

# The Seer

A person is walking away from the viewer down a narrow, paved path that leads into a dense, foggy forest. The trees are tall and their branches are silhouetted against the bright, hazy light at the end of the path. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and slightly ominous.

DON'T BE AFRAID

# THE SEER

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# Part One

## A Deadly Vision

Jake McKenzie slammed his fist against the table and threw his pencil against his notebook with his other hand. He'd gotten the algebra problem wrong.

Again.

For the fifth time.

"Damn I hate this..." he muttered to himself. "I'm never going to get it right!" He crossed his arms on top of his math book and buried his head there.

"I'm never going to get this..." he whispered and closed his eyes tight. How could he be getting the same stupid problem so wrong every frickin' time!?

He shook his head as familiar thoughts flooded into his mind.

*I'm going to fail this exam.*

*This is so hopeless.*

*What's wrong with me....why can't I ever get this stuff right?*

*I'm running out of time!!*

Jake had always thought of himself as being just another ordinary, maybe even average 15-year-old. He wasn't good at sports, though he loved playing them. He had a handful of people in his class at school that he'd call 'friends'...a handful which actually only really meant two, and they had been his friends for as long as he could remember because they all got stuck in the same classes together.

School sucked, especially Math because no matter how hard he tried, and try he did,

he had never got his grade above 63%. He hated English class, but didn't suck too much at it, loved French and did pretty well at it, while Science and Social Studies were most of the time enjoyable, but nothing to get excited about - and most of the time, he wasn't really all that excited...especially not now. Not today. Today was the second to the last day with study breaks in them before final exam week began. And he did not feel ready. Not even close.

He sat up again and stared down at the math problem that seemed to taunt him from his algebra book. The x's and y's and the stupid subtraction and addition signs, and the parenthesis that housed evil multiplication and division steps that had to be done first... or were they last?? Or was it after you added and subtracted... no...no... no... that's not it. Jake shook his head again, and glanced up at the clock that ticked relentlessly away from across the library, and felt like the second hand was dragging him mercilessly towards the end of another fruitless study period with every tick.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

It was 11:45am.

Exam week would be here in three days.



The library's front door creaked open, and he turned away from the clock to see who might come in.

It was Robby Thomas, one of the two people at school he called a friend. Jake watched him come in and wished he could somehow tap into Robby's brain and download his math skill. Robby was one of those guys who seemed like, without having to try, was good at pretty much everything. If they hadn't somehow become friends, Jake would have found this scholastic effortless to be quite annoying!

Robby had entered the library, and was moving towards him now, shouldering his usual red backpack over a well pressed expensive looking blue dress shirt. And that was when Jake noticed that not all was usual...not at all.

Robby was different. Instead of his normal confident stride, he seemed to shuffle,

almost struggling to move ahead, and his head was down, as if it were too heavy for his neck to hold up. Robby seemed to move right by him, unaware of anyone or anything instead of exchanging the normal 'Hey' as he and Jake often did when they met up.



Darker. Colder.



Jake shivered as Robby passed, and felt a deep icy heaviness enclose around him - the room suddenly fading to grey, except Robby, who now moved silently but purposefully towards the back far end of the room.

Jake stood, watching. Something was terribly...horribly wrong. Or was about to be. He could feel it like an electric current shooting throughout his body.

He can't! He mustn't! Don't let him open that backpack!



Jake bolted forward, sending his chair tumbling to the ground.



"Robby!" He shouted, as loud as he could, but his words seemed to tumble useless to the floor as he ran.

"Stop!" He yelled and again felt his words falling useless.

Without hearing, without caring, Robby slid his backpack onto a table against the far wall of the library, and unzipped the top.

Jake pumped as hard as he could now, tried to cross the distance, but just could not seem to move fast enough.

Robby's hand vanished inside the backpack for a split second, and Jake saw something glint unnaturally in the darkening shadows which seemed to engulf the back end of the room...felt his breath catch in his chest and froze, Robby had just pulled out a gun!



“Roooooobbbbbbbbyyyyyyyy!” Jake could hear himself screaming now, but again no-one else seemed to hear. Robby sure didn’t, because he continued to move the pistol towards his right ear, shoving the muzzle into skin...

Jake took another step forward, eyes wide in terror - hands reaching out to try to stop, but was just too far away.

“Roooooobbbb - ”

A loud bang. A flash. And Robby slumped to the floor in blood.

And with the bang still ringing in his ears, Jake found himself back in his seat, staring at his Algebra book he had been working on all morning.

There was no darkness.

No grey.

No chill in the air.

“What!?”

Jake spun in his seat to look behind him. There was not even a dead Robby, and strangest of all, it was business as usual in the library.

Jake sprang from his chair and dashed past a few started tenth graders who were hunting quietly for an important book they needed for a project they had been working on.



“Hey kid, watch it!” One hissed as Jake raced by.

And in an instant he was there at the back of the library, only the table which stood next to the wall sat empty.

There was nobody.

No pistol.

No blood.

"Jake."

It was Mrs. Jennings, the librarian. She continued to speak as she walked towards him from the front desk.

"You can't run in the library, you know that."

Jake just stood there in a daze.

"Jake!"

Mrs. Jennings had reached him now and had her hand on his shoulder. "Jake!"

He shook his head, trying to understand.

She was right in front of him, looking into his face...leaning in. "Jake! Are you ok? Can you hear me?"

Jake blinked and covered bismuth with his right hand. Shook his head...wanted to vomit.

"No."

It was all he could get out. He wasn't ok. None of this was ok. He could feel his legs wobbling underneath him and knew in a second that if he didn't sit down, he would faint.

"I need to sit." He muttered.

"Ok, here's a chair." Said Mrs. Jennings as she slid the chair from the study table next to them over to his legs.

Jake sat.

"Thank you."

"Let me get you some water." Said Mrs. Jennings. "You look like you need something cold to drink."

Jake nodded.

"Put your head down on the desk for a minute, ok?" She said, as she moved away to find some water.

Jake folded his arms on the table in front of him and rested his head.

What.Was.THAT?

It had been so real! Could still hear Robby's pistol cracking loudly in his ears.

He looked again to the spot where he had THOUGHT FOR SURE he'd seen Robby fall to the floor in blood...and saw only the dull brown of the library's industrial carpet.

Shook his head.

"Here you go, Jake..." said Mrs. Jennings.

"Thank you...." He replied weakly and sat up to take the glass of water from her outstretched hand and took a long drink.

"What's going on, Jake? You look terrible."

Jake shook his head.

How could he explain what he'd just seen?

"Mrs. Jennings....have you seen Robby Thomas come in the library today?"

Mrs. Jennings paused for a moment, thinking. "No. No, I haven't. Why, are you expecting him?"

Jake shook his head, unsure of what to say.

"I don't think so...." That sounded weird even to him.

He downed the rest of the water and set the cup on the table. Took a deep breath and



let it out slowly, trying to calm.

Mrs. Jennings smiled. "I think you're just working too hard. Take a break! Walk around outside a bit. You'll be ok."

Jake took that in. Maybe he had been working too hard.

Nodded. "Yeah...maybe you're right, Mrs. Jennings. I think I'll go for a bit of a walk... I'm feeling a bit better now."

"Ok Jake. You take it easy, ok? I've got to get back to my desk now, but if you need anything just let me know."

Jake nodded his thanks and watched as she walked back to her desk to help some students who had been waiting there for her.

*I think a walk would do me good.* He thought to himself, rising slowly and noted thankfully that his legs were back to normal. *Yes....outside would be perfect.*

He hurried back to his things, gathered them up and stuffed them into his backpack, zipping it shut. Then slinging it over his shoulder, he waved his thanks once again to Mrs. Jennings and pushed his way out the library doors and promptly walked right into....Robby Thomas!



'Whump!'

Reflexively, Jake caught one of Robby's library books before it could tumble, but not before several others escaped and toppled loudly to the floor.

"Whoaa!" exclaimed Robby, startled by the sudden impact.

"I'm so sorr...!" Jake heard himself blurt out, his voice trailing off as he suddenly realized who he had just smashed into.

For a split second Jake saw himself once again back in the library, racing desperately....reaching...trying in vain to stop Robby from pulling that awful trigger,

but could only watch as Robby fell to the floor in blood.

And was back to the library front entrance again. Blinked, as Robby slipped off his red backpack.

"Don't worry about..." said Robby about to bend over to pick up the fallen books.

Relief! Jake felt it well up inside him so strongly that he lunged forward impulsively and enveloped Robby in a massive bear hug.

"I'm soo glad to see you!" was all he could say.

For a moment, a very brief moment, Robby didn't move, and didn't say a word – most likely too shocked to, thought Jake afterward, but that didn't matter now. Robby was alive! There was no gunshot, no blood. No body.

And then Jake noticed the red backpack on the floor by Robby's feet.

Robby coughed uncomfortably. "What's the matter with you, McKenzie? Let go!"

Jake let go, still looking at the backpack. Stepped back.

"Sorry, Robby." He replied nervously and looked Robby in the eyes. "I...um...don't know what got into me." And that was the truth.

Robby shrugged. "Whatever. Doesn't matter." And with that, he knelt down and started gathering his toppled library books from the floor.

And that's when Jake noticed the nicely pressed blue dress shirt Robby had on: the same blue dress shirt he had seen him wearing in that strange... ..what was that? A dream? Jake knelt down and helped gather the remaining books.

He could feel his heart racing- beating as if it would break out of his chest at any second. Felt like he wanted to talk, to say something....ANYTHING to get a conversation going with Robby, but didn't have the slightest clue of what to say. They were down to the last two books now....the same awful Algebra textbook he had been working with most of the day, and a French novel of some sort.

"How's Math going?" Asked Jake, feeling lame. Dumb question stupid! The guy rocks at math. He rocks at everything!

"All right, I guess," was Robby's quiet reply as he took the French book from Jake's waiting right hand.

"Algebra has been a little rough."

What!? Jake hoped his lower jaw didn't look like it had fallen all the way to his sneakers.

"You? You're kidding, right? I always thought Math was a piece of cake for you!"

Robby shrugged. "Not this time around. I don't know what's wrong, but I just can't seem to catch on to this stuff..." he said, looking down at the Algebra text book in his hand.

For a split second, Jake saw a shadow pass across Robby's face as he stared down at the math book. "Ha. Tell me about it!" He replied, suddenly aware that the conversation had to keep going. "I've NEVER caught much of anything out of Math...at least not easily."

Robby kept looking down at the Algebra book silently, so Robby plunged forward. "Yeah, it's so frustrating, you know? I mean, Mrs. Mason explains what to do on the whiteboard so fast, and I'm sure what she says is totally clear for her and the rest of the class, but NOT ME. As soon as she blabbers on about solving for "x" and "y" I just get SOOO BOOOORRRREED. Blah, blah, blah is all I hear. I hate it!"

Robby shifted and lifted his gaze, and Jake noticed a small....VERY small smile tugging around the corners of Robby's mouth.

"Totally," He replied. "I haven't been following her classes very well for weeks now. I'm glad to know I'm not the only one."

Jake could hardly believe his ears. "I know! I always leave that class feeling like I'm the only one not getting it...it...really sucks!" Jake paused for a breath. "That's what I was doing in here all day – trying to figure the Algebra book out before finals come

around.”

Robby’s face darkened again at the mention of finals. “I’m sure I’m going to fail them.” He answered quietly. “My parents will kill me.”

Uh-oh. Suddenly, Jake wished he hadn’t mentioned finals, could see the hint of a smile vanishing from Robby’s face, and could feel heaviness....deep heaviness descending like a fog.

Change the topic.

PIZZA. The thought asserted itself loudly in Jake’s mind.

Pizza?

Jake frowned for a moment as the word seemed to grow in his thoughts. Clearing his throat, Jake spoke again.

“Um, I was just going to grab something to eat. Turns out Algebra makes you mighty hungry. I was going to grab a slice of pizza over at the mall. Why don’t you come? I’ll buy.”

For a moment, Robby wavered, as if he hadn’t heard...and then that smile tugged around his mouth again, his face lifting. “That sounds pretty good, man. I’d love a pizza.”

Relief! Jake felt his heart skip excitedly, that strange heaviness lifting as Robby stuffed the last book into his backpack, zipped it up and hoisted it over his shoulder. “Let’s go! Come to think of it, I’m pretty hungry myself.”

Jake laughed. “Great! Let’s go.” And they marched together down the school hallway and out the door into the bright afternoon sun.

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The walk across the ever busy Hillcrest street had been quick and easy, and upon leaving the school grounds Jake happily engaged Robby in easy conversation about everything from the latest X-box game that every gamer in grade 9 either had already,

or desperately wanted – to girls...and more girls, and the fast approaching summer break only a few weeks away.

“What will you do this summer?” asked Jake, as they crossed the Hillcrest Mall’s packed out parking lot. Robby shook his head as he opened the door to the mall’s main entrance and held it for Jake. “I don’t know. You know we usually go back east to visit my grandma and a few cousins who live in Ontario....but I haven’t heard my parents talking much about it this year. You?”

They walked down the crowded, but refreshingly cool hallway towards the mall’s food court, which was now swamped with school kids and shoppers eagerly devouring their lunches. Jake spotted the ever popular “Leaning Tower of Pizza” restaurant just ahead – and noted happily that the line of hungry customers was only 5 people long.

“Well, we hardly ever do anything big over the summer at our house.” He replied as they threaded through the crowded eating area. “We usually go camping a few times, but both my parents work year round so we can’t get away for very long.”

Robby nodded. “Where do you guys go again? I can’t remember.”

Jake smiled, “Wherever we can find an opening! It’s not always easy to reserve a spot in the more popular campgrounds—and my Mom isn’t that big on roughing it, so that limits our choices. So...random places. I don’t think we’ve been to the same spot twice.”

They made it to the end of the pizza line.

“Yeah, my Mom isn’t much of a camper either,” replied Robby. “She prefers to stay in hotels whenever we travel.”

Jake nodded. “My Mom goes along with my Dad just because she’s a good sport, but secretly I think she wishes we were in some classy hotel on our vacations.”

The line moved forward quickly, much to their delight. They had already seen a dozen plates of the Leaning Pizza’s famous cheese tower pizza pass by, filling the air with one of the best smells known to teendom: garlic... onion... bacon... and so much melted cheese that it looked like it would flow off the plate.

A few minutes later, and they were sitting at a table almost smack dab in the middle of the crowded and noisy eating area of the food court. For a second, a very brief second, they looked lovingly upon their pizzas—savoring the smell, the moment.

“Let’s eat!” said Jake happily as he grabbed his giant slice with both hands.

“Oh yeah!” Agreed Robby, as he took a bite, long strands of melted cheese stringing out like a web as he tried to return the pizza back to his plate. For a while, nothing else mattered. Algebra... school.... final exams... vacations, and even girls were lost to conscious thought—for now it was all about the cheese, and the oh so lovely chunks of bacon.

“Mmm.” Robby had set his pizza back on his plate, and was sitting back in his seat with his eyes closed, savoring the bite in his mouth.

“Ummm-hmmmm” Agreed Jake his mouth equally full, but his hands were even fuller as he struggled to break through the cheese strands that seemed to stretch endlessly between his slice and his mouth.

Finally! The cheese put up a valiant fight, but after a few seconds Jake was free. Leaned back to relax for a moment.

“So...” he said after a few moments of silent chewing passed between them. “ That new Iron5 movie this summer is looking pretty good, eh?”

Robby struggled to swallow, and grabbed a drink to help things down, and then nodded. “Yep. The last Iron5 was awesome! Did you see the new trailer that came out for it last week? They showed Dark Ranger...”

It had all been going so great. The conversation had been effortless since they had left school and had gotten their pizza. Then “IT” happened. As Robby jabbered on excitedly about the evil Dark Ranger, Jake suddenly noticed something that made him freeze mid bite into his pizza.

Letters, about the size of his fist, scrolled rapidly across the space just above Robby’s head. At first they moved too fast to read, seemed like gibberish, until a second later, as Jake watched his pizza slice still hanging from his mouth and hand, they slowed and

the letter stream turned to words, and then sentences and complete thoughts.

*I won't see it, anyway. Doesn't matter, there's nothing I can do about it. I'm failing and there's no way out. Worthless... what the hell are you doing, you pathetic moron? This isn't going to help anything! Pizza won't get you past algebra, and this idiot is just as lost as you... I'm such a failure. I'm nothing more than a worthless pile of shit that can't even get his way through first year algebra. Nobody else is as big a loser as you.*

Jake blinked, returning the pizza to his plate as the words scrolled rapidly over Robby's head—just a few feet away, and seemed to swirl around to repeat themselves again. But Robby kept chattering on about a portal or something that the Dark Ranger would appear from, seemingly oblivious to the show above him.

***I'm a worthless pile of shit.***

The words vanished... except those last ones. They froze above Robby's head, and that's when Jake noticed Robby was no longer talking... but was bent heavily over his plate, hands over his face, sobbing, shoulders shaking.

"Jake?"

Jake could hear his name being called... but it felt far, far away. A heartbeat. Heard his name again.

"Jake?" The voice was clear and close now.

Jake turned just for a moment from Robby as he cried desperately over his plate, head and shoulders shaking uncontrollably. Maybe someone from school had seen and had come to help. A teacher maybe? Oh God, I hope someone else...

There was no one else except the crowded hungry shoppers who continued to do what hungry shoppers do in a food court – eat, talk, and text. Nobody was looking their way, and nobody seemed to be calling his name.

"Hey Jake, what's going on, man?"

Jake slowly turned back to see... Robby. Not the crying, desperate Robby he had seen

just seconds ago... but Robby....just plain old Robby, who sat across from him with a strange frown on his face. There were no tears. No hunched over shoulder shaking, sobbing, and no ugly words scrolling in midair over his head.

Jake swallowed hard and grabbed his soda—took a long... real long drink and set it down again on the table and shook his head, unable to think.

Thankfully Robby plunged forward with the conversation: "I said we should see it together. You and me."

Jake felt like he had forgotten how to speak and could only look dumbly across the table as Robby sat there looking back at him, waiting for a response.

Jake forced himself to smile and nod.

Say something! His mind screamed. Say something!

"Th... that would be great!" He stammered. A few more words started forming themselves into complete thoughts in Jake's mind, much to his relief. "It opens mid-July, right? We *should* go together!"

Robby was all smiles. "That would be a lot of fun!"

Jake thought for a minute. "I'll need to talk it over with my parents, but I'm sure they won't have a problem with it—I NEVER do stuff with friends."

Robby snorted. "My folks won't care. They're too busy. So just tell me when, and I'll be there."

Jake nodded. "Ok. I'll talk to them tonight and see." He took another bite of his pizza and imagined how surprised his Mom would be that he was asking if he could go and hang out with a 'friend.' She'll be surprised, all right! He thought to himself.

"Well..." said Robby, as he finished chewing on the last bite of his pizza. "I think I need to head home."

Jake wiped his mouth with this greasy napkin. "Sure. I should head home too. It was great to talk with you though."



Robby was quiet a moment, looked down at his backpack, and then back up at Jake. "Yeah." He paused. "It WAS great to talk with you."

"I've been so alone." He whispered.

What!? Jake frowned. He had just heard Robby say it... but hadn't seen his lips move.

"What?" asked Jake, unsure.

"What?" replied Robby, starring. "I said it was great to talk with you, too."

No, he didn't.

The thought formed clear and strong in his mind. Jake leaned forward, felt his heart pounding. This was beyond weird.

"You said I've been so alone. "You whispered it."

Robby froze a moment, like the proverbial deer caught in an oncoming car's headlights. Cornered! Trapped! Opened his mouth to answer, and then quickly closed it.

Jake paused. New words came.

"Yo... you've failed every single Math test since April, and that's never happened to you before." As he said the words, like a movie playing in his mind, Jake could clearly see Robby staring down at a handful of math tests... which he had crumpled up and buried in his backpack. One had 45% in ugly red marker across the top of it, another from May had 32%, and the last one from early June had a huge 0.

More came.

"You never told your parents because you were too ashamed to tell them that you were flunking. What will they think of you? And they wouldn't listen to you anyway, they're too busy – at least that's what you've been telling yourself."

A heartbeat.

Jake kept going, could feel the words flowing as if he were reading them from a book: "...all this has been building up overtop of you like a mountain – with every test, and

every failure, you feel it growing. Weighing you down. You feel..." Jake paused. Swallowed.

What in the world was going on?! Where was this stuff coming from?

Then he felt it. It rushed in on him like a massive wave – deep confusion. Despair. Loneliness. Trapped! Cornered! There was no way out!

"You feel..." Jake paused, and locked eyes with Robby, who was staring back at him—mouth gaping. "... like your only way out is to kill yourself. And that is what you planned to do today, in the library. The gun is in your backpack." In his mind, Jake could clearly see the cool hard metal of the handgun as it sat under the books at the bottom of Robby's pack.

Silence fell. The words, as quickly as they had come, came to an abrupt stop. There was nothing else. For a moment, nobody moved.

A breath passed between them. Another... and then Robby seemed to crumble, his gaze falling to the table, his eyes watering to spill over with tears. Buried his face in his hands.



# You're not stupid

Jake felt his legs wobbling under the table as he spoke the last few words and watched as Robby crumbled before him.

*Your only way out is to kill yourself... the gun is in your backpack.* The words seemed to explode through his mind. Shocked! Stunned! Jake clapped his right hand over his mouth as he suddenly saw Robby's terrible and desperate plan. It wasn't a dream anymore. It was something he knew: What he'd seen in the library was real! Robby had been planning to kill himself today!

Jake dropped his hand away from his mouth and grabbed his soda again. He took another long drink, sucking hard until he heard the straw loudly slurp up the rest of his root beer. He didn't know what to say or do next, so he set his empty cup back on the table and placed his hands on his knees to stop them from shaking.

Whoa.... hang in there..... he told himself silently, trying to recover.

Robby still had his face buried in his hands, and for a few seconds, which felt like an eternity to Jake, that's exactly how he remained. After a few moments, Robby cautiously, so as not to attract attention, lifted his face and grabbed a napkin to wipe the tears away that had been streaming down his cheeks. Blew his nose.

"Sorry," he said, eyes glued to the table as he crumpled the used napkin and dumped it onto his food tray.

"I... I don't know what to do." He continued quietly a few seconds later. "I HAVE been failing Math since April." He shook his head. "And I was too scared to tell my parents because I've NEVER failed at anything in school. I didn't know how to tell them, and I knew they would be so disappointed in me."

Quiet.

Seconds flashed by.

Thankfully, Jake felt the strength returning in his legs, but he could still think of nothing

to say.

Robby kept talking quietly, starring at the table. "I tried taking extra classes... you know, to figure things out.... but.... but I'm just not getting it. I'm too stupid." Hung his head.

Heaviness. Deep... dark heaviness. Jake could feel it descending and shivered.

"Robby... you're not stupid." The words seemed to fall empty on the table in front of him.

Oh, man.... what a dumb thing to say. Of course you're going to say that... everyone would say that. Jake shook his head. Tried to think. Robby was silent, still starring at the table bleakly.

"You're not stupid!" He said it again, knowing it was a dumb thing to say, but was still unsure about how to help.

Could he help?

Took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Robby... man... I don't know what to tell you. I... mean... You're not stupid. Everyone struggles with something, but nobody is usually brave enough to admit it. I've always sucked at Math..... and I've asked the teacher for extra help, and my parents signed me up for a math tutor every Saturday.... but I still..... SUCK. But really.... suck. I see a math problem and it feels like my brain shuts down. But it's true you know, everyone sucks at something, and that doesn't make them stupid. IT's.... it's normal."

Robby was listening up to this point, and then he shook his head again. "I bet your Mom told you that."

Jake smiled. "Yep. Almost every single time I feel like giving up on this stuff."

Robby didn't smile. "My Mom NEVER says that. She's always going on about working your butt off to become something. That you can do anything you stick your mind to, and if you're not doing well, it's because you're not working hard enough. And then there's my Dad... he's an engineer. He eats, drinks, and sleeps Math every day.... and

it's just easy to him. He can't figure out why I can't seem to get it.... it always came so easy to him! Or so he says."

Jake nodded. "My Dad is good with Math too, and he can rarely help me when I'm stuck. I know he tries to explain it... but most of the time it just seems to go over my head. I don't think my brain is built for math."

Robby cracked a slight smile. "Mine either, man. At least I'm not wired for this Algebra junk."

Robby sighed heavily and leaned back in his chair. Stared up at the ceiling for a few seconds. Then frowned, turning back to Jake.

"How did you know all that stuff about me?"

Jake had absolutely no idea. None. Zero. Nothing. Nada.

He looked Robby in the eye, "I don't know. One minute I was talking with you, and then next I just... I just... knew. I don't know how."

Boy, that sounded crazy. And for a split second he could still remember the awful, hate filled words that had been scrolling over Robby's head.... and decided that THAT would be way too weird to explain. Kept quiet.

Silence.

"Well..." said Robby after a few quiet seconds passed between them. "I should get home. I've got more studying to do."

Jake nodded. "Me too, I guess."

Robby smiled again as he stood. "Thanks for the pizza. It was good to get out of school for a while. And... thanks for talking with me. It feels better to... to not be alone with all this."

"Yeah, sure!" Replied Jake, and looked Robby in the eyes as he stood with him, remembering the awful thing that still sat at the bottom of Robby's pack.

"Don't do it." He said earnestly.

Robby was quiet a moment, then nodded. "I won't." And meant it.

And with that, they gathered their trays and dumped their garbage in the nearby bins and made their way back home.

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Jake couldn't stop thinking about it. Where had those words come from? How had he known what Robby had been thinking? How had he seen those test marks? The gun hidden in Robby's backpack? And what had happened back in the library?

It was already after midnight, but sleep would not come no matter how many times he had tried.

Was it intuition? A very... VERY lucky guess?

Jake shook his head. Thought about it. No.... that wasn't guessing. He knew what guessing at a dumb multiple choice question felt like. When you guess, he thought to himself, you just throw something out - a big 'whatever' and hope for the best. What had happened earlier had been... well.... like fact!

His mind spiralled back to the first questions again: BUT HOW DID I KNOW? Where did that come from???

He rolled over on his right side, pulling his covers up to his chin, and stared across his darkened room and out his bedroom window. Outside, he could see the nearby lights of the neighbor's house, a few blackened silhouettes of trees, and above the pale light of the moon as it slid behind a cloud.

*How had he known?*

Still no answers came, and after a few more minutes of starrng off into the night sky, Jake felt his eyes closing, his breathing slowing as sleep finally found him and he rested.