



CHAPTER 1

SAM

Two Days Before

The helicopters were low in the sky. Giant, black, shiny creatures, like a swarm. Chugging and clattering over rooftops and towers, banking and swooping.

Sam Rafford watched them as he made his way down the hill to college, his rucksack over one shoulder.

He wondered what the helicopters could see. How closely they could scan the town, the streets and the houses. Could they pick out individuals, mark them out as troublemakers? Three months ago he'd have thought this was ridiculous. Now it

seemed a lot less stupid. It was odd, how quickly people got used to new situations.

As he made his way down the hill, he took his phone out and watched the video Cait had messaged him. It was jerky and poor quality, but there was no mistaking what it showed. The video had been filmed from the middle of a crowd. A caption said O2 ARENA. Many people had one hand raised in the air, as if at a concert. But these people were not holding up lighters or phones. They had their arms stiffly upwards at 45 degrees. You didn't need to know a lot of history to recognise that gesture, Sam thought.

“What on earth are you watching, Sammy?”

He glanced up at his friend Jas's mildly accusing voice. He flicked the video off with his thumb. He didn't know why he felt guilty watching it — there was no reason to — but right now an explanation would have been needed, and he didn't feel like giving one.

“Just people,” he said.