

Curse or Blessing?

It started when he was eight. He somehow knew his grandfather would die the next day. He confided in his mum who told him not to have such morbid thoughts.

His grandfather's car hit black ice and careered down a steep embankment into a river. His grief-stricken mother put her son's premonition down to a hideous coincidence. She pushed aside more worrying implications.

Ethan was twelve when he admitted to himself that he was different. A concatenation of random events confirmed his scary ability to predict the future. He knew, for example, that his older brother would suddenly run away from home. He wasn't able to pinpoint the exact date and time, but sure enough, Rob left within a week of the thought popping into Ethan's head. It wasn't only bad news that figured in his predictions. His dad received a big promotion. Ethan had already bought a 'Congratulations on Your New Job' card and without thinking had given it to his dad as he burst into the house to tell everyone. "How on earth did you know I'd been promoted?" his dad quizzed Ethan later. "I heard you and Mum talking about the possibility and I knew it was only a matter of time," the boy responded plausibly. His prognostications became sharper in timing and accuracy and their frequency accelerated alarmingly from one a month to many times a day.

Walking to school each day in his mind's eye he would see crystal clear images of things which passers-by would experience in the future. He saw a young woman who had just smiled at him transported to a hospital room where she was gazing adoringly at her new-born child. As he was following one of his classmates through the school gates he knew that later that day this lad would break his leg. He was about to tap him on the shoulder and tell him not to play football that afternoon but he pulled back fearful of the incredulous response he would get when explaining the reason for his monitory advice.

As time progressed his predictive arena expanded to embrace sporting and political events. A keen supporter of Arsenal he found that with infallible success he could foretell the result of their next match. He decided to have some fun with his best friend Michael, who often accompanied him to the Emirates Stadium. He suggested they should each guess the exact result and score line of the next game. Their predictions made, the two boys signed a piece of paper with their guesses on it. Of course, for Ethan they weren't

guesses but cast-iron certainties. Four nil down after four matches Michael decided to pack it in. In truth he was unnerved by the unerring accuracy of Ethan's 'guesses.'

This was the only occasion on which Ethan had done anything which might reveal his special powers. He had told no-one in his family because he was afraid they'd think he was a freak. But his urge to show-off to his chum had unfortunate repercussions.

Michael had kept the signed and dated bits of paper with their forecasts and he was looking at them one day when his brother Ben grabbed them. Michael was afraid of Ben for good reason. Unnaturally tall and beefy for his sixteen years, Ben was a nasty bully, constantly in trouble at school and lately hanging out with a gang of feral youths. Michael knew the gang was engaged in more than petty shoplifting because he'd found a rolled up bundle of twenty pound notes in Ben's room when he was searching for his Fitbit which he knew Ben had appropriated.

"Well spit it out. What are these numbers then?" Michael had to tell him about Ethan's uncanny score predictions and Ben listened intently. Lately he'd been getting an older gang member to place some bets for him mainly on the horses but occasionally on football matches. He sensed that determining in advance four exact score lines was more than a fluke.

The next day after school Ben waylaid Ethan, put him in a headlock and marched him into the woods. To soften him up Ben belted Ethan in the stomach and as he was writhing and retching on the ground started the interrogation. "So what's this I hear then about your Mystic Meg stunts?" Ethan tried to play dumb but when Ben thrust the scribbled bits of evidence under his nose he confessed to his predictive ability. As a test, Ben asked him for the result of the next Arsenal match and which player would score the first goal. He decided to put a £10 bet on the name Ethan had confidently given him. Sure enough John Stones, the Manchester City centre-back was the first player to put the ball in the back of the net. As he was only a very occasional goal scorer the odds were excellent and Ben won £150.

Ben told Ethan that if he revealed his unique ability to anyone else he would do more than rough him up. He showed the terrified boy a large hunting knife with a jagged edge and said he'd already cut someone in a street fight and would gut Ethan like a fish if he blabbed.

For the next few weeks Ethan fed Ben many sporting tips and with the help of his eighteen year old accomplice Ben placed bets in a range of bookies locally and in adjacent towns. The boys thought they'd been clever in minimising the risk of detection but they were overheard in a pub bragging about the thousands they were making with their scam. Word soon reached the ears of the local crime boss and he sent two of his heavies to lean on the pair. The confrontation went badly wrong. The lads pulled knives and attacked the thugs who shot them both. Their secret tipster was never unmasked.

And what of Ethan? By the age of twenty-five he had overtaken Elon Musk as the world's richest man.