



The first storm

It came out of nowhere.

On the TV news, the cheery weather forecaster had predicted a fine, clear October night. But in the deep dark of the early hours, fierce cracks of thunder broke out – like granite cliffs exploding – and in rolled the storm. It startled the townspeople of Fairfield awake and sent them scurrying to their windows to see what was going on. In the brief hollows between booms, lightning fizzed and crackled and scarred the sky. The stars twinkled and twitched, blinking with the shock of it all.

House by house, flat by flat, lights and lamps flicked on till – *snap!* – the power cut plunged every building into darkness. The inhabitants bumbled about, searching for torches and candles, all clueless about what the town's river was getting up to. The meandering Wouze had suddenly swelled to twice its size and did what it had never done in its entire history ... went walkabout. Up, up, up it soared, spilling over its banks, gliding across pavements and merrily gushing along roads. It seemed to want to know what the inside of buildings and houses looked like, sluicing through tiny gaps under locked front doors.

Then, as suddenly as it had started, the storm stopped, leaving the expanded river stranded. In that moment of calm, the power flicked back on, letting the stunned population of Fairfield get a good long look at the damage that had been done by the unexpectedly wild weather.

Outside, tree branches and For Sale signs swam alongside each other in newly formed streams.

Inside, occupants sloshed around in knee-high water, trying to rescue precious things, while pyjamaed teens and kids wowed in wonder at their river-soaked homes.

And far, far away – streaming through space – someone felt VERY guilty about what had just happened.



The damage next day



KIKI: Fame and shame

Kiki's eyes flicked from the new posts on her phone to the breakfast news on TV. But it was still just some presenter blah-blahing about politicians arguing with each other. Nothing yet about the completely nuts weather in Fairfield last night.

"I'm not sure what time I'll be home from the hospital, Kiki," Mum called out from the hall, as she packed her nurse's uniform into her bag. "There's bound to be a staff shortage today with so many roads cut off."

"Hmm?" mumbled Kiki, all curled up on the sofa. In her lap was the TV remote, a plate of peanut butter on toast and her mobile.

She scrolled past an image of the usually neatly clipped grass of the park, which was now a shallow

lake. It was lucky that her family's ground-floor flat was a little uphill, on the north side of town, so they'd escaped the worst of the weather madness. The torrential rain *had* slithered under the wafer-thin gap at the bottom of their front door, though, so that when Kiki first got up, the carpet had felt like spongy, boggy moss to bare toes.

"I said I'm not sure what time I'll get home!" Mum called out again.

Kiki heard her this time but was too busy scanning Snapchat for her schoolmates' storm stories to give a reply. Her best friends, Lola, Zainab and Saffron, all lived on the flatter south side of the river, close to school. Lola had just posted a pic of her living room, with water lapping at the bottom of her mega-screen TV and her sliders bobbing about like mini dinghies.

Zainab's post was of her excited little sister splashing about in the mud-coloured paddling pool that their kitchen floor had become.

Saffron messaged to say that she'd heard Harvey Wickes's gran had bodyboarded out of the front door of her flooded cottage, using a plastic sledge she'd dragged down from the loft.

(Disappointingly, there were no photos of that...)

"Kiki! Are you listening to me?" Mum asked, appearing in the doorway, jangling her door keys in her hand.

"Mmm, yeah ... I'm listening," Kiki muttered.

"Not sure if I'm entirely convinced by that," Mum said with a sigh, as she disappeared back into the hall. "But one more thing: Eddie's not opening his shop today, so he's going to stick around and help out here, which is handy, considering both your schools are shut."

Kiki rolled her eyes. Her six-year-old brother Ty was annoying enough – having Eddie as a sort of part-time nanny was like having an annoying big brother too. Eddie might be twenty years older than Ty, and have a qualification in electronics, but he was easily as goofy. He helped Mum out by looking after Ty a few days a week when she had long shifts. He shut up his repair shop early on those days and picked up Ty from school on a spluttering, ancient motorbike with a clattering sidecar, the two of them looking like something out of a kids' cartoon in their matching red crash helmets. It was mortifying.

"They should be back soon," Mum carried on.

"Unless they've drowned..." Kiki said under her breath.

Bright and super early this morning, Eddie had come knocking to suggest that he and Ty go and splosh round town in their wellies. It suited Kiki if they took their time; she was looking forward to having the flat to herself once Mum left for work, even just for a little while.

Settling herself even deeper into the comfy sofa, Kiki stared at her mobile – speeding through more storm-related posts – till her attention was snagged by the mention of a familiar name on the television.

"...in Fairfield, where a completely unexpected storm last night caused never-before-seen flooding in the town," said the newscaster, his silver-grey eyebrows bent into curls of concern as he sat in the comfort of the warm, dry studio. Behind his head was an inset image of Fairfield's ornate town hall, which was just a few minutes down the hill from Kiki's flat. The town hall's grand steps led on to what looked more like a harbour than a high street.

"Whoa..." mumbled Kiki, jerking to attention.

Without thinking, she put a foot on the floor and instantly winced as the wetness of the carpet

seeped uncomfortably through her sock.

"Mum! Mum, come QUICK!" she yelled, at the same time trying to rescue the contents of her lap as the remote control, toast and mobile slipped sideways. "Fairfield's on the news – we're famous!"

"Really?" said Mum, reappearing in a flash. "What are they saying?"

Kiki waved her arms wildly to shush her.

"Our reporter, Lisa Garcia, is in Fairfield now," the newsreader continued. "Lisa, can you tell us more about this unprecedented incident?"

"Yes, thanks, John," said the young female reporter, who now filled the screen. "You may think I'm standing in the middle of a river, but it is in fact the town's main street."

Kiki noticed that Lisa Garcia looked nervous. Then she spotted the problem: little waves of floodwater were slapping and slurping over the top of the reporter's red wellies.

"There's not a soul in sight here, John. Clearly, everyone is busy trying to deal with the catastrophe that hit their homes in the early hours," Lisa carried on professionally. "Except, hello ... I've just spotted someone! Hi, there!"

The reporter beckoned someone off camera to come closer. From the left, a boy awkwardly splashed towards her, his knees playing peek-a-boo in the gap between his skater shorts and wellies. Even though it had stopped raining, the boy had the hood of his black Puffa jacket pulled up. A tuft of white-blond hair peeked out from under it, above his round pale face.

"Can I ask your name?" said Lisa, flipping the microphone towards the boy.

"Wes," said the boy, blinking madly as he leaned in too close to the mic.

"So is your school shut today, Wes? Has it been badly flooded?"

Lisa tried to move the mic away so he wouldn't foghorn into it again, but the boy just leaned closer.

"Yes," he said, peeking out of the hood.

Lisa hesitated for a second, hoping for more, before realizing she wasn't going to get it.

"And what's the name of your school?"

"Riverside Academy."

"Ooh, he's from Riverside!" said Mum. "Do you know him, Kiki?"

"He's in my year, but I don't really know

him," Kiki replied, flapping her arms again to shut Mum up.

Kiki didn't really know many of the other Year Sevens. She and her old primary-school friends, Vic and Megan, didn't even speak to each other any more. Within a week of starting at Riverside, Kiki had found herself scooped up by the Popular Crew. That didn't go down too well with Vic and Megan, and when they'd overheard Kiki describing them as "just some girls" she "sort of knew" from primary school, it had been the final straw. Vic and Megan had never forgiven her and had found a new crowd to hang out with. Kiki could hardly blame them. She'd have done the same if it was the other way round.

But as she stared at the boy, Kiki realized she *had* noticed him around in the corridors, constantly blinking or drumming his fingers on some book or other, and always, *always* being shouted at by passing teachers to take his hood down and "get that jacket off".

"The storm was short but savage." Lisa persevered with her interview. "It must have been pretty terrifying to witness?"

"Er, not really," said the boy. "I was watching *Star Trek Beyond* on my laptop and fell asleep with my headphones on. So I missed it."

Kiki burst out laughing, then started frantically messaging Lola, Zainab and Saffron.

Switch on the news – you have GOT to see who they're interviewing from our school... #TOTALGEEKALERT!

She paused for a second, wondering if the hashtag was too mean. But then it was the sort of thing Lola would say, so surely that made it OK, didn't it?

"EXCUSE ME!" came a high-pitched yelp from the TV. "*I saw what happened!*"

"Oh my goodness, Kiki!" gasped Mum. "It's your brother – it's Tyreke!"

Kiki looked up at the screen again.

Both Lisa and the hooded boy had swivelled round. They were staring at a young boy behind them. He was floating past the town-hall steps on an inflatable flamingo, wearing a red crash helmet and waving a lightsabre.

"It was ALIENS! I watched them out of my bedroom window!" Ty shouted.

"Oh no," mumbled Mum, slapping her hands to her face. "Not *this* again..."

"They were zooming around in SPACESHIPS that were like GLOWING DODGEMS doing LASER QUEST!" blurted Ty.

"Nooooo!" groaned Kiki.

Kiki's brother was an expert fibber. His lies were legendary. All his friends still stared down at Kiki's feet whenever they saw her, even though she'd twice taken off her trainer and SHOWN them that she didn't have an extra toe. And the trusting little gang absolutely believed that Ty's part-time childminder, Eddie, had a secret government lab in the back of his dilapidated electrical repair shop, when all Eddie *actually* did was fix people's toasters.

As for Mum, her pioneering brain surgeries kept her very busy (she was a nurse in A & E), and Dad wasn't around because he lived in a lighthouse (he'd moved out a year ago to a flat above a photocopying shop in Birmingham).

When the storm woke him in the night, Ty had a shiny *new* fib to tell. He'd run between Mum and

Kiki's bedrooms, yelling that he'd seen tiny neon-yellow spaceships zigzagging across the blackened sky.

And now here he was, on national TV, blabbing his spaceship fantasy to the whole country. Kiki and Mum swapped glances, united in weariness at Ty's unstoppable habit of telling tall tales.

"Ha! So there we have it," said the reporter, turning back to face the camera with a wry smile. "Last night's storm and flooding were caused by aliens. It's official! Back to you in the studio, John."

"But it's TRUE!" roared Ty, as a pair of rangy arms – belonging to Eddie – reached in, grabbed the back of the inflatable flamingo and dragged it out of shot.

Lisa stared at the camera and held on to her rigid grin.

The hooded boy stared at the retreating flamingo and its rider.

The screen switched back to the newscaster in the studio.

And Kiki felt her blood run cold.

Please, please, PLEASE let none of my friends have seen that, she thought frantically.

PLING

And *there* it was, the message that mattered most. The one from the Queen of the Popular Crew. Lola.

**OMG, Kiki. Is your little bro for real?
ALIENS! Own the shame, friend! #hahaha**

Whenever school started back, it would be way too soon to live this down.

In that second, Kiki wished a stray spaceship would beam her up and speed her away to *wherever* wasn't here.



**Friday:
the night
he came**