



CHAPTER 1

FIREWORKS

The minute I woke up, I could tell something wasn't right. I couldn't put my finger on it at first. It was eerily quiet for a start. I mean, silent. I'd never realised how much background noise there is every day — until it's not there any more. No distant traffic; no birdsong; no radio or TV floating up from downstairs; no parents shouting at my brother, Nate, and me to get out of bed. Nothing! I checked my phone but it wasn't working. Weird! I turned on my laptop but, again, nothing: dead as a dodo. Great! Just what I needed — a flat battery and a power cut both at once.

There was a tapping at my door. “Josh?” Nate popped his head round. “Mum and Dad aren’t here.”

I did a mental check: it was Sunday so they wouldn’t be at work. “I’ll be down in a sec, buddy. They’re probably sleeping it off after last night.”

Yesterday had been a national celebration of Independence Day. Parties and firework displays had been happening all over the country. I’d gone to a big local display at the civic centre with my girlfriend, Nell. Mum and Dad had had a smaller party at home. All the displays were timed to go off together. NASA reckoned they’d even be seen from space. The whole of Britain would be lit up. I know fireworks are for kids really, but there’s a little part of me that still gets a kick out of them. The problem was, I never got to see them.

“They’re not in their room either,” Nate said.

“I can’t find them anywhere.”

“OK,” I said. “Give me a minute.”