

Move

By Dante Harker

Calum sat on the steps leading down into the garden and gave the orange-tinted pebble a disappointed glare. He was actually more disappointed with himself given the years of practice he had put into developing superpowers and still nothing; even after five minutes of intense effort the stone refused to move.

It had always been the same. His first memory was as a precocious five-year-old, when he had leapt from the three-metre-high tool shed convinced that he could fly. Nothing, no flight, no soaring through the clouds, no drifting on the up-currents going only nature knows where. Nothing, at least nothing but a broken arm and dented nose. Thankfully the 'just in case' mattress he had prepared, saved him from more permanent injuries.

Later, at the age of thirteen, his school had arranged for his year to sing carols at an old people's home. Not much of a singer, Calum, and his friend Jasper - a small boy for his age who spoke very little and, if rumours were true, had still wetted the bed - escaped class and went to explore.

At the sound of a nurse heading their way they had darted into a room smelling of urine. Electric plug-ins did nothing to mask the pungent odour; instead their warmed fragrance lifted and swirled near-toxic fumes around the room.

In the corner a figure rocked in a chair by the window. The figure, barely a man, more a skeleton with skin draped over ancient bones, turned out to be Major Topper Harris.

'I still see the flash of their bayonets, their guns screaming. You know you can't hide from the guns? I am a Major, men used to salute me. Not now of course. They still call me "Major" but I can see the grins on their faces as they do. Plus, the nurses steal my socks.'

The two young boys stood in the presence of the Major, afraid to move. He called them over and too scared to do otherwise, they moved into the light of the window. It was one of those winter days where the sun never made its presence felt. The room's only light coming from white, tinkling bulbs from the Christmas tree standing in the garden outside the window.

The boys promised the Major that they'd watch for sock thieves, and when the smell of urine caused tears to well in their eyes, they slowly backed away.

'One second boy!' the Major cried and he reached out like a cobra, latching onto Calum's hand. 'You boy are different, you have something special, a gift. Use that gift.'

That idea of him being 'something special' had stayed with Calum, adding to his belief he was a superhero, he was just yet to find his power.

A cold breeze danced leaves around the garden and Calum jumped as his sister took a seat next to him: 'What are you doing? You must be freezing out here in this cold, and in shorts!'

'The sun was out' Calum replied 'it's only just turned cold. I guess I'll have to unpack all the boxes and find some jeans.'

From the make-up smears around her eyes it was clear that Laura had been crying. She looked old, much older than her thirty years.

'I'm sorry you had to come home from sunny Thailand to overcast Sheffield. That must be a shock. And to come home to mum and the hospital and everything, I'm sorry.' Laura wrapped an arm around her brother and tears returned to her eyes.

Calum looked down at his tanned legs, only days ago they were running him along white sandy beaches, a free spirit enjoying his gap year. He knew his mum was ill, he had spoken with Laura and his dad a couple of weeks ago and they'd told him not to worry. And then the phone call came. It seemed the 'nothing to worry about' was a mild heart attack; the second attack was not so mild.

'They told us she would get better soon' Calum's dad had told him. 'We didn't want to worry you. We just thought we would look after her and, if she was going to be fine, then what was the point of ruining your trip?'

The phone call had come moments after dawn had broken over his Thai beach. The full moon party had slipped from a banging hedonistic rave, to a chilled-out and somewhat melancholy gathering of those who had not pulled, and not yet passed out. The gathering, all softly spoken in the presence of the rising sun, glared at Calum when his phone disturbed the serenity.

Calum, shocked that he was able to get a signal, stumbled way from the party leftovers and took the call from his sister. 'The doctor told us that she isn't going to make it.'

'Who isn't going to make it?' Calum had questioned. Still wasted from the party, he was a little unsure that the call was even real.

'Sorry, Calum, it's me, Laura: its mum, she's had a heart attack and the doctors don't think she's going to make it.' At her words, the party stopped and the world became pointless.

A leaf drifted by on the wind and as Calum watched it dance his mind drifted to his mother's words: 'You're my little miracle,' she had often told him growing up. Calum was a very late second child and when he had come along, unexpected and despite the odds, wonderfully healthy, his mother couldn't help but see him as special.

Then when Laura had left for university and with their father away so much with work, it was just Calum and his mother.

Pulling his thoughts back to the present, Calum left his sister and went up to his room in search of jeans.

Before he left his mum had told him that she would pack everything away as he was going for a year. That way his room could be a guest room. However, everything looked the way he had left it. Well nearly, it was tidier and hoovered, plus his computer and game system were turned off which never happened while he was at home. He put the jeans on and then hunted for socks. Before he covered his feet he felt the patch around his big toe, his flip-flop callus. 'Life is better in flip-flops,' he mused to the empty room.

He had kept this as his Facebook status for weeks bringing a wealth of 'it's all right for some' comments from his friends who had forgone the gap year and left for University without dithering.

At the hospital Calum stood with his father and sister as the doctor reported the 'deterioration' in his mother's condition, only to be expected given the massive heart attack.

Calum listened as his father talk on the phone, ever the stern businessman; he relayed the news back to various family members. 'They don't expect Faye to survive the night.' His tone was crisp and to the point, seemingly unswayed by the outbursts of tears, that even at a distance, Calum could hear had met his words.

A nurse, clearly at the end of a long shift, told them that they could go in and visit, but it was best to go in one or two at a time. Calum expected her to add, 'that's it, say your goodbyes and move along.' She didn't, she just offered a smile that didn't make its way up to her tired eyes and drifted away.

'Do you want to go in first son? You can, I can go in after.' Calum looked at his dad. He thought for a second that he could see guilt in the man's eyes. If they went in together, would his dad apologise for not getting in touch sooner?

Would he tell him why he thought it was acceptable to deprive his son of these last few weeks with his mother?

'It's okay, you go in.' Calum said 'I really need to get a coffee before the jet lag gets the better of me.' Calum didn't wait for a reply; instead he walked purposely away in the direction where he hoped he would find a drink.

Twenty minutes later, after getting lost several times in the labyrinth of the Northern General Hospital, Calum found a cafeteria. He glared and he stared and he put all the energy his tired mind could muster and still the milky froth of his coffee didn't move. Not even a ripple. Surely today, with such emotional trauma, his superpowers would show themselves; but nothing.

'Where have you been? The doctor has just been back. He said there isn't long,' Laura snapped on Calum's return. As she spoke she ushered him towards his mother's private room.

When he had visited earlier that day he had stayed in the background, left his sister and a few aunts to fuss around. The visit had been short and on the drive back he had drifted to sleep, taken back to the blue waters and a life without worries.

Now, pushed over to a chair at the side of her bed there was no escape. Here was his mother, a tube up her nose and more coming from her arms. Laura left him alone, telling him that she would give him a few minutes to say any last words.

Machines beeped and the strip lighting hummed along with his mother's laboured breathing.

No last words arrived; he thought and hoped that something, anything would come into his mind - the right thing to say. He remembered that on a TV show once the characters had been encouraged to talk to the unconscious patient as, research showed that their words could still be heard. Calum wanted to say something, but more than that he wanted to hear his mother say something in return, her last words.

A nurse came and looked over the chart, a woman with a kind face. She patted Calum on his shoulder and murmured, 'time to say your goodbyes, it won't be long now.'

When she left Calum looked at his mother and said 'I don't want to say my final goodbyes unless you wake up and I know you've heard them.' As he spoke Calum focused all his attention on to his mother's forehead.

He concentrated and he pushed his thoughts towards his dying mother. He thought about their trips to the zoo and the

museum. How, much to her protests, he'd taught her how to play the latest video games until she could kill zombies with the best of them.

He started to murmur the words 'wake up', over and over. He gave the words power and intention. 'Wake up, wake up. I can't lose you without a final goodbye - wake up!'

'Calum is that you?'

'Mum, yes I'm here, I'm so sorry I wasn't here before, they didn't tell me.'

'Don't blame anyone my sweet, my miracle child; I made them promise not to bring you home. I want you to have an amazing life. Will you do that for me? Will you have an amazing life?'

Calum took his mother's arm and he promised.

Calum's felt his Dad's hand on his shoulder and heard him say, 'son, you have to leave the room.'

Calum stood up, dazed and then followed his father out of the room.

'You were sleeping son and I'm sorry but your mother has gone.' Calum looked into his father's eyes, 'I don't understand, I was just talking to her, I used my powers. I was talking to her.'

'It was just the jetlag, you were sound sleeping. I'm sorry son.'

Confused and a little unstable on his feet, Calum left the hospital with his father and sister.

He wasn't sleeping, he knew he wasn't, he had spoken to his mother. He wanted to scream, insist that something was wrong, that everyone had to listen to him.

But he had promised his mother that he would have an amazing life and that would be near impossible if the world thought him insane.

At the car he stood waiting for his father to find the keys. He knew what he'd seen and he smiled at the thought of his mother's face and at her last words to him.

At his foot there was a small mottled pebble. As his dad checked his jeans and then his coat pockets on his key hunt, Calum pointed a finger at the pebble and with all his attention and all his will he commanded, 'move!'
