

The Gift

Marty was six years old when he first realised there was something different about him. He had been playing with his Lego when he stopped abruptly and announced to his mother, 'You should take the washing in.'

Puzzled, Mum examined the sky. There was not a cloud to be seen. A gentle breeze was blowing the sheets which she'd just hung out a few minutes ago. 'I think they'll need a bit longer sweetie,' she'd said ruffling his hair.

He'd shrugged his shoulders. 'Just don't want everything getting wet.'

Mum chuckled. 'I think I'll take my chances.'

A few hours later, the sky turned a moody grey and a sheet of rain swept in. The sheets were drenched.

'Told you,' said Marty, unhelpfully. Mum stomped upstairs muttering under her breath.

It was only later that she grew curious. 'How did you know it was going to rain?' she asked. 'Did you hear the forecast?'

'Nope,' said Marty. 'I just heard the storm coming.'

Marty had always heard weather. Storms made a low rumbling sound hours before they appeared. It hadn't occurred to him that other people didn't hear it too but Mum's reaction told him otherwise.

As the years went on, he realised there were lots of other things that he could hear that others couldn't. One day, he complained to his teacher that Molly's heart was beating too loudly and could he sit somewhere else. Another day, he asked Dad if they could turn the electricity off for an hour because he couldn't hear himself think. He could hear a fly buzzing in the house across the street and the tiny squeak of grass growing.

His parents took him to an audiologist. She did a whole barrage of tests. Then she scratched her head and repeated them again. Finally, she declared herself dumbstruck. She said she'd never seen someone with such powerful hearing. She called it 'a gift'.

If it was indeed a gift, Marty realised he should use it to his advantage. He could listen in to all the teachers' gossip or the plans for the next class test. Then he could share it with his classmates and enjoy being the hero of the school. It was fantastic!

A few days later though, he'd overheard Tilly and Jason chatting on their way home from school. They didn't see him. After all, he was several streets away.



'He thinks he's all that, doesn't he?' said Tilly.

'I know. Total show-off.'

'Wish he'd just leave us alone.'

Marty told himself that they could be talking about anyone. But he noticed that they gave him cold looks when he sat next to them at lunch the next day.

The next day, he'd been in maths class on the second floor when he'd heard his name being spoken in the ground floor girls' toilets.

He tuned in. He knew he shouldn't but he couldn't help himself.

'I wish he'd just leave,' the first voice said. It sounded like his friend Emily. They'd been neighbours for years.

'I know. He's so weird. Snooping into other people's conversations like that,' a second voice said. It was Farah. She'd known him since year 1.

'Total weirdo,' agreed Emily.

Marty clamped his hands over his ears and wished he could give his gift to someone else. Some things, he realised, are just not meant to be heard.

INFERENCE FOCUS

1. Why does Mum examine the sky?
2. Why does Mum chuckle?
3. Mum stomped upstairs muttering under her breath. What is Mum feeling at this point in the story? Why?
4. What do you think Mum's reaction was when Marty said he had heard the storm?
5. What do you think an audiologist is?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What word could replace *abruptly* to give the same meaning?

V

What does *drenched* tell us about the sheets?

V

What impression does the phrase *barrage of tests* give about Marty's visit to the audiologist?

P

How do you think Marty might change after this experience?

E

Why did the writer choose the title 'The Gift'? Do you think it's a good title – why or why not?