

# 1

## Blue Plastic Sandals

The first time I ‘moved’, I had no control over it. It wasn’t long after my fourteenth birthday and my class were on a school trip: a journey along a canal. Our barge was puttering through the murky water, full of merry exuberant kids. We loved the fact that Miss Day was cooking sausages in a pan over a little gas fire and making us all hot dogs in the outdoors. It was a bright sunny day and I was happy.

Then, like a premonition, a mosquito landed on the soft inside of my arm. A moment later it bent over and bit me, the bag of its body quickly swelling up with my blood. I ignored the sting; it was fascinating to see the fly change, filling its body before jumping off, bloated and twice as heavy as when it had landed.

## MOVE

The soft coughing of another engine made me look up. A barge, painted vividly in white and red, was coming our way. The man at the tiller was smiling at our rowdy boat and touched his hat to us. In response to his wave, our boat steered to the left and, as a result, came close to the wide flat stones that paved the sides of the canal. This gave the girls up the front the opportunity to mess about. Some of them jumped across from the wooden frame of our barge to the bank.

One of the smaller girls in our class, Tara, stood up to have a go, and stumbled. Just as she fell, hitting her shins on the stone lip of the canal wall, our boat closed up the gap. We felt a shudder from the impact of the barge against the canal wall and there was a loud crack, like someone had broken a dry stick across their knee.

It all happened right in front of me. The inexorable momentum of the barge was causing the vessel to grind along the wall, right across Tara's foot. She was white, utterly white, and she looked across into my eyes. There was a kind of pleading in her face, as if to ask 'it's not true, is it?' But I looked down at her leg and threw up in an uncontrollable spasm. By doing so, it was as if I'd failed her. She knew it was true.

As the barge came away from the wall there were screams from the others, who could now see what had happened. Tara's foot was broken, but it wasn't just broken. It was horrible. Scarlet blood was streaming down the stones of the canal wall, but that wasn't the worst of it. The worst thing was the sight of a pathetically sad little blue plastic sandal hanging loose below the crushed foot.

## Blue Plastic Sandals

A moment later, Tara screamed.

Hopefully you've never heard anyone really scream. Of course you'll have heard shrieks and stuff, even fairly serious screams, like those from the other girls on the canal bank. But this was something else; this was as if all the horror and pain of the whole world was howling in your ears. It paralysed me and made me curl up, shrinking inside myself to avoid the terrible sound.

It was the screaming that pushed me over the edge. I just wanted to escape, to be anywhere else, not to be standing there, unable to look away, and listening to screams that clawed through my whole body.

\* \* \*

When I woke up, I saw my mum leaning over me.

'Mum? Where am I?'

She laughed. 'Home, silly.'

It was true. I was lying in my own bed. The screams had faded fast. Somewhere I knew they were still continuing, but thankfully not here. The clock read 3.35.

'What about the canal trip?'

'That left long ago. Don't you remember? You were too sick to go.'

Now that she drew my attention to it, I could remember getting up, then feeling a bit dizzy. The fact that I hadn't eaten any breakfast was noticed by my mum, as was my slightly dazed behaviour. That's right. It was coming back more strongly now.

## MOVE

She'd placed a cool hand against my head, and then taken my temperature. Much as I'd wanted to go on the trip, I'd agreed to go back to bed.

Was the accident all just a feverish dream? Writing about it now, that's the obvious conclusion anyone would have come to. Except that I knew it hadn't been a dream. I had been there, really been there, until just a few minutes ago and it was absolutely nothing like a dream.

Did you ever see a drawing where if you just look at the black lines, you see something, say birds, but when you look at the white parts of the drawing, you see something else, like a face? Both pictures are there at the same time, but you can't fix on them simultaneously, you have to see one or the other. Well it was like that with my memories, only they were not black and white, but a rich composition of bright colours, sounds, tastes, scents. And screams.

There was no way I was going back to the barge, even if I could have. I settled into my bed and into this version of the world, with the other version receding and fading, like I'd walked out of a dark cinema, back into the daylight, and begun to forget the horror film I'd just seen.

There was something else. I knew, even then, what I'd done was wrong. The more moral reader will have already noticed that my wish had been a selfish one. I hadn't wished that Tara was uninjured; I'd simply wished to get away from the barge. That's true and that's the way I was back then. There's not many of my classmates would have been different either. It's how most people are in an emergency. But the fact that my desire to

## Blue Plastic Sandals

escape had been selfish wasn't what was troubling me.

A lingering sensation that I had done something wrong, perhaps injured someone, lay heavy upon me. But who? Why did I feel like I was inside the mind of a shark that had just scented blood? Whatever I had done was repulsive, but at the same time it was exciting. To be fair to the young lad who moved away from that horrific scene, I didn't know what I'd done and I certainly didn't know how to fix it.

While I was deep in thought, feeling my way around the strangely split memories, the buzzing of my phone made me jump. It was a text from my best mate, Zed.

'OMG. Total Chaos. Taras leg knackered. Hsptl. Blud. Jamie waz sic. All the girlz r crying. U missed it all!'

Looking at the little black letters on the phone's screen, I shuddered. The echo of that scream was ringing in my head. I could see it all again. But it wasn't just the recollection of that awful moment that made me shiver. Zed's text proved it wasn't a dream. It was true. Some kind of magic, some kind of unnatural magic, had taken place. And I had caused it to happen.

What would you have done next? I was tempted to tell my mum. Even though it was so unbelievable, I could prove it; I could describe exactly what had happened, what everyone was wearing, who was standing where. But I didn't. Partly it was because of that guilty feeling, for some reason I felt like I'd done something she would be angry about. It was also because my mum was worried that I was a bit more geeky and soft than other kids. She was always at me to go out and play in the street,

## MOVE

rather than be on the computer. Trying to describe this to her would be risky. She'd probably think I was going mad. Maybe I was?

What I did do was wait until she left the room. Then I rang Zed.

'Liam, Jays' man, what a day.'

'Where are you Zed?'

'On the bus.'

'Can you call up to me when you're home?'

'Sure, as soon as we're back.'

'Thanks Zed.'

'Later.'

\* \* \*

It was about an hour later that I heard the doorbell ring.

'Zed wants to come up. Is that all right?' asked my mum.

'Sure.'

Zed is a bit like Tigger in the Winnie the Pooh stories. Well, an Asian-looking Tigger, with a taste for heavy metal. When he enters a room he bounds in full of energy and immediately becomes the centre of attention. What most of my class never realised about him was that he has a lot of respect for brains and he never sneered at me like some of the others did. That's why we were mates. That, and the fact that for years he lived right across the road from me.

'Liam, man, it was incredible. Wait while I tell you.'

'Stop, stop right there Zed. I want to prove something to

you, something totally weird.’

He stopped.

‘Hold on a second. We need some background noise.’ I put on the radio, which had a channel preset to Kerrang! for when Zed visited.

‘Yeah?’

‘OK. This is really strange, kinda scary. But I was there all day on the barge and then when the accident happened, something magic happened and it was as if I’d never gone on the trip.’

‘Erm, Liam, mate, you’ve been sick, like. You dreamt it.’

‘Just listen.’ And for the next ten minutes I told him how it was, all the while trying to read his face. Sometimes Zed looked surprised and sombre, at other times he shook his head.

‘Well?’ I asked him.

‘I dunno. You weren’t talking to anyone else?’

‘No.’

He picked up my mobile phone and checked. I let him.

‘Well, it’s strange all right. Some of what you said is dead on and I don’t see how you could make it up. But you said we had sausages just before the accident?’

‘Yes.’

‘Nah, mate, we had burgers.’

‘Oh.’

‘And she knackered her left foot?’

‘Yes.’

Zed shook his head. ‘Right.’

‘That’s really strange.’ I was surprised. It was impossible to make sense of this information. Not that it would have been

## MOVE

much better if my memories had been in total accord with Zed's view of what had happened. 'So close, but not quite the same. But you do agree about the clothes she was wearing? About what Miss Day was wearing? That earlier, at the start, Jocelyn had nearly fallen in, messing about at the back? And she was made to help with the food?'

'Yeah.'

He spoke reluctantly, but I felt hugely relieved. It meant that I wasn't going mad, that all this wasn't just happening in my head. Something really strange had happened to me today.

'There's this other thing as well.'

'Yeah?'

'I feel I shouldn't have done it. If it was magic, it wasn't good magic.'

'Magic? Do you think it was magic?' He was disbelieving.

'No. I'm just saying. It was like I was using some power in my head. But I shouldn't have. I've upset something. It's really hard to describe. I dunno. It's very confusing.'

'No kidding.' Zed widened his eyes. 'Can you do it again, though? Like now?'

'What? Get away from here to somewhere else?'

'Yeah.'

I thought about this and hadn't got a clue how I'd escaped from the barge in the first place.

'I don't think so.'

'What if I shriek my head off?' Zed smiled, making a joke out of it, but I shuddered.

'Yeah. Yeah, if it was for real, maybe that would do it. It has

## Blue Plastic Sandals

to be an emergency, I reckon.'

'Nice skill to have, mate.'

'So you believe me?'

'I think you had a vision or something, a flash of something in your head.'

'Should I tell my mum?'

'No way, Liam. If I was you I wouldn't tell anyone. They'll think you're a looper.'

'But you don't think I'm a looper?'

He looked at me for a long time.

'I've always thought you were a total madzer.'