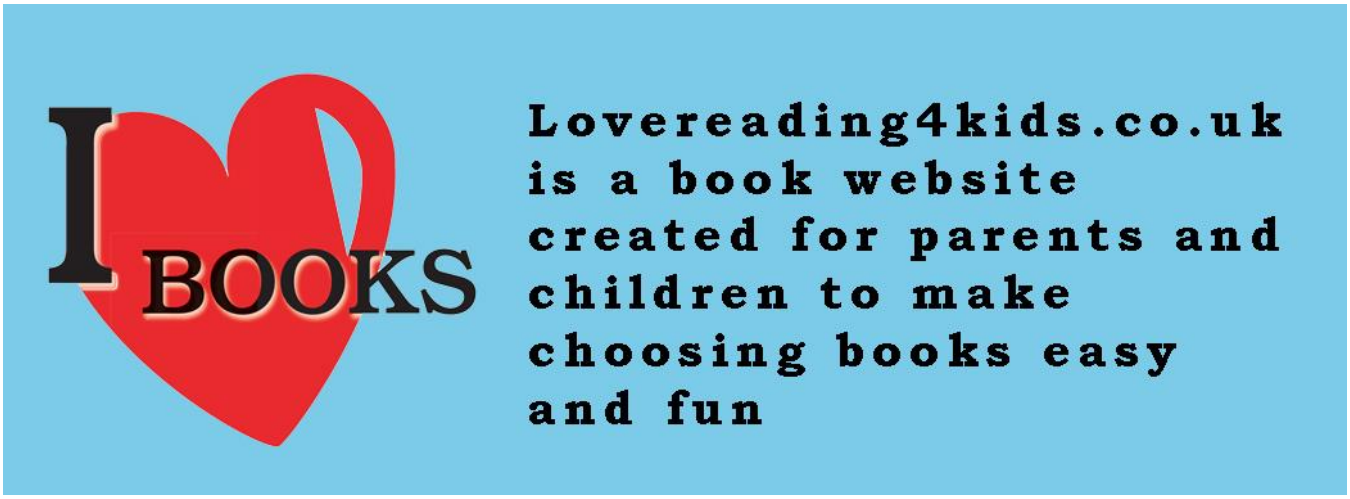

Opening extract from

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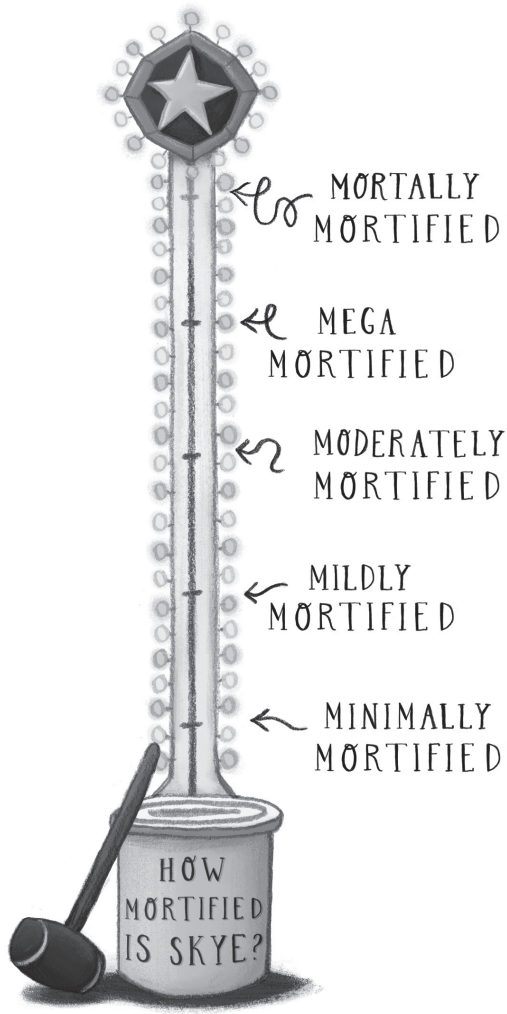
MORTALLY MORTIFIED
MEGA MORTIFIED
MODERATELY MORTIFIED
MILDLY MORTIFIED
MINIMALLY MORTIFIED
HOW MORTIFIED IS SKYE?

The ~~Chronicles~~ Mortifying life of Skye Green

I have always wanted to write a book. I write a journal already (this is it) and I like to think that one day someone will find my diary and publish it. Maybe when I am as dead (and famous) as Charles Dickens or Roald Dahl or Astrid Lindgren (if you don't know who she is, look her up - she is awesome). But I would really like to have something published before I die, so that is why I have decided to write a novel.

I have been a bookworm since probably forever and I think that being a writer must be the best job in the world. I mean, you get PAID for living inside your imagination. What could be better than that?

Trouble is, it turns out that putting your imagination on to the page so that other people

can read your brilliant, creative ideas is harder than you might think. I find, for example, that my brain is overflowing with great stories and insightful observations while I am staring out of the bus window on my way home from school. However, as soon as I get home and open a notebook and try to get the ideas down on paper, everything seems to evaporate, and I am left doodling in the margins, or scribbling 'I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING TO WRITE' over and over again.

I asked Mrs Ball, the school librarian, how I could get over this problem. She said, 'Write what you know.' Well, I am only twelve (*nearly* thirteen), so I haven't exactly had the most riveting of life experiences from which to draw inspiration for a novel. When I told Mrs Ball this, she smiled and then said, 'You have to start somewhere, Skye.'

So that is what I am doing: I am going to have a go at writing about My Mortifying Life.

The trouble is, how do you ever know where the true beginning of a story lies?

In my case, for example, do I start with how Aubrey Stevens has been my best friend since we

were three? Because without her, none of this would have happened. She and I have been all but surgically conjoined since the minute we set eyes on each other at nursery.

I can clearly remember that day, even though Mum says it's not possible for me to remember it because I was so small. But I do: Aubrey came toddling over to me while I was playing with one of those shape games where you have to put the cube through the square hole and the pyramid through the triangle hole and so on. I was struggling with the pyramid and Aubrey came right up to me, snatched the shape out of my hand, and stuffed it expertly through the triangle hole. Then she patted me on the head, gave me a slobbery kiss and said, 'Best fwend.'

At least she started as she meant to go on: telling me what to do and how to do it from day one. You can't fault her for consistency. She is as consistent in her bossiness as she is consistent in her always-being-there-ness.

I literally do not know what I would do without her. We go everywhere and do everything together. We even have matching friendship

bracelets which we made at a holiday club in Year 5 and which we have sworn we will wear until the end of time. (Or until they fray and drop off of their own accord, which will hopefully be when we are too old and wrinkly to care - but I can't even imagine that.)

Everything about Aubrey is cool. Even her name is cool - way better than mine, but then most names are. I am always telling her that her name is lovely. It makes no difference what I say, though, as Aubrey actually hates it. This just goes to show that people are never happy with what they have.

'I can't *believe* you would want to change your name,' I tell her.

'So would you if your name meant "elf ruler"!' she wails.

She has no idea. I would LOVE it if my dad had chosen my name from the amazing and excellent *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, instead of from a stupid island in the middle of the freezing ocean.

'It could have been worse,' I tell her. 'They could have chosen Galadriel instead. Or Findis.'

Anyway, back to my life, as that is what I am supposed to be writing about . . .

I was apparently conceived (Hideous Word Alert - and equally Hideous Image Alert) on the Isle of Skye in Scotland. So I ended up with the idiotic name, Skye, which I hate with a passion more dark and more fierce than any you can imagine. Actually I hate it just a little less than my APPALLING surname: Green.

'What is so appalling about "Green"?' you may ask.

'Try saying it after my first name,' I may reply.

Yup, that's right, my name is Skye Green. Mum couldn't even get *that* right.

So when people (mainly people like Izzy and Livvy - I'll come to them later) are not calling me 'Skyscraper', or asking me if my head is in the clouds, they are saying, 'Doesn't the sky look GREEN today? Hahahahaha!'

SO HILARIOUS!

Not.

My little brother got the better name, by the way. He is called Harris, also from a holiday in the Hebrides. I guess Scotland did it for Mum

and Dad. (Goodness knows why. The only time I have been there I got bitten to death by midges and it rained all the time.)

I did once moan about my name, and Mum said, 'Be grateful for small mercies. We could have called you Eigg or Muck.'

So I guess I am stuck with the name until I am legally allowed to change it.

But anyway, back to my story . . .

Maybe I should start it *right* at the beginning? From when I was a baby?

No, I think not. That would mean I would have to talk about my dad, and seeing as I can't remember him, there's no point in starting there.

He died. That's all you need to know. Don't ask me any more about it, because there's not any more to tell. Mum won't talk about it without blubbing and, like I say, I don't remember. So. I tend to avoid the subject.

Mmm. OK, I'm just going to go for it. I am going to plunge right in and start this story on a typical day in my mad household. After all, I may as well show you *exactly* how mortifying my life is.

You literally could not make it up.

It is the last week of the Easter holidays and I have just about had enough of being at home with my insane excuse for a brother, Harris. At this precise moment in time (i.e. nine o'clock, i.e. breakfast time, seeing as it's the holidays) he is sitting in the dog's bed, checking the dog for fleas.

'Harris, that is gross,' I mutter, flinging my spoon down with a clatter. 'How is anyone supposed to eat around here while you're doing that?'

'It's very important to check Pongo for fleas,' says Harris. 'Especially when he's been snuggling up with Gollum.'

Gollum is our cat. I named her when I was going through a major hobbity phase (encouraged by Aubrey's mum and dad). She hisssssses a lot, so it made ssssenssse, my preciousssssssss.

'Harris, since when has Pongo EVER snuggled up with Gollum?' I ask.

My cat is not known to snuggle. She'll share her claws with you, yes. Cuddles? Not so much.

'What are you two talking about?'

Mum has waltzed into the kitchen. Literally waltzed.

'Why are you dancing?' I ask. I take a sip of orange juice and look Mum up and down with narrowed eyes. 'And *what* are you wearing?'

Mum twirls around, holding out a purple satin skirt as though she is about to curtsy. 'You like?' she says, in a silly high-pitched voice. She is also wearing an exceedingly inappropriate clingy low-cut top, covered in silver sequins.

'No! I do not "like",' I splutter. Some of the orange juice goes up my nose.

Harris laughs.

What is it with Mum's dress sense lately? She has taken to going into charity shops and coming out with the most ridiculous collection of lacy, sparkly, velvety, frilly numbers. She calls her new wardrobe 'vintage'. When I told Aubrey that, she laughed and said, '"Vintage" is what old people say when they mean "manky second-hand clothes that other people don't want any more".'

So now I am worried that everyone thinks my mum basically gets her clothes from jumble sales.

'You're not going out dressed like that, are you?' I say.

Mum roars with laughter. 'I should be saying that to *you*, now that you're nearly a teenager.'

I flinch. I hate being reminded that I am nearly thirteen. Ever since Aubrey has turned thirteen she has started doing weird things like stuffing tissues down her bra (which she doesn't even need to wear yet) and talking about boys like they are some fascinating species she has only just discovered, rather than the smelly creeps and lowlifes they actually are.

Mum is still laughing. 'Your *face*!' she says. 'I'm not that much of an embarrassment, am I?'

Harris leaps up from Pongo's bed and yells, 'You're not embarrassing. You're beeeeoooootiful!' and launches himself at Mum's legs. He rugby-tackles her to the floor and they roll around, shrieking and giggling. Pongo loves any kind of rough and tumble, so he joins in.

'For goodness sake!' I shout. 'You are such losers.'

Mum pushes Harris and Pongo off and says, 'That's enough, boys.'

'Aaaaaoooowwwww,' Harris whines. 'But it was fun!'

Mum gets up and gives him one of her indulgent looks as if to say, 'You are such a naughty cutie-pie'. (She has been known to call him this. I have no idea why. Most of the time he is less of a 'cutie-pie' and more of a 'grubby little worm', if you ask me).

'Come on, outside with you,' says Mum.

Harris huffs and puffs but he takes Pongo into the garden and soon they can be heard shouting and barking at each other and doing what only Harris and Pongo do to have fun (which usually involves mud and mess and general nut-headedness).

Mum is looking at me. Her hair is wild and her eye make-up is smudged. She is still panting slightly from the rough-and-tumble. She looks like Roald Dahl's character, Mrs Twit (i.e. quite mad).

'Oh, Skye,' she says sadly. 'It wasn't that long ago that you would have jumped in and joined us. You're growing up so fast.'

'Yeah, well, someone's got to act like a grown-up around here,' I mutter.

Thing is, I wish it wasn't me.

'This'll cheer you up,' Mum says, 'Milly Brockweed tells me that the new people are moving in next door this week.'

'Oh yes, that has brightened up my day no end,' I say. 'Anything to do with Milly Brockweed is bound to be fabulous. Tell me, is it her long-lost son from Australia that she is always banging on about? And will he have a million cats in his house, just like she does?'

Mum sighs. 'Noooo,' she says.

Milly Brockweed is our babysitter and a right old curtain-twitching nosey parker. She also has a houseful

of cats which I have to feed when she is away. The first time I agreed to do it, she offered to pay me five pounds. I thought she meant 'five pounds per cat' so of course I was up for it. Turns out she meant 'just five pounds'. Even though I went twice a day for a fortnight and had to put out food all over her horrible house (which smells of cat wee). Gollum made me suffer by being extra-scratchy with me during that time. Can't say I blame her. From her point of view I must have reeked of The Enemy.

'I wish Mrs Robertson hadn't had to move,' I say. Mrs Robertson used to be our babysitter. She lived next door until a few months ago when she had to move into a care home. 'I miss her so much,' I say.

'I know,' says Mum. She puts her arms around me and gives me a quick squeeze. The sequins on her top squash into my face, so I pull away.

Mum releases me and sighs again. 'I miss Mrs Robertson too, but it will be nice to have some new neighbours at last. It's been too quiet with her house standing empty. Maybe they'll be super-friendly and offer to babysit,' she adds, smiling. 'Then I can stop asking Milly.'

'No one can be as nice as Mrs Robertson,' I say, staring at the floor.

Harris and I used to go next door after school when

Mum was late from work. She always gave us homemade cakes and lemonade and helped us with our homework. It's because of her that I love reading so much. When she came to babysit in the evenings, she always read to us. I was a slow learner and not that much good at reading at school, but when I was seven Mrs Robertson read *The Secret Garden* to me and it was like someone had turned on a light bulb in my brain. It is a story about a girl who is sent away to live with a relative she doesn't know or like. She is full of anger until she makes a friend and finds a secret garden which becomes a special place where she can hide. I haven't been sent away from my family, but sometimes I wish I had a special place just for me where I can go when I want to be alone. I suppose that's why I read so much: books are like a secret garden for me.

I asked Mrs Robertson if I could borrow her copy of *The Secret Garden*, and I ended up reading the rest of it on my own and have been a bookworm ever since.

'Well, maybe it will be a nice family with kids your age,' Mum says, breaking into my thoughts. 'Wouldn't you like to make some new friends?'

She is still talking about the house next door.

'New friends?' I say. 'I don't want *new* friends. Why does everyone think that just because I am nearly thirteen I need to grow up and move on and try new things and – and *change* everything?'

Mum takes a step towards me, but I back off. I don't want another faceful of those sequins and Mum's cleavage.

'OK,' says Mum. She looks a bit hurt, but I can't help that.

I open my mouth to say I am going to my room, when Harris bulldozes through the patio doors, a mud-splattered Pongo hot on his heels.

'They're here!' he is shouting. 'The new-people-next-door are here!'

And so begins a new and entirely unwanted chapter in the story of My Mortifying Life.