

## CHAPTER ONE

### PATTERNS

Here are some facts about me.

My name is Ted Spark.

I am 12 years and 281 days old.

I have seven friends.

There are eight lies in the silver folder labelled *My Lies* in my desk drawer.

I am going to be a meteorologist when I grow up, so I can help people when the weather goes wrong. This is a thing that will happen more and more in the future. The world is heating up because of increasing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This is causing the seas to rise, and weather to become more extreme and unpredictable. This is very interesting and also very concerning. I don't know why the rest of my family, Mum and Dad and my sister Kat, are not as worried about this as I am.

It might have something to do with my funny brain that works on a different operating system to other people's. It makes patterns like the weather very important to me, and it makes me notice things that no one else could. I see the way things connect, and I connect things that other people do not seem able to. I am learning that there are even patterns in stories and myths and poetry. There are patterns everywhere you look.

Three months ago, I solved the mystery of how my cousin Salim disappeared from a pod on the London Eye while Kat and I were watching him. A man came up to us while we were queueing and offered us a free ticket, which Salim took. Salim got into the pod at 11:32am on Monday 24 May, but when it came down again at 12:02pm we did not see him get out again. Mum and Dad and Aunt Gloria, who is Mum's sister and Salim's mum,

thought that his disappearance was impossible. Even the police thought it was impossible. But I knew that even though some things seem as though they must be impossible, they always makes sense. For example, in the year 1700 there was an earthquake in America that caused a tsunami in Japan, 6,303 miles away. A tsunami is a huge wave. At that time, the Japanese people who were hit by it probably did not even know that America existed, but the tsunami that was caused by America flattened their houses anyway. This is absolutely true, and it proves that the whole of history is a pattern, and everything is caused by something else.

When Salim disappeared, Kat and I came up with nine possible theories, and one of them had to be true. That is what I knew, and that is what Kat and I proved. We worked out which theory was correct, and we got Salim back, and then he and Aunt Gloria went to New York together, to a new weather system and a new life, and a new job for Aunt Gloria, as a curator at the Guggenheim Museum (My encyclopedia says that a curator is someone who looks after paintings and pieces of art, and organises exhibitions in art galleries). But we were still part of that life, and when Kat and Mum and I went to visit them during our summer holidays this year, the mystery of the London Eye turned out not to be the only mystery in our universe.

Ten days ago, on the first proper day of our holiday, a painting was stolen from the Guggenheim Museum.

When the painting was stolen everyone kept saying that it was priceless. That was not correct. They should have said that it was worth \$20 million in New York, which is £9.8 million if you are in London, where Kat and Mum and I live. It was very difficult for me to understand how a painting could be worth so much. Unlike photographs, paintings are not always accurate or realistic. I can see why a photograph would be valuable, because it shows

you what the photographer saw at the very moment the picture was taken. My cousin Salim loves photography, and his photographs helped us solve the mystery of his disappearance. When I look at his pictures I can tell exactly what the world looked like when he took them. It's like time travel. But paintings are not like that, and so at first I was not very interested in the stolen painting

But then Aunt Gloria was blamed. The police thought that she had stolen it, and they tried to put her in prison. That would be bad for her, and also bad for Salim. So I knew that I had to help him by getting the painting back again, and proving that Aunt Gloria had not been the one to take it.

This is how I, and Kat and Salim, did it.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FIGURES OF SPEECH

Dad calls Aunt Gloria ‘Hurricane Gloria’. This is a good name for her. She leaves *a trail of destruction in her wake* (Dad’s words). In fact, Aunt Gloria does not physically destroy things. She is just quite noisy and chaotic. Dad’s name for her is an example of a figure of speech.

Dad has been teaching me about figures of speech, which are words or phrases that sound like they mean one thing, but really mean another. One example is *It’s raining cats and dogs*. This doesn’t mean that kittens and puppies are actually falling from the sky. It means it’s raining hard. I am making progress with figures of speech, but I still get confused very easily.

I knew we were going to see Aunt Gloria and Salim in New York before I was meant to. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, when I should have been asleep, I eavesdropped (which does not mean I dropped anything, it means that I listened carefully outside the living room door when I was not supposed to) on a conversation between Mum and Dad. Mum and Aunt Gloria had just had a phone call, and Mum was telling Dad about it. Mum said that Aunt Gloria wanted us all to come visit her and Salim in New York.

‘I think she’s missing me,’ said Mum. ‘The new job’s going well so far – but you know how hard it was for her to get there.’ I did know, because New York is roughly 3,459 miles and one seven-hour-and-fifty-minute flight from London. ‘And Salim seems to be fitting in – isn’t that a marvel? But it’d be nice for him to see his cousins. What do you think, love?’

Dad said he thought that it sounded like a lot of money, and Mum could take me and Kat but she couldn’t count on him coming too, because *someone* had to hold down a job and

earn the money for the mortgage and school uniforms and Ted's appointments. I felt the air pressure drop, and a cold front sweep into the living room. (This is a metaphor, another thing I am learning about. The temperature on our home thermostat by the stairs was 17 degrees Celsius and it did not change).

'Don't be like that, love,' said Mum, after a pause. 'Glo and Salim are family. We have to stick together, especially after what happened in the spring. Just think of it – the children will love it! It'll be a holiday for them! And – it might be good for Kat.'

Dad sighed. 'It might,' he said. 'And Ted as well. He needs to start learning how to cope with the rest of the world.'

The air in the living room metaphorically warmed, but an icy pocket formed around me as I sat on the stairs. I did not like that Dad had said that. I was happy in London. I knew its geography and its weather. I knew the Tube. I was not sure I wanted to travel to another country.

I had learned about some journeys last term in school that made travelling sound dangerous and bad. When Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492, he did it by mistake, while he was looking for India. That journey took him a whole five weeks. This is actually not much time at all compared to how long it took Odysseus, the legendary Greek hero, to cross the Mediterranean in the *Odyssey* (17 years). Both of these journeys reminded me how big and confusing the world can be, and how it is possible to get lost in it.

What if I got lost in New York? What if I never came home again?

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE HOME FRONT

To calm myself down I decided to look up the Guggenheim Museum, where Aunt Gloria worked, in my encyclopedia. What I discovered made me feel a bit happier. The Guggenheim is an important New York landmark, just like the Statue of Liberty. *Museum* is not an entirely accurate word to describe it. My favourite museum in London, the British Museum, is big and hundreds of years old, and full of statues and jewels and pots. I like to go there and think about the patterns in history. But the Guggenheim is not like that. It was opened in 1959, so it is much newer than the British Museum. It also does not have any jewels, or pots. It is a museum that mostly just holds paintings. It is a very unusual museum, just like I am a very unusual person.

It was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, a famous American architect, and when it first opened it made a lot of people very upset. This is because Frank Lloyd Wright didn't want to design an ordinary square building with ordinary walls and floors and ceilings. Instead, he wanted his museum to be an interesting shape. So instead of square, it is round, like a shell, with a round spiralling ramp inside it.

I was interested when I read about that. I thought that I would like to see a place so full of patterns.

But then I thought about who I was going with, and I felt worried all over again. What Dad had meant about Kat, but not said properly, because grown-ups are bad at finishing sentences, was that this summer Kat was being Mad, Mean Kat approximately 97% of the time. She had failed her maths and science exams at the end of the year, and almost failed history, which made Mum and Dad very unhappy. 'But it doesn't matter. I don't want to do

any of them for GCSE,' Kat had said, when she opened her envelope from school. 'I want to do art and design. And media studies.'

'Absolutely not!' said Mum. 'You know you have to do maths, it's the law. And as for art – Kat, love, you have to be practical! Your father and I want you to study practical subjects. There'll be time for art later.'

'But Auntie Glo's not practical,' said Kat, sticking out her chin and fiddling with her hair. 'She studied art, didn't she? I want to be like her.'

'Your aunt's doing all right now, but she's struggled, Kat,' said Mum, folding her arms. 'The worry I've had over her career – love, there were years when she couldn't pay her way, and we had to help. I won't have that for you.'

'That's just not FAIR!' yelled Kat, and that was the beginning of the argument.

Sometimes I do not understand people's emotions. But this time it was very easy. Everyone was angry. Our house was full of shouting and tears, which I imagined in my head as cold fronts and showers, for weeks. Kat stayed out late in the park with her friends, or came home on time but refused to leave her room for dinner. She also grew out her hair, which Dad said looked like a shaggy sheepdog, and cut it herself into a strange new shape that made Mum shout and Dad say, 'Kat, absolutely not.'

'All right, then, I'll get my belly button pierced,' said Kat. And the hair was allowed to stay.

Kat began to spend a lot of time on Dad's computer in the evenings, the green light on her face making the bones of her cheeks stand out. Apparently Kat is beautiful, but I don't know how anyone knows that. To me she just looks like Kat. The second time I caught her at the computer she looked up and said, 'Buzz off, Ted. I'm emailing my friend from school.'

Actually, she didn't say *buzz*, she said a much more awful word that Mum would have whacked her for, but I am translating.

I *had a hunch* (a figure of speech that means a deductive suspicion, not being crouched over) that this behaviour was suspicious. I knew that the person Kat was emailing was not a friend from school. I knew this because Kat does not email her friends, she texts them. Her phone is always going off at the dinner table and making Dad say, 'Put it away, Kat.' She would only email someone she couldn't text. And the one person she knew who it would be too expensive to text, because he lived in America, was Salim.

What could Kat and Salim be emailing each other about?

Then Mum and Dad told Kat and me about New York properly, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. 'REALLY?' squealed Kat, making my ears hurt. She went whirling up to Mum and Dad and hugged them both, and then she tried to hug me. This was an easy emotion to understand: Kat was happy about going to New York. Then she ran away to Dad's computer again and tapped away at it. Kat *was* emailing Salim, I thought. My deductions had been confirmed.

And I was upset, because even though Salim had been my friend too, when he was in London, he had not emailed me at all – not once, since I had helped to solve the mystery of his disappearance. Was this because he liked Kat better now? Were they becoming better friends through the words of their emails, and leaving no room for me?