

“What is going on?” Finn asks anxiously as the students erupt into complaints.

“Why does it feel like we’re in the middle of traffic on a motorway?” River says through gritted teeth, his arm brushing against mine as he lifts his hand to cover his ear. “Argh! Make it stop! It feels like the traffic is in my head now!”

“This is horrible!” Finn whimpers. “The scraping and screeching! I hate that sound! Stop it!”

My breathing starts coming out shaky and uneven as panic grips the room. The noise is almost unbearable now and I yelp as it overwhelms every other sense, causing an instant headache. People are yelling now, shouting angrily at their companions about why it’s happening, begging anyone to bring it to a stop and crying out in frustration as the noise builds and builds until it’s impossible to do or think of anything else.

As I begin to lose myself in the horror of this feeling, I feel Maisie nudge urgently at my leg. My hand falls to the top of her head and drifts down her back, and I can feel that she’s breathing normally. She’s calm and controlled, unaffected and right here with me.

A memory from a couple of years ago battles its way to the forefront of my mind:

*I'm sitting at the kitchen table with Gavin, the mobility instructor who helped me navigate my new world when I first lost my sight and had to re-learn everyday tasks again. I'm having a bad day. I've tried to pour a glass of water and it's gone everywhere. On some days, Poppy and I laugh about these things. Other days, we cry.*

*Today, I'm crying.*

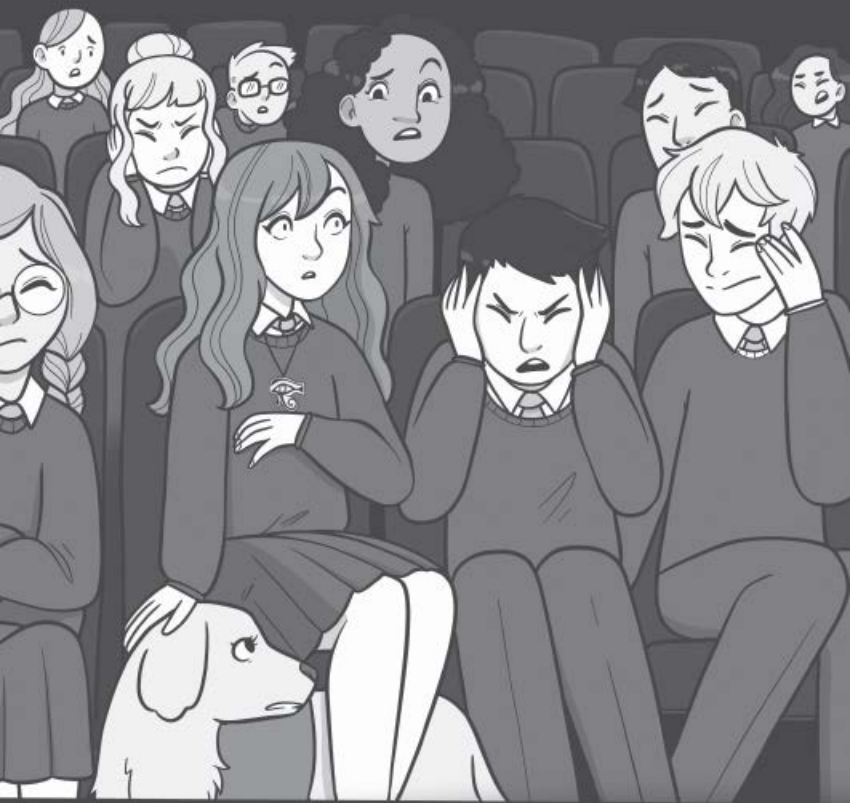
*The reality that I won't be able to do simple things on my own, like pour a glass of water without it feeling like a big, daunting task engulfs me. Walking out the door by myself will be difficult. How am I supposed to get excited about my future when making a cup of tea will be a challenge? I'm exhausted from the amount of focus and energy it takes to learn everything again. I'm angry that this has happened to me. I feel alone, no matter how much love and support my family gives. It feels like I'm ... stranded.*

*I don't say all this to Gavin. Instead I say, "It's too much."*

*"Yes, it's a lot," he replies simply. "You'll get there, one step at a time."*

*I sniff, shaking my head. "It doesn't feel that way."*

*He takes a moment and then says, "I know it's overwhelming. I know it feels like you're crumbling,*



*but this – all of it – will show you what you're made of."*

In the midst of the unbearable noise roaring through the auditorium, Maisie nudges my leg again. Her soothing presence brings me back. I won't let what's happening right now make me crumble. I will accept it and find my way through it. Instead of focusing on the sense of panic that this overwhelming noise threatens, I try to focus on something simple: my breathing. Deep breath in, long exhale out. Feel the cool air as it fills my lungs, breathe out the warm air. With one hand on Maisie's head, her thick, soft fur warm against my leg, I gradually begin to steady my breathing.

The Eye of Horus pendant remains warm against my skin. I realize it's helping to calm me. And now that I've collected myself, I'm able to listen properly. I'm not shying away from the noise. There, among the traffic sounds reverberating in my ears, is something else, something out of place and distant. It takes a moment to work out what it reminds me of, then I realize it's like a battle scene in a movie: swords clashing, shields blocking, arrows zipping.

*Strange.*

Suddenly the noise stops. The panic begins to lift. I can hear everyone gasping for breath as they recover. The whole school is in a state of shock.

“What was *that*?” Finn asks through wheezes, his voice wobbling.

“I have no idea,” I reply, reaching to touch my pendant as its warmth fades. “But I hope it doesn’t happen again.”