his sleeve across his nose and glares at me. I know I won't hit him again before he hits me.

I sit in the school office and wait for mum to come and get me. Dad has the car so she'll need to take the bus. She won't be happy.

I rub my fingers over a bruise near my eye. My head hurts and I feel small, like when I'd gone upstairs into the nursery and found mum crying and holding my new little sister. I wanted to help but she screamed at me to get out and I ran to my room and she kept screaming and crying and screaming until she stopped making words. I hadn't been able to see the future then, but afterwards, when I could, I wished I'd seen it and told her what was going to happen. Maybe she was stronger than me. Maybe she could change the future.

She doesn't say anything to me when she gets here, but I know what to do. I follow her to the bus stop and wait and sit beside her when we get on. She leans her head against the window and closes her eyes. I look at her and the clouds disappear and I see myself crouched at the top of the stairs and mum and dad are stomping around in the living room. I can only see their shadows in the hall and I don't know what they're saying because sometimes the future is silent, but they fight for a long time before mum runs out into the hall and slams the

front door behind her. Dad follows her slowly and I don't think he knows I'm there because he stands next to the door and his shoulders shake and he punches the wall. He sees me when he turns back around, but he doesn't say anything, he just goes back into the living room and turns out the light so I can't even see his shadow anymore.

Mum stands and rings the bell for our stop. I start to cry. She looks down at me but doesn't speak so I follow her out and along the streets to the house. She unlocks the front door and leaves it open for me. I try to stop crying before I go in. It takes me a long time.

She's sitting in the living room. It's dark. The curtains are still closed.

'Mum,' I say.

'Not now Robert.'

I can see what's going to happen. I wipe my nose on my hand. 'Are you going to leave us?'

She stays quiet.

'I saw it,' I say, 'I saw you fighting with dad...'

She looks away. 'Go to your room.'

I see myself climbing the stairs.

But I don't move.

I see me coming out later and sitting at the top of the stairs, waiting, and it makes me angry and sad and I want to punch and scream and shout and break everything.

But I don't.

'Are you even listening to me, Robert?'

My head feels like a balloon that's been blown up too far but you can't tell when it's going to burst.

'Mum,' I say, 'I'm scared.'

She looks at me.

‘Mum, I’m scared and I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Please don’t go.’

I walk towards her. My stomach feels full and empty at the same time and I reach out for her and she stops like she doesn’t want to touch me but then she gets up off her chair and takes my hand.

‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’

I can’t stop saying it because I can see myself at the top of the stairs and they’re fighting and she’s leaving and I can feel it all inside my head and I think I’m going to burst, but everything’s different and I’m not there, I’m here, with her.

I close my eyes and hold her tight and suddenly the grey clouds fill my head and I wonder if I’ll ever see the future again but mum squeezes me and I can hear her crying and the door opens behind us and dad comes in and he waits for a moment before he puts his arms around us and I can feel them both breathing together until I can’t tell who is who and I try to look through the clouds to see if I’ve changed the future but everything stays grey no matter how hard I try and it doesn’t matter and I don’t care because I’m here and they’re here and we’re together.