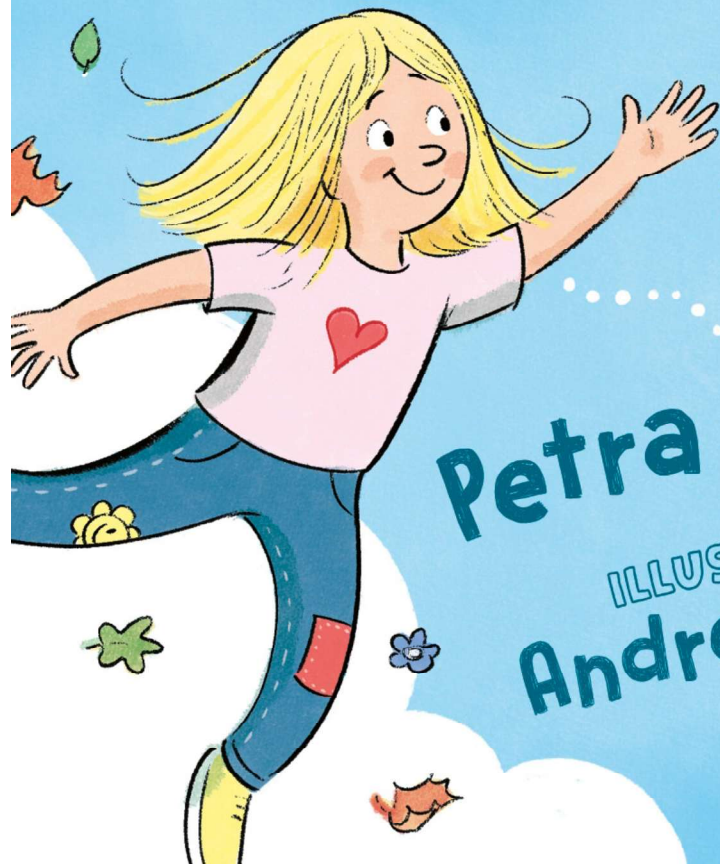


CHAPTER
SAMPLER

Evie P & me



Petra James

ILLUSTRATED BY
Andrew Joyner

Evie P
& me



To Evie, Lily and Thatcher

Evie P & Me

first published in 2025

by Walker Books Australia Pty Ltd

Gadigal and Wangal Country

Locked Bag 22, Newtown

NSW 2042 Australia

www.walkerbooks.com.au

Walker Books Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the country on which we work, the Gadigal and Wangal peoples of the Eora Nation, and recognises their continuing connection to the land, waters and culture. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

Text © 2025 Petra James

Illustrations © 2025 Andrew Joyner

The moral rights of the author and illustrator have been asserted.



A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

ISBN: 978 1 760657 46 8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Cover and internal design by Sarah Mitchell

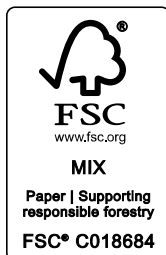
The illustrations for this book were created digitally.

Typeset in 13pt Sorts Mill Goudy

Printed and bound in Australia by Griffin Press

EU Authorized Representative: HackettFlynn Ltd.,
36 Cloch Choirneal, Balrothery, Co. Dublin, K32 C942, Ireland.
EU@walkerpublishinggroup.com

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



The paper this book is printed on is certified against the Forest Stewardship Council® Standards. Griffin Press holds chain of custody certification SCS-COC-001185. FSC® promotes environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.

Evie P & me



Petra James

ILLUSTRATED BY
Andrew Joyner



WALKER BOOKS

AND SUBSIDIARIES

LONDON • BOSTON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

*You never know something
wonderful
is going to happen ...
until it does.*





CHAPTER 1

New Girl Tuesday

Evie P arrived on a Tuesday.

She said Tuesday was the **best** day of the week to arrive.

It wasn't the beginning of the week.

It wasn't the end of the week.

It wasn't even the middle of the week.

Evie P said Tuesday was *floaty* and full of

surprise.

Just like her.

When I woke up that morning, Tuesday
looked just like Tuesday.



Because that's the amazing thing about something wonderful.

You never know where it is.



PEEK A BOO

Here I am.
Something wonderful.
Waiting to be found.

By ...
YOU!



It might be **sitting**
at the bus stop.



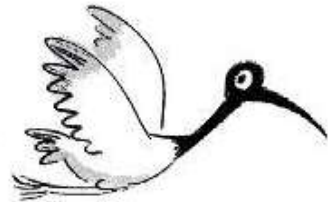
Or **zooming** down the path.



Or **hurtling**
g around the corner.



Or maybe even **sailing** through the sky.





WELCOME to
TUESDAY



Ms Trunketabella, our teacher, was standing at the front of the class with a girl we'd never seen.

A new girl.

On a Tuesday.

That had never happened to us before.

We didn't know then that this was just the beginning of **so many things** that had never happened to us before.



The new girl was standing straight with her arms tight by her side.

We stared at her.

She stared at us.

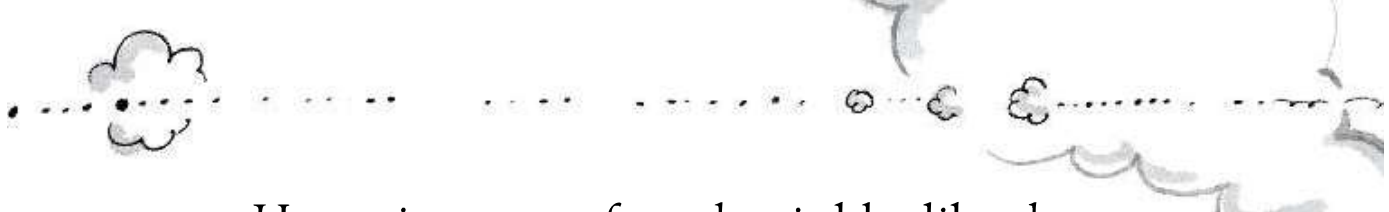
Ms Trunketabella smiled as we sat down at our desks. ‘Hello, class,’ she said. ‘This is Evie P. She’s come all the way from the other side of the world to join us.’

We gasped and looked at each other. The other side of the world! That was a **whole hemisphere** away. Where faraway people lived in countries like Siberia and Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

I rolled the names around my tongue. They were **delicious**. Like salted caramel chocolates. Or pavlovas piled high with raspberries and whipped cream, and sprinkled with hundreds and thousands.

‘That’s right, Ms Trunketabella,’ said the new girl called Evie P.





Her voice was soft and twinkly, like the fairy lights around my bedroom window.

‘How did you get to our side of the world?’ said Jack Huddle.

I knew Jack was hoping Evie P had come by train. Trains were Jack’s favourite things. His Uncle Richard had given him a collection of steam trains for his birthday in October.

‘I sailed across the oceans and the continents in an airship,’ said Evie P.

‘An airship?’ said Jack, looking disappointed. ‘Not a train?’

‘Yes and no,’ said Evie P. ‘My parents are Air-xplorers. Their feet hardly ever touch the ground.’

Air-xplorers!





The word **torpedoed** through my head, trailing bubbles of mystery behind it.

I'd never met an Air-xplorer.

I was going to add it to my

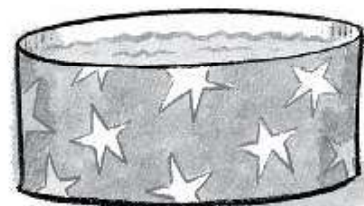
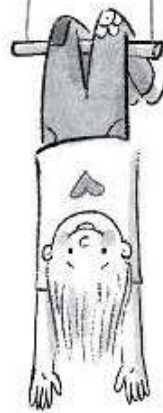
WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP

list. I already had Acrobat after I saw the High Flyers at the Blanco Brothers Circus, but Air-xplorer was much higher in the sky and Dad said I should always aim for the stratosphere.

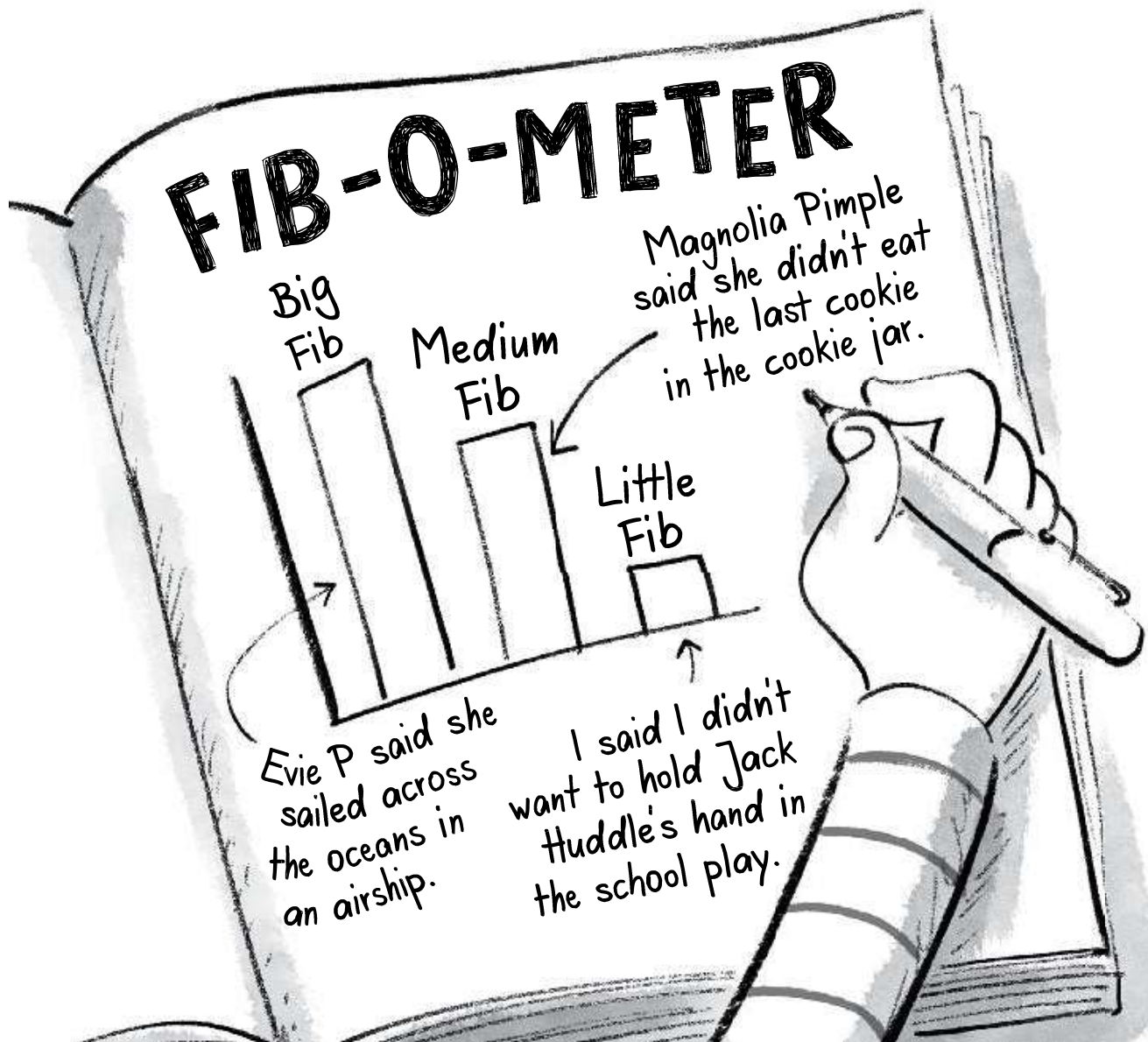
Or, maybe even the mesosphere.

'Well, that's a Big Fib if ever I heard one,' said Gretchen Aughtie, leaning into Tom Abergeldie. 'In fact, it might be the Biggest Fib I've heard this week.'

Gretchen Aughtie said **she** knew a lot about fibs because her dad was an accountant. She said **he** said people told heaps of fibs every day. Especially at tax time.



Gretchen had appointed herself Class Fib Monitor. She was determined to be the best Class Fib Monitor in the History of Class Fib Monitors and was listening closely to everything we said.





'LOOK!' said Evie P, suddenly running to the window and waving. 'There they are. **Bye, Mum. Bye, Dad. Bye, Tiddles.'**

There was a crash and a clutter as we all clambered out of our chairs and raced to the window to jostle next to Evie P.

We really wanted to see what she could see. Gretchen Aughtie got there first.

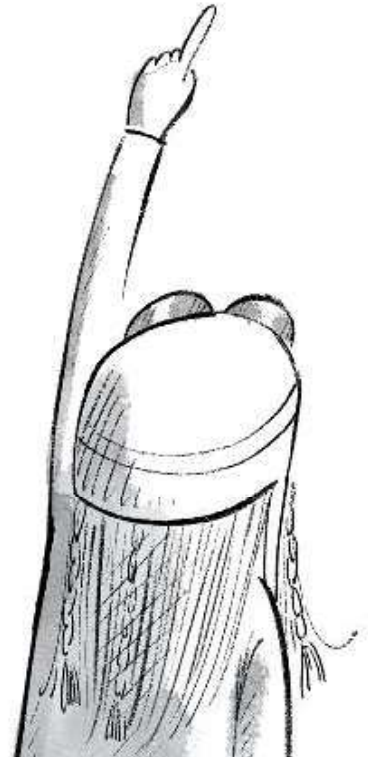
She **hated** missing out on things. Even Big Fib Things.

And she had very **sharp** elbows that jabbed and stabbed.

We pushed and **p u l l e d** and **prodded** for space, following the line of Evie P's finger, pointing **way,**

way,
way into the blue.

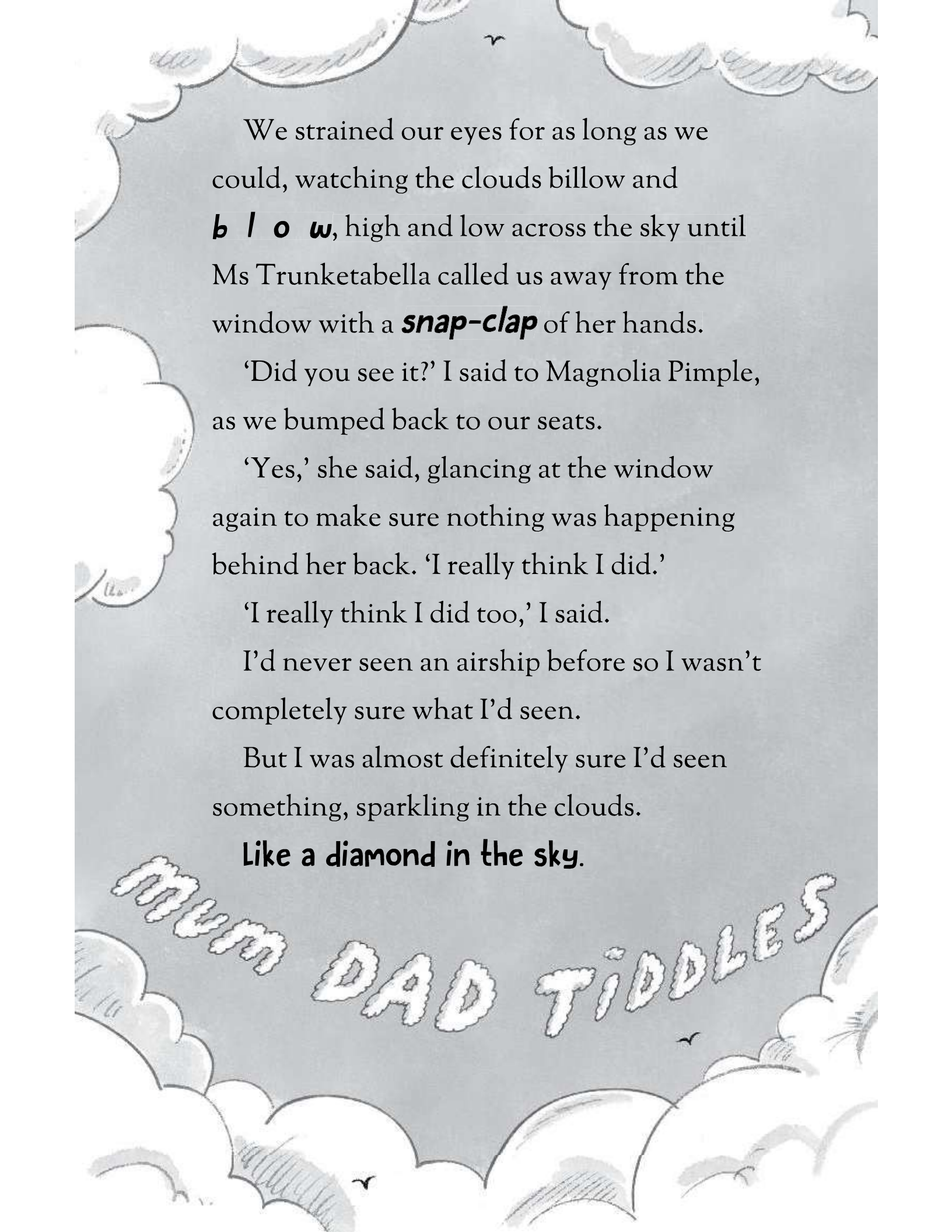
I squinted hard and **harder** and **hardest** until my eyes were nearly shut tight.



I could see clouds and birds and a small
red plane and ...

maybe ...





We strained our eyes for as long as we could, watching the clouds billow and **b l o w**, high and low across the sky until Ms Trunketabella called us away from the window with a **snap-clap** of her hands.

‘Did you see it?’ I said to Magnolia Pimple, as we bumped back to our seats.

‘Yes,’ she said, glancing at the window again to make sure nothing was happening behind her back. ‘I really think I did.’

‘I really think I did too,’ I said.

I’d never seen an airship before so I wasn’t completely sure what I’d seen.

But I was almost definitely sure I’d seen something, sparkling in the clouds.

Like a diamond in the sky.

MUM DAD TIDDLES

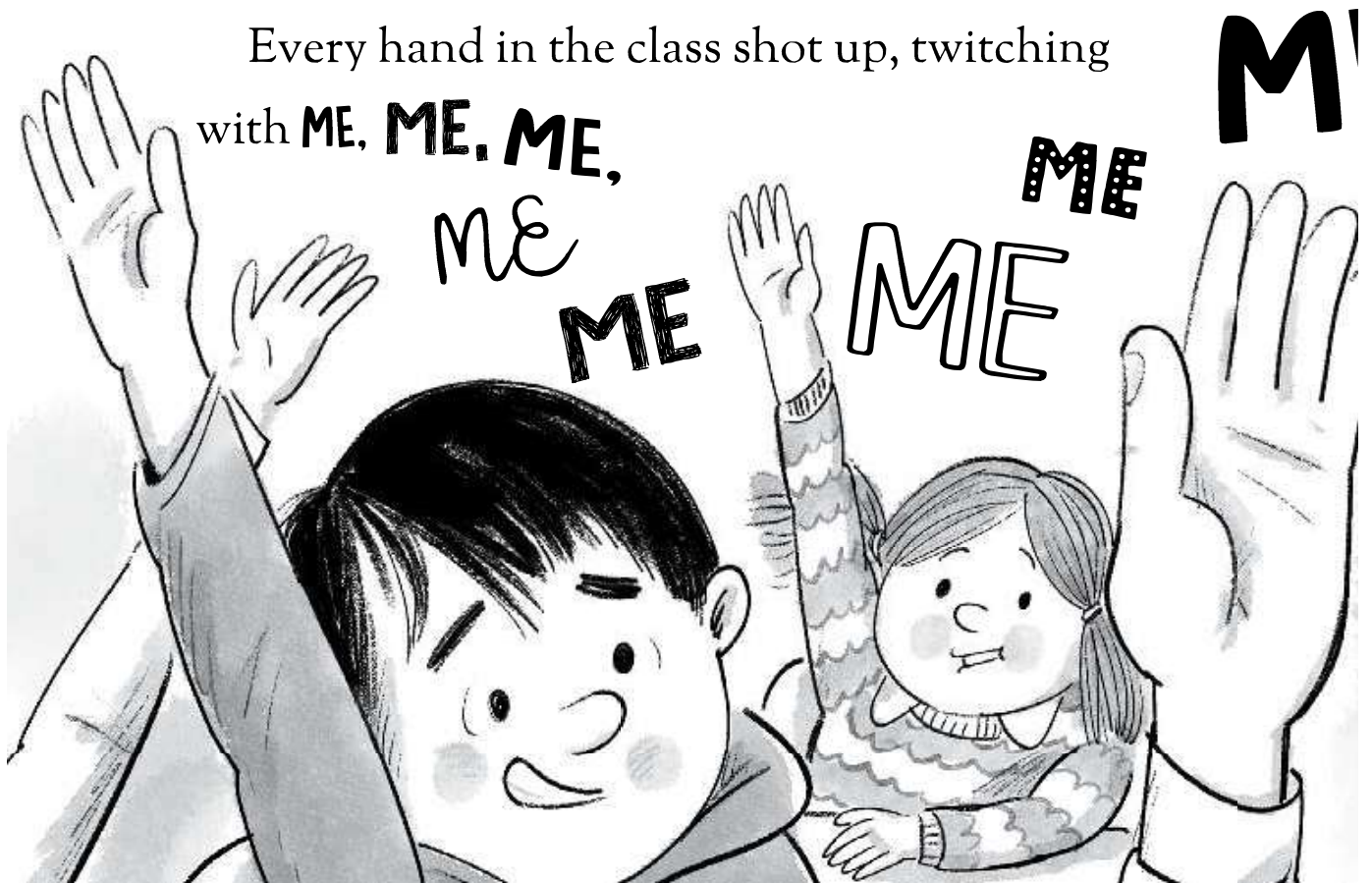


CHAPTER 2

Gold comes from the stars

'I'm sure you've all got lots of questions for Evie P,' said Ms Trunketabella.

Every hand in the class shot up, twitching
with **ME, ME, ME,**



TOP TEN QUESTIONS FOR EVIE P

Q: Is your hair always like that?

A: Yipe.

Q: What's an airship?

A: A big balloon that looks like a flying sausage.

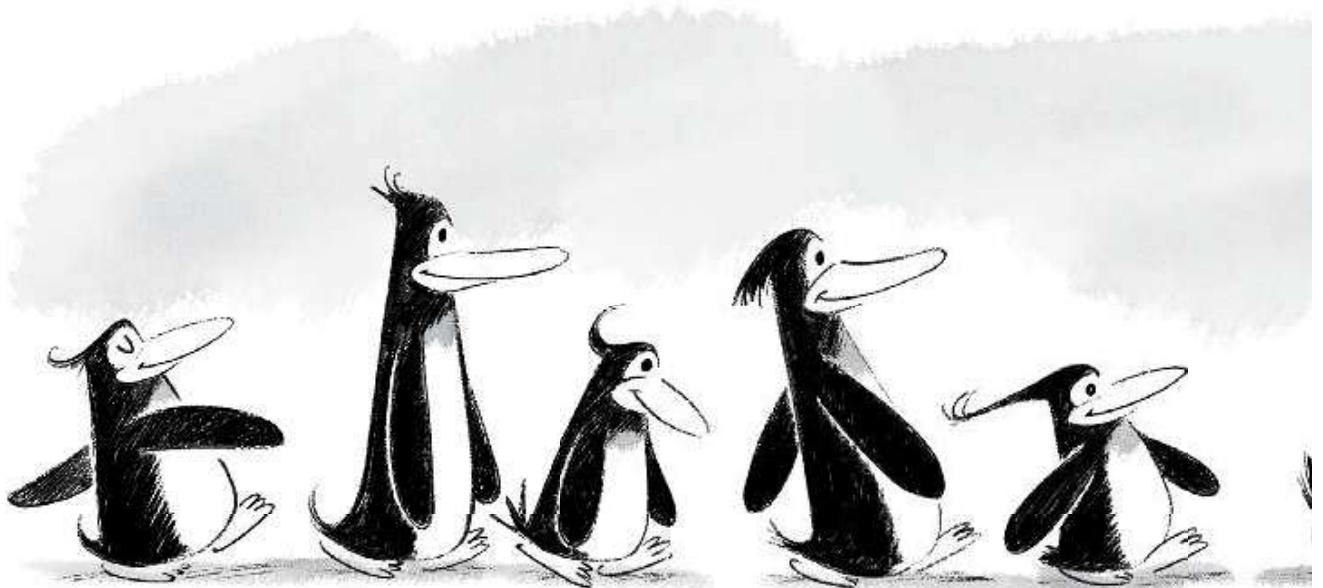
Q: What's your favourite joke?

A: What do you call Postman Pat when he loses his job?

A: *Pat.*

Q: Where are your mum and dad?

A: Flying to Tibet. On a top-secret exploring job.
Sssshhhh ...



Q: What's your lucky number?

A: Eight. Or maybe seven.

Can I have two?

I've got a lucky letter as well: X, Y, Z. I know that's three but people always say them together.

Q: Why are you wearing a funny hat?

A: To hide my funny head.

Q: Who's looking after you?

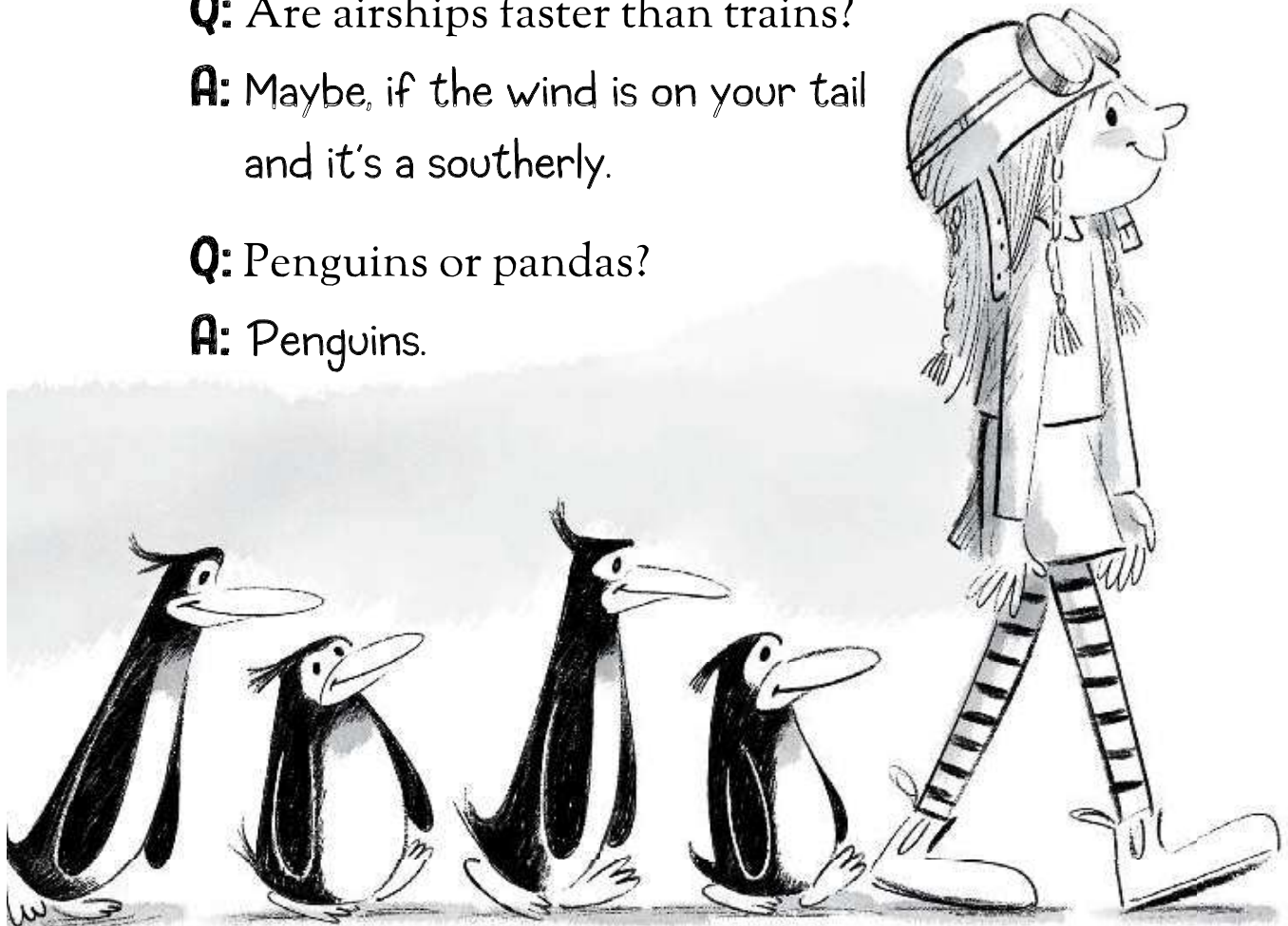
A: Poppi. My Grand Aunt. She lives in a giant toadstool.

Q: Are airships faster than trains?

A: Maybe, if the wind is on your tail and it's a southerly.

Q: Penguins or pandas?

A: Penguins.



Q: What's that thing sticking out of your backpack?

A: *A Storm Glass Weather Predictor.*

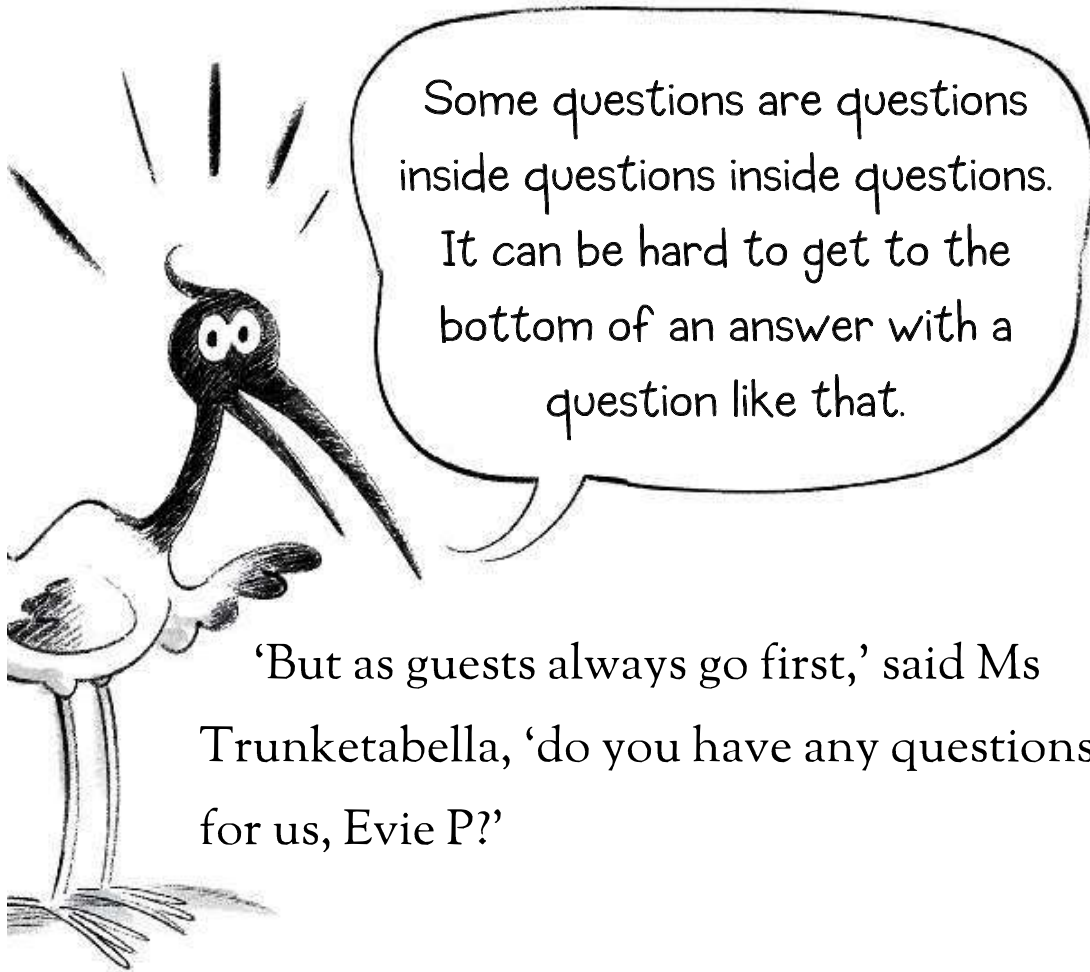
Q: What's a Storm Glass Weather Predictor?

Q: What does it do?

Q: Why do you have it?

Q: Where did it come from?

Q: Can I hold it?



‘Yes, Ms Trunketabella,’ said Evie P. ‘I do have questions. Lots! My mum says I’m more curious than a cat. She says it’s the best thing to be.’

‘Your mum sounds as though she knows a thing or two,’ said Ms Trunketabella.

Evie P smiled. ‘That’s what *she* says too.’

‘Well, fire away,’ said Ms Trunketabella. ‘What would you like to know?’

‘Where’s the Unnecessary Cupboard, please?’ said Evie P. ‘I’d like to put my Storm Glass Weather Predictor in it.’

She pulled it out of her backpack and held it up in front of us.

We stared at it in awe. It was round and see-through and made of glass. There were crystals of frost inside it, like a snowy wonderland.





‘Your Storm Glass Weather Predictor?’ said Ms Trunketabella.

‘Yes,’ said Evie P. ‘Dad said it wasn’t necessary while I was stranded on land so I brought it with me. To put in your Unnecessary Cupboard.’

It's my most precious belonging in the world. I found it in an ice cave in Iceland and we've been inseparable ever since.'

'Oh, I see,' said Ms Trunketabella, who didn't sound as if she saw at all and was glancing behind her as if the Unnecessary Cupboard might be hiding in the dress-up box in the corner.

I looked under my desk. And my chair.

I looked under Gretchen Aughtie's desk too.

If anyone was hiding an Unnecessary Cupboard, it would be Gretchen Aughtie.

'Well, Evie P,' said Ms Trunketabella, after looking all around the room. 'I'm afraid, well, the truth is ... we don't have an Unnecessary Cupboard.'



‘You don’t have an Unnecessary Cupboard?’
said Evie P.

‘Yes ... I mean no ... we don’t,’ said Ms
Trunketabella, looking bewildered.

‘But why not?’ said Evie P, looking
bewildered too.

‘Well,’ said Ms Trunketabella, ‘to be honest,
I guess we didn’t really think an Unnecessary
Cupboard was, um, well ... um ... necessary.’

‘But how do you know, Ms Trunketabella?’
said Evie P. ‘What’s unnecessary today might
be necessary tomorrow.’

‘That’s true,’ said Ms Trunketabella,
frowning. ‘But our motto here is to take one
day at a time.’

I shot up my hand, like a rocket zooming
into space.

‘Yes, Lily?’ said Ms Trunketabella.

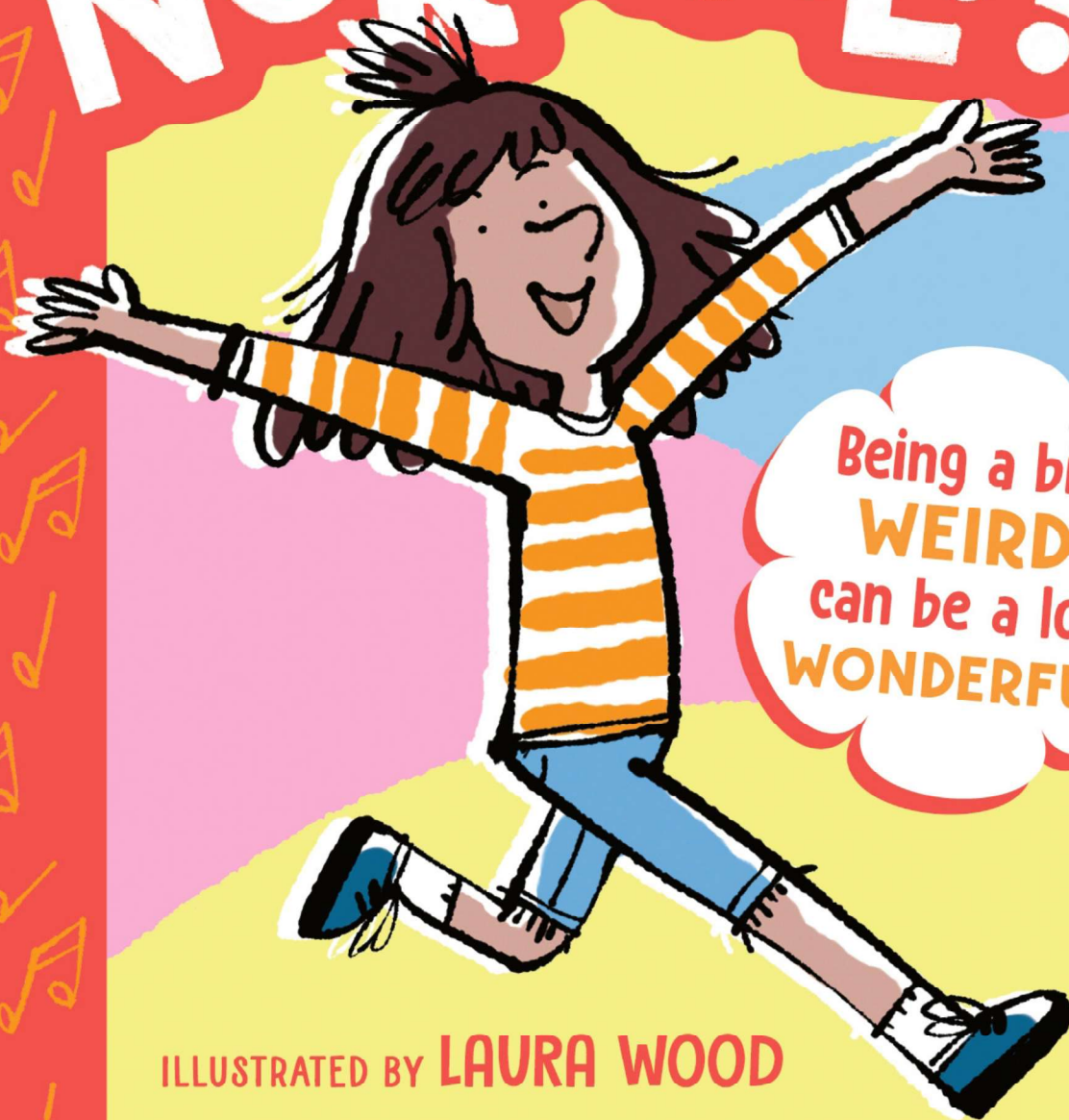
‘My dad says you should always be
prepared,’ I said.

CHAPTER
SAMPLER

EMILY DEMPSTER



TOTALLY NORMAL!?



Being a bit
WEIRD
can be a lot
WONDERFUL

ILLUSTRATED BY **LAURA WOOD**



**TOTALLY
NORMAL!?**

TOTALLY NORMAL!?



EMILY DEMPSTER

ILLUSTRATED BY **LAURA WOOD**



WALKER BOOKS

AND SUBSIDIARIES

LONDON • BOSTON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

Totally Normal
first published in 2025
by Walker Books Australia Pty Ltd
Gadigal and Wangal Country
Locked Bag 22, Newtown
NSW 2042 Australia
www.walkerbooks.com.au

Walker Books Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the country on which we work, the Gadigal and Wangal peoples of the Eora Nation, and recognises their continuing connection to the land, waters and culture. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

Text © 2025 Emily Dempster
Illustrations © 2025 Laura Wood
Design by Nicolette Treanor

The moral rights of the author and illustrator have been asserted.



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

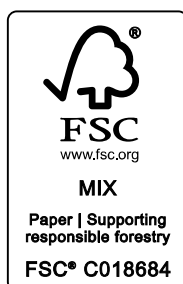
ISBN: 978 1 760658 39 7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the prior written permission of the publisher.

The illustrations for this book were created digitally
Typeset in 13 pt Bembo Book MT Pro
Printed and bound in Australia by Griffin Press

EU Authorized Representative: HackettFlynn Ltd,
36 Cloch Choirneal, Balrothery, Co. Dublin, K32 C942, Ireland.
EU@walkerpublishinggroup.com

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



The paper this book is printed on is certified against the Forest Stewardship Council® Standards. Griffin Press holds chain of custody certification SCS-COC-001185. FSC® promotes environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.

For Drew - ED

**To all the *totally normal* people
in my life: you know who you
are and I love you for that - LW**

SATURDAY 20 JULY

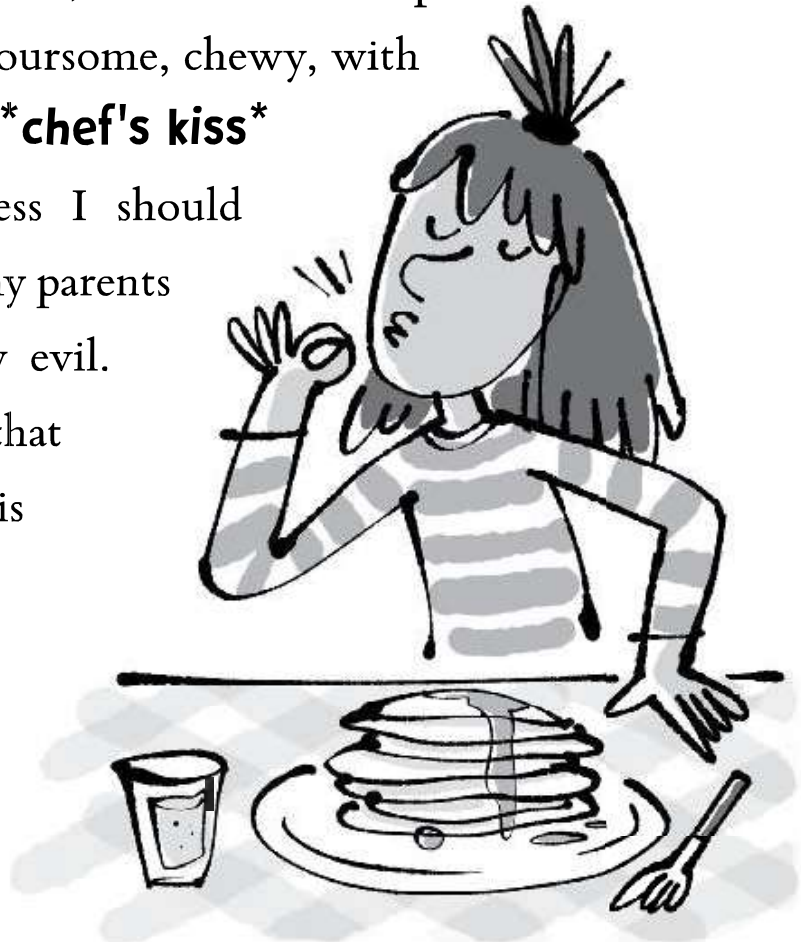
Mum once said that children are like pancakes – the first one is always a bit weird. You know that first pancake that has a funny shape and is a bit burnt at the bottom?

Well, the first pancake in my family is me.

Wow, thanks Mum! Great parenting! High five!

For the record, I think the first pancake is the best one. Flavoursome, chewy, with a crispy edge. ***chef's kiss***

And I guess I should explain that my parents aren't actually evil. They think that being weird is a good thing.



They love it when I come up with a character and do a funny voice, like when I hunch over and do an impression of my grandma: ‘Hello daaaarling, would you like a cup of tea? You look tiiiired.’ That always gets my mum laughing so hard that she has to wipe tears from her eyes.

And my parents love my conversation starters. For some reason, I find it hard to do ‘small talk’ with someone I’ve just met, and I’ll blurt out something wacky, like ‘Did you know that marine worms can grow hundreds of butts?’

Mum and Dad always agree that a discussion about marine worms and their butts is much more interesting than talking about the weather.

If I can get Mum and Dad laughing, that’s when I feel like they get me.

Most of the time though? I feel like they don’t.

At least once a day (sometimes twice if I’m lucky!) Mum or Dad will ask (shout) in that exasperated tone that they use just for me, **‘Ellie, WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!’**

And honestly? I don't know the answer to that.

All I do know is sometimes I find it hard to focus on boring stuff, like brushing my teeth or doing my homework. But who doesn't? I'm sure there are plenty of people out there like me, but unfortunately, not in our house ...

Because you know who doesn't find it hard to focus on boring stuff? My eight-year-old brother, Stewart. He just loves to brush his teeth on time and complete his homework as soon as he's asked. I think he does it just to annoy me, but Mum and Dad don't see it like that.

And by the way, don't get me started on my four-year-old sister, Beatrice (we call her Bea). She is an absolute menace, but Mum and Dad just think she's adorable.

Basically, I feel like Stewart and Bea can do no wrong in my parent's eyes.

But as the oldest child I feel a constant pressure to be ... how should I put this ...

not myself.

Because here's the thing, 'Society' (and therefore my parents) subconsciously (that means deep down in the brain where you don't even know thoughts are happening) thinks that oldest children should be all-round excellent people who never put a foot wrong.

This is seriously true!

Oldest children are meant to be responsible and conscientious with combed hair and shiny shoes and leadership awards from the principal every week and an A+ in everything.

Oldest children turn in their homework one week in advance, then they cook breakfast for their siblings and then they save the little old lady next door from a house fire. And this all happens before the first bell rings for school.

Being the oldest child, only makes my non-perfect, messy, late, **weird pancake self** more of a ... disappointment.

Well, I'm sick of it!

I have seriously been considering adopting

myself out to a more understanding family. A family who accepts the real me and who appreciate all of my unique gifts and talents – of which I have many.

Or, changing my name to Francine Grindlemeyer Schneedleburg and moving to Siberia.

But actually, I have an even better plan. And it is a truly excellent, fool-proof plan.

I am going to become a famous teenage pop star, like Billie Eilish. Listen to this logic, which in my opinion, is **water tight**.

Does Billie Eilish have anyone telling her to brush her teeth and get in to bed on time and pack her water bottle in her school bag? Does Billie Eilish have to vacuum the lounge room every Thursday in order to get her iPad on the weekend? Is Billie Eilish constantly being compared to her perfect little brother or told to be a better role model for her little sister?

OF COURSE SHE'S NOT!

And why is that?

Oh, that's right, because she's too busy being **unbelievably cool** and making millions of dollars!

If I was a famous pop star like Billie Eilish, I would sleep in til 9 am every morning, then eat a bowl of rice bubbles, compose music til lunchtime, take a nap, order pizza and then play *Roblox* til my bedtime, which would be midnight. I would have a professional tooth-brusher to take care of all of my dental hygiene needs, a cook, a maid and a personal assistant to take care of all the things that I always forget, which is basically everything except composing music.

When I'm famous, Mum and Dad won't care that I still can't get out of bed at 7 am, or finish my homework on time, because I'll be a millionaire! They'll want to visit me in my mansion and swim in my pool and my little brother and sister will want to play with all my puppies. (Because of course I will adopt a load of puppies when I'm rich!)

But unfortunately for them, I will probably be too busy to see them ever again.

MONDAY 22 JULY

Ugh. School started again today. Term Three, Year Five. I am a prisoner to routine, once again. But now at least I have my pop star dream to distract me.

I finished my work quickly in class, and then I spent the rest of the time drawing in my notebook, thinking about how awesome life is going to be when I'm a famous pop star. I still haven't figured out exactly how to make it happen. I just need more thinking and drawing time.

One thing is for certain, I don't think I can keep living this life I am currently stuck in for much longer. This morning, Dad told me I wasn't getting my iPad after school because I hadn't done my chores on the weekend.

When he told me this, I screamed like a wild,
blood-thirsty banshee.



I tried to explain to Dad that I didn't have time to do my chores as I was too busy plotting world domination, but Dad wasn't listening.

And guess who did do his chores and is, right now, playing on his iPad. That's right, my little brother Stewart, or **Mr Perfect** as I like to call him.

Stewart is only in Year Three, but he's really good at sport and is top of his class in every subject. He seems to win an award at assembly every week, and he beats Year Six kids at handball (though they don't mind because they like him so much). All the girls in his class have a crush on him and they come up to me and my friends at recess and ask, 'Are you Stewart's sister?' and I roll my eyes and say, 'Yes,' and then they giggle and run away. Why do they do this?!

My parents always compare me to Stewart. They say things like, 'Why can't you be more like Stewart and get ready for school without being reminded?' or 'Look, Stewart is in bed on time,

and you are still in your uniform. He is two years younger than you Ellie! Come on! Hurry up!’

And then I scream like a wild, blood-thirsty banshee ... again.

But Stewart *does* do stuff that shows he’s not completely perfect and is actually kind of stupid.

Evidence that Stewart is not perfect
but actually kind of stupid –
Exhibit A

So, my mum asked us what we wanted for dinner last week, and I said lasagne, but Stewart shouted ‘No!’ I couldn’t believe it. I said ‘Lasagne is delicious, Stewart. Why don’t you like it?’ Stewart said it was because it reminded him of witchetty grubs. He saw someone eat one on YouTube once and it made him feel sick. Well, the whole family stopped what they were doing and asked him what he meant, because lasagne is nothing like witchetty grubs. Then my dad asked him if he meant gnocchi, and he said ‘Oh yeah, gnocchi.’ I mean, who gets

gnocchi and lasagne mixed up? My perfect little brother, that's who.

Evidence that Stewart is not perfect
but actually kind of stupid –
Exhibit B

My other piece of evidence that Stewart is not completely perfect is what happened when he got a drone for his eighth birthday. Mum and Dad told him not to fly it in the backyard. They said that he had to go to a big open space when he was learning to fly it. Stewart thinks he knows everything, so he went in to the backyard anyway and flew it up in to the air, before Mum and Dad could stop him. But of course, he couldn't control it and the drone flew over the fence, then over the next house. And then it flew completely out of sight. It probably hit some old grandad on the head.

I've never seen him cry so much.

So, you see, Mr Perfect is not so perfect, but do my parents see that? No, they do not.

THURSDAY 1 AUGUST

One of the reasons I find it so hard to concentrate on doing boring stuff is because our house is **NOISY**.

The noisiest is my little sister Bea. She is always humming or singing or wiggling her bum in my face when I'm trying to do my homework. Apparently, she is starting Kindergarten at my school next year, but let me tell you, she is not ready. If she doesn't get her own way on something, she still chucks an epic tantrum. She's like the baby from *The Croods*. If someone ever breaks into the house to steal all our stuff, I will send Bea down to deal with them.

A few weeks ago, she chucked the tantrum to end all tantrums, when Dad wouldn't let her kidnap a puppy.

Yes, that's right. She tried to kidnap a puppy.

Here's what happened. We went for a family walk around the park near my house, where there are always lots of people walking their dogs. Bea usually has to pat **EVERY** dog she sees, so our walks take about seven-hundred hours.

A nice lady came along with an adorable schnoodle puppy – a cross between a poodle and a schnauzer. The puppy loved Bea, and he was jumping all over her and licking her. She was in heaven.



The lady let Bea pat the puppy for ages and then she had to keep walking. But Bea wouldn't let the puppy go. She was holding on to it really tightly around its middle and the puppy was wriggling around, but it couldn't get free of Bea's iron grip. Mum had to hold Bea's arms while the lady pulled the puppy free. Bea was screaming and I saw some kids from school walk past. It was so embarrassing!

And that wasn't even the end of it. The lady started walking away with the puppy in her arms, and when Mum let Bea go, Bea started running after the lady. The lady had to start running too so Bea couldn't get her. The lady looked really scared being chased by a puppy-crazed four-year-old – that was kind of funny. Then Dad started running after Bea and he caught her just in time. She was screaming and thrashing her arms and legs around. Dad got pretty angry and he walked straight home with Bea kicking and screaming in his arms. We could all hear Bea still yelling all the way up the street.

And she's supposed to start school in six months?! As if!

Mum, Stewart and I finished the walk without Dad and Bea. We were all quiet for a long time, which was nice for a change. But I kept thinking about Bea screaming and all the people looking at us and Dad getting angry. Why couldn't we just act like a normal family?

I felt sorry for Bea, too. She has always wanted a pet, but Mum and Dad reckon they couldn't cope with three kids *and* a dog. I kicked a rock on the ground and watched it skid across the footpath, then took a peek at Stewart. I couldn't believe it ... he was crying! I watched him quickly wipe a tear away, so that Mum wouldn't see. It still shocks me that Stewart was actually crying. He's Mr Perfect, he's basically a robot. Who knew robots had feelings?

Sometimes I feel like there are too many kids in our family, and that's why things are always so crazy. We were almost back home from the walk,

but I took a deep breath, and I asked Mum why she had to have another baby when she already had me and Stewart. She said it was because our family wasn't complete yet, and because she and Dad love each other so much. I pointed out that these days all they seem to do is fight all the time. Mum made a face at that and explained that it's not fighting, it's having a 'discussion'. I said I wasn't sure about that. Mum was quiet for a bit, and then she said 'Ellie, your dad and I have disagreements but we always work it out – always. I promise.' I looked down at the ground, and nodded. Stewart was pretending not to listen, but I could tell he was. Mum stopped walking and gave me a big hug. 'I'm sorry Ellie. Things are a bit hard right now. Bea is still so little. It will get better,' she said. I hugged her back. Mum held mine and Stewart's hands as we walked back up the hill to our house.

FRIDAY 2 AUGUST

School is finally over for the week! Woo hoo!

And my best friend Arya came over after school!

To be precise, Arya is my **BFFFL** (Best Friend Forever For Life). We met in Kindergarten and we've been inseparable ever since. Her parents are Indian and her mum cooks delicious curries and lets her stay up til 10 pm, and she always has treats in her lunchbox. I always ask Arya's mum to adopt me and she just laughs and hugs me. Mum says that Arya's mum is an IT genius who also happens to look like a Bollywood model.

Whenever Arya and I hang out after school, the first thing we always do is play 'crack the egg' on the trampoline. One person lies on their back on the trampoline and hugs their knees to their chest,

and the other person jumps and tries to bounce them until they ‘crack’. I love this game, as Arya can never crack me – I am uncrackable! But I only have to jump three times to crack her, because she can never stop laughing.



After that, we laid on our backs on the trampoline and talked about the school disco. It was next Friday, and some of the boys at school were asking girls to go with them. None of the boys had asked me or Arya yet, and we were super relieved about that. (Most of the boys at school are really annoying and immature – not exactly boyfriend material. Maybe they’ll be better in about ... twenty years?)

I started to laugh, and said, ‘Hey, Arya, what would you say if Oliver asked you to the dance? You would definitely say yes to Oliver, right?’

Arya punched me on the arm. ‘Ellie, no!’ she squealed. ‘Can you imagine?’ Arya got up and knelt on the trampoline in front of me and put her hand up under her armpit. Then she pumped her arm up and down to make a farting noise. I screamed with laughter. That’s what Oliver spends ninety-nine percent of his time at recess and lunch doing. I think it’s the main way he communicates.

I gradually stopped howling with laughter, and Arya said, ‘Okay Ellie, your turn.’ Arya put her

hand under chin to help her think, and an evil grin appeared on her face.

‘Uh oh,’ I said.

‘So, Ellie, how do you feel about going to the school disco with ... Simon.’

It was my turn to scream in horror. ‘Noooo, not Simon!’ I yelled, so loudly that my mum yelled out to us to be quiet. Simon is the biggest know-it-all. He always has his hand up to answer questions in class, and he even corrects the teachers when they are wrong, which he does with a big smile on his face. I did a great impression of Simon, which included holding my finger up to make a point and saying in my best know-it-all voice, ‘Excuse me Ellie, but you are not doing that dance correctly. I believe that this is the correct way to do the Gangnam Style.’ Then I did Gangnam Style on the trampoline and Arya laughed so much that her stomach hurt and she begged me to stop.

After the trampoline, we ate lamingtons and played *Roblox*, and before we knew it, Arya’s

Mum came to pick her up. We said goodbye – dramatically of course.

‘Til next time, bestie!’ I called out, dabbing my eyes with a tissue.

After the fun afternoon with Arya, I was feeling happy and relaxed. No school tomorrow, yay! But then ... I remembered the dreaded thing that my parents make me do every Saturday morning.

SWIMMING LESSONS.

My parents have always been big fans of exercise in the morning, while I have always been a big fan of sleeping in and playing on my iPad. But they don’t let me have my iPad until I do my swimming lesson.

My mum is always super perky to try to get me in the mood. She’s always saying things like, ‘Come on Ellie, get out of bed and eat that frog!’ You see, she has this idea that if the worst thing you have to do today is eat a frog, then you should do it first thing in the morning and get it out of the way. Just like swimming lessons.

But I don't agree. Which I communicate by lying in my bed and screaming into my pillow.

My mum is determined to get me into the swimming squad, which is the level up to what I am currently in. She even keeps hassling my swimming teacher to correct my breaststroke so that I can get in. But what she doesn't realise, is that I know exactly how to do breaststroke. It's the easiest swimming stroke there is! But I have come up with a genius plan to avoid trying out for squad. You see, I keep stuffing up on purpose!

Because if I get in to the swimming squad, I would have to train every day after school at 4 pm. And there is no way I want to get in to that cold pool every day after school. **No way!**

So, I've been faking it for months now. Mum is getting really impatient, but it's still working. My teacher still says I'm not ready! I wonder if I can keep this up til I'm in high school ... but I will at least be able to keep it up for tomorrow!

SATURDAY 3 AUGUST

If I needed any more inspiration to go ahead with my plan to become a famous pop star and leave my family behind forever (okay, maybe I'll see them at Christmas and Easter, we'll see), then I got it today.

I had just got back from swimming lessons, where I successfully performed a very wonky breaststroke – so I'm off the hook from squads for another week. I was in the kitchen getting a snack, when Bea sidled up to me with a cheeky smile on her face. I always know she has done something really evil when she is smiling like that.

'What?' I asked.

But Bea just kept smiling.

'WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, BEA?!' I yelled into her face.

Usually, it's around now that she tells me she's just played with one of my favourite toys, or written in one of my secret notebooks (with that smile still on her face, like she's really enjoying it). But this time she just kept smiling – but she didn't say anything. Her silence was unnerving. I knew it was bad.

**'MUM, HAS
BEATRICE BEEN IN
MY ROOM?'**

I yelled.

'I don't know,' Mum said. 'I thought she was watching TV.'

I looked at Bea, with my most stern face. But she just smiled back at me. The picture of innocence.

'What?' she asked sweetly.

I took my snack up to my room and everything looked just as I'd left it. I checked in all my hiding places for my secret treats and my pocket money, and they were still there. My diary was right where I left it, with no scribbles in it. And then I saw it.

A huge booger, right on my bedhead, above my pillow. It was **ginormous** – and I don't use that word lightly.

I started screaming and then Dad ran in.

'What's the matter?! You sound like you're being murdered!' he said, looking around the room as if trying to spot an intruder.

I couldn't even talk, I just pointed at the bedhead. My dad peered in closely at it.

'Is that snot?' he asked.

I nodded.

'Not yours, I'm assuming' he said.

I shook my head, tears brimming in my eyes. And that's when she appeared in the doorway, with her cheeky smile still on her face.

'What's the matter, Ellie?' she asked sweetly.

'You put a booger on my bed Beatrice! Don't you even think about denying it!'

'It wasn't me,' said Bea. She put her fingers up her nose and poked around. 'See, I don't even have any snot right now.'

‘That’s because you put it all on my bed!’ I screamed and lunged at her. Dad caught me and had to hold me back. Bea ran to her room and hid under her bed.



‘Calm down, Ellie, she said it wasn’t her,’ said Dad.

‘It was her and I’ll prove it!’ I said.

I'd done my swimming lesson which meant I got to have my iPad for a whole ninety minutes. I was so angry that I decided to use it to catch Bea in the act. I set up my iPad in my cupboard with the door slightly open and started recording on the camera app. I made sure the camera got a good view of my bedroom. Bea was still hiding under her bed, and so I opened my bedroom door and said loudly, 'No-one go in my room and touch any of my stuff, especially not my treats from Simone's party.'

I went downstairs and sat at the table with my snack and waited for a minute, then I heard her scamper into my room. Ha! The trap worked! I sat there, eating my cheese and crackers and strawberries, listening to her pottering around in my room. It was my turn to smile now. I was going to catch her red-handed!

Bea was in my room for ages and I started to get worried that she was doing something really bad. So I announced, 'I'm going back to my room now and no-one had better be in there.'

I heard Bea run out of my room and back in to hers.

Yes! I've got her now! I thought, as I ran upstairs to my room. I got my iPad from my cupboard, pressed stop on the recording, closed my door and sat on my bed to watch the little monster in action. I knew if I had actual evidence of her putting snot all over my stuff, she would be in so much trouble.

I pressed play. The first few minutes was just Bea snooping around my room and doing her booty dance in the mirror. Then she made different faces in the mirror for ages. Then she got bored of that and, to my horror, I saw her take out my jewellery box, which is where I was keeping my lollies from Simone's party, and shake it. She could hear the lollies down the bottom under the ballerina bit, and she pulled back the part where they were hidden and grabbed them out. I had no idea she knew how to do that. She is definitely some kind of evil genius.

Then, and this is the worst part, she sat down on

the floor and **ATE THEM ALL!** The iPad recorded all of it, and she ate with her mouth open, too. I watched for about five minutes until she got to my Freddo Frog, and then I couldn't take it anymore.

I ran downstairs to Mum and showed her the video of Bea in my room. But Mum was in a bad mood and she said that this was 'covert surveillance' and an 'invasion of Beatrice's privacy'.

'Why can't you be a role model for Bea, or at least her friend?' Mum asked.

'Because she is a child of Satan causing pain and destruction wherever she goes,' I replied.

Mum was not impressed. 'That's not nice, Ellie. You know, when Stewart goes to parties, he comes home and shares his lolly bag with her. Honestly, why can't you be a bit more like your little brother?'

And then she confiscated my iPad until further notice.

THIS IS THE FINAL STRAW.

SUNDAY 4 AUGUST

Mum thinks she is punishing me by taking away my iPad. But little does she know that not having it has left me with a good two-hour mastermind plotting session this morning, in the privacy of my bedroom, in which I have figured out the first step in my plan to become a famous pop star!

Step 1:

Piano lessons

While I think it is also very important to get an agent, and of course ultra important to develop a strong online presence through the various social media platforms, the first thing I *probably* need to do is learn a musical instrument. Piano seems to be the instrument that all musicians start with, so why

not? Let's go with that! I am going to be so good at it, I just know it!!!!

I waited for the perfect time to talk to Mum. I came downstairs and peeked into the lounge-room – she was having a rest on the couch. I waited for her to sit up a bit and start looking at her phone, and then I walked casually into the room and hopped on to the couch near her feet.

‘Would you like a foot massage?’ I asked.



She looked over her phone at me, and raised her eyebrows. 'Are you trying to get your iPad back?' she asked.

'No!' I said. 'I've been in my room thinking about ... how to be a better person.'

Mum sat up a bit more. 'You are already a good person, Ellie. But I do like the sound of this. Go on.'

I took a deep breathe. 'I know we don't have a lot of money for activities, you know, because you and Dad had a third child and child care is really expensive and soaks up all the money for fun stuff.'

Mum cleared her throat and her eyebrows went back up.

'Anyway, I don't know if you've noticed, but I've become very, very passionate about music lately, and I was wondering ... if I could start taking piano lessons?'

Mum looked at me like she was meeting me for the first time. She was quiet for what felt like forever. And then just as I was about to start begging she said, 'Okay.'

‘Really?’ I squealed.

Mum smiled. ‘I think music lessons are a great idea, and worth the money. But only, on one condition. You have to practise. Every day.’

‘Of course! That’s my plan anyway so I can become ...’ I caught myself just in time. ‘Really good at it.’

Mum looked suspicious, but she didn’t say anything, except for, ‘Oh, and Stewart will start lessons, too. It’s only fair.’

I rolled my eyes and growled.

‘Okay?’ said Mum, her eyebrows raised again. Honestly, it’s a miracle her eyebrows don’t fly off her face sometimes.

‘Fine,’ I said, trying to be mature.

Mum smiled at me. ‘This is really great, Ellie. I’m really proud of you for pursuing an interest.’

I sat up and smiled at her. ‘Does this mean I can have my iPad back now?’

‘Nope,’ Mum said.

MONDAY 12 AUGUST

Mum found a music school really close to our house and piano lessons start on Saturday. Not long til my family are a distant memory! I just have to make it through the week, which is harder said than done, because of ... **Harriet**.

Harriet is a newish girl at school who thinks we are best friends. Like, actual besties. She started earlier this year, and we bonded over our mutual love of graphic novels, and for a while we spent a lot of time together. We went to each other's houses, and our mums became friends.

But the truth is ... she **brags all the time** about herself and she can be really mean to other kids and actually *I don't like her at all and I wish I'd never met her and I wish she wasn't at my school!*

Oh my goodness, it feels so good to write that.



The problem is,
we sit next to each
other in class,

and then she hangs
out with me and
my friends at recess



and lunchtime,
so I never get a
break from her.

Harriet's house has six bedrooms and she has two new puppies. Her mum and dad have lots of money and they go skiing for holidays in the winter, or to island resorts in the summer, and she's already booked into this fancy high school which has five swimming pools and three tennis courts. None of this really bothers me, it's just that she brags about all those things **ALL** the time.

Every Monday morning, Harriet makes a beeline for me and starts jumping up and down and clapping her hands in a super excited way, and then she always starts with, 'Guess what happened to me on the weekend!' and I have to say, 'What?' and then the bragging starts.

Here are some examples of brags that I get from her on a Monday morning:

'On Saturday my mum took me to Gelato Mania and I got a triple scoop of ice cream!'

'I hatched a Fly Ride Unicorn on Sunday morning and everyone in *Adopt Me* wanted to trade with me!'

‘My mum took me to Fashion Girl in the night-time and bought me a two-hundred-dollar dress and then we had hot chocolates with marshmallows!’

Then this Monday morning’s brag was **worst** of all:

‘My parents told me I’m getting another puppy for my birthday and it’s going to be a Teacup Pomeranian, my dream pet, and I get to go to the breeders on Thursday and choose the one I want.

I CAN'T WAIT!!!'

‘Wow Harriet, that’s really cool,’ I managed to mumble, but inside I wanted to scream.

Maybe if my life was more exciting, I wouldn’t find it so annoying. But the most exciting thing that has usually happened to me on the weekend is going grocery shopping with Mum.

Mum says that Harriet is just excitable and she wants to share the fun things that have happened to her, as that’s what friends do. But I tried to explain to Mum that Harriet doesn’t stop talking about all the fun things she gets to do and she just

goes on and on about it! And then she will bring up something amazing that happened weeks ago, and re-brag about that all over again!

Thankfully, Mum agreed that what Harriet is doing does sound really annoying.

When Harriet is bragging to me, it makes me so angry that I feel like my head is going to explode. But when I try to tell Harriet that I don't like her bragging, she screams at me and walks off, blocking her ears and saying 'la, la, la, la, la, la'.

Ugh!

