

# JAMIE

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Orion

This book is for you

Have you ever had a secret?

Not a small secret, like you broke your brother's X-wing toy, or spilled your mum's nail varnish on the bed. I mean, a big secret. One that seems to get more massive every day you carry it around. The sort of secret you lie awake at night thinking about, and it starts popping into your head when you're doing ordinary stuff at school.

Have you ever had a secret like that?

My secret was a weird one. In some ways, it felt like

I'd been carrying it round my whole life, but other times it felt like it was still pretty new. It changed and squished itself around my brain all the time, invading my thoughts when I was trying to watch something or just walk home from my friends' houses. But it didn't seem to be hurting anyone, my secret. So I just carried it around with me.

It was always there though.

It whispered at me when I got dressed and when I tried to do something with my hair. It muttered louder when we went swimming with school, or when I needed to use a public toilet. It got extremely irritating when I had to go clothes shopping with Mum, though for a long time I thought that was just because I hated shopping in general. Mum used to moan as she dragged me through the racks that I wasn't being helpful, and would I just *choose* something already? And I'd point to something and she'd roll her eyes to the security

cameras like she was the star of her own show and say *not* that, *I didn't mean something like* that, and the whole thing would start again.

My secret rode home with me on the bus, prodded me when a stranger talked about me. It was always there.

It got to be a sort of friend, my secret. I suppose it was better than it being my enemy. And thinking about the secret actually didn't make me feel bad. When I thought about the secret, I felt OK. Happy, even. Sometimes I felt like it was me and the secret against the world. Like only we knew the truth.

It was Year Four that I first said my secret aloud. To Ash, obviously, because you can tell anything to Ash and he won't bat an eyelid. Some people think this means he's unresponsive, but it's because he's actually really cool, and perfect at calculating risks. That time one of the kids in 5A brought a tarantula into school he just shrugged because, like he said later, it wasn't as

though the spider was going to leg it across the school like an Olympic sprinter and climb up his leg. Compared to a tarantula in the backpack, what I had to say didn't seem like that much of a big deal. But even so, my legs had turned into jelly and it felt like my stomach had fallen out of my bum because what if this was the end of my friendship with Ash?

I said it quietly, so if he did shout WHAT I could pretend he'd misheard me.

'I'm not a girl or a boy, Ash.'

There was a weird sort of silence that made my lungs freeze, like the time my brother pushed me into the icy plunge-pool on holiday.

Ash blinked. 'Oh, right,' he said, looking at me with flared nostrils. Ash doesn't get wide-eyed, he gets wide-nostrilled, which is fine in summer but no good at all when winter comes and he has a perpetual cold, let me tell you. 'So. Are you still going to be called Jamie?'

‘Yes,’ I said, deciding right that second that Jamie was my name and I was going to stick with it. ‘But don’t use “he” or “she” when you’re talking about me. Neither of them sound right. They’re not . . . my words. You can say, “I know Jamie Rambeau, they’re a super-cool person”.’

Ash nodded. ‘OK. I can manage that, I think. What if I forget?’

‘Then I’ll be really cheesed off,’ I said. ‘But you’ll try harder not to forget next time, won’t you?’

We looked at each other and smiled. I suddenly felt lighter than I had done for ages, like I’d inhaled a hundred helium balloons and I could go floating right up to the ceiling, maybe right up to the clouds or into space.

I told Daisy next. Daisy is my other best friend, and she’s the one who makes the decisions and keeps me and Ash entertained at the weekends. She had more questions but got used to it, eventually.

Mum and Dad were next, and my big brother, Olly. Maybe it was a bit weird for me to tell my friends before my family, but on some level I think it annoyed me that I had to tell them at all. They were my family, they should just *know*, surely? Turns out, parents need stuff spelling out for them a lot of the time, and they're not nearly as smart as they think they are.

They had lots of questions, way more than Daisy. They wanted to know what, if anything, was going to change with my name, my clothes, my pronouns, and they even asked about my favourite video games, for some reason. But then Dad did some research and after a while they both stopped bringing it up at dinnertimes. Sometimes I wonder if they're actually OK with it or if they got bored of talking about it. And Olly? Well, he shouted HOORAY and immediately started trying to open a bottle of Mum's champagne (She stopped him before he got very far.) He came out as gay a few years



ago, so was delighted to have someone else in the family under the rainbow flag.

Pretty soon everyone else in my class heard about me not being a boy or a girl, and they all started using *they* when they talked about me (without me even asking!) which felt amazing. Jamie Rambeau coming out wasn't even the most interesting thing to happen that week – not when a mix-up in the school kitchens meant the creation of Double Chips Friday to get rid of a potato surplus.

But then the teachers heard about me. Things got a bit messy after that. There was a week where Mum and Dad were asked to go into school for important meetings and I had to sit there whilst they talked about me like I wasn't there and decided things without asking me. But it worked out, in the end. Mum and Dad are used to it now, and they get my words right almost all of the time, and the teachers know who I am and things are pretty good.

At least, things *were* pretty good.

Until recently.

Until we started Year Six. That was when everything went wrong.

OUT NOW

