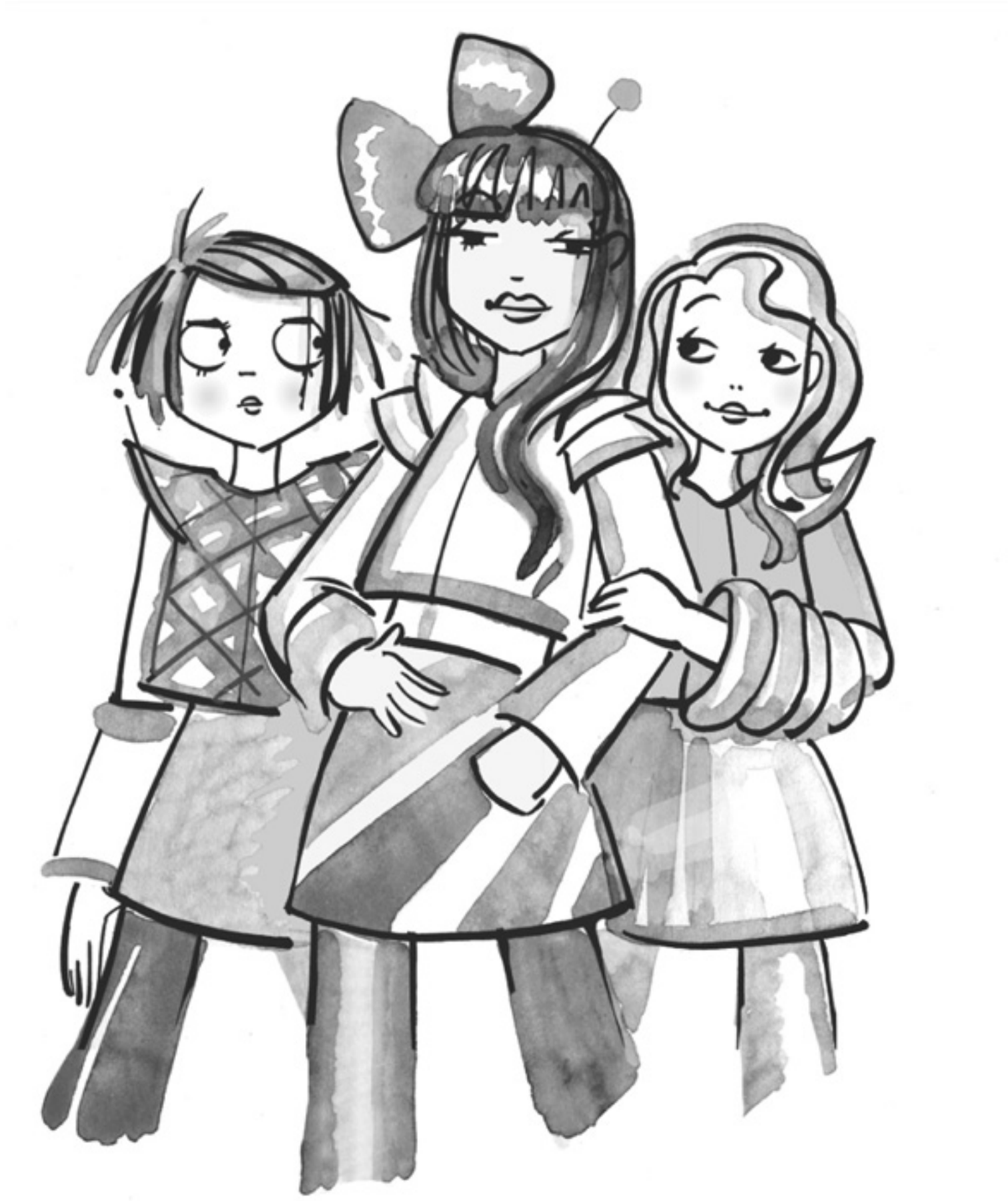
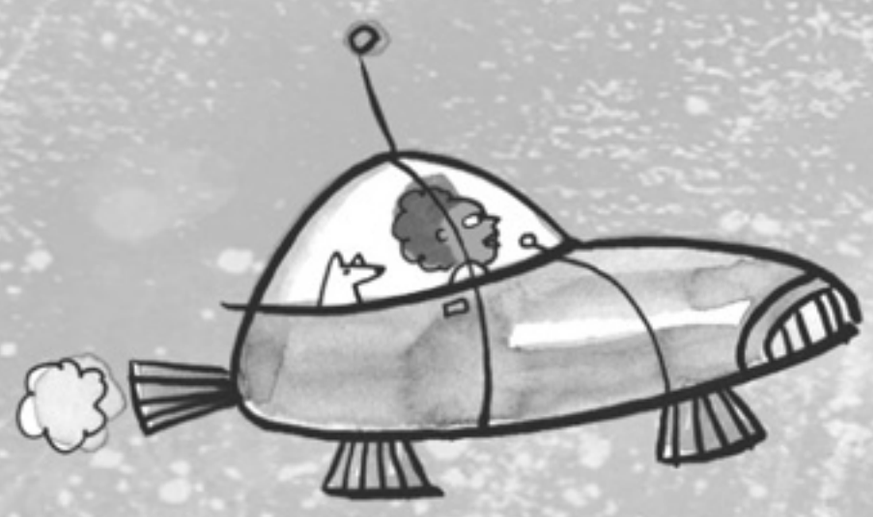
A MOON GIRL STOLE my FRIEND

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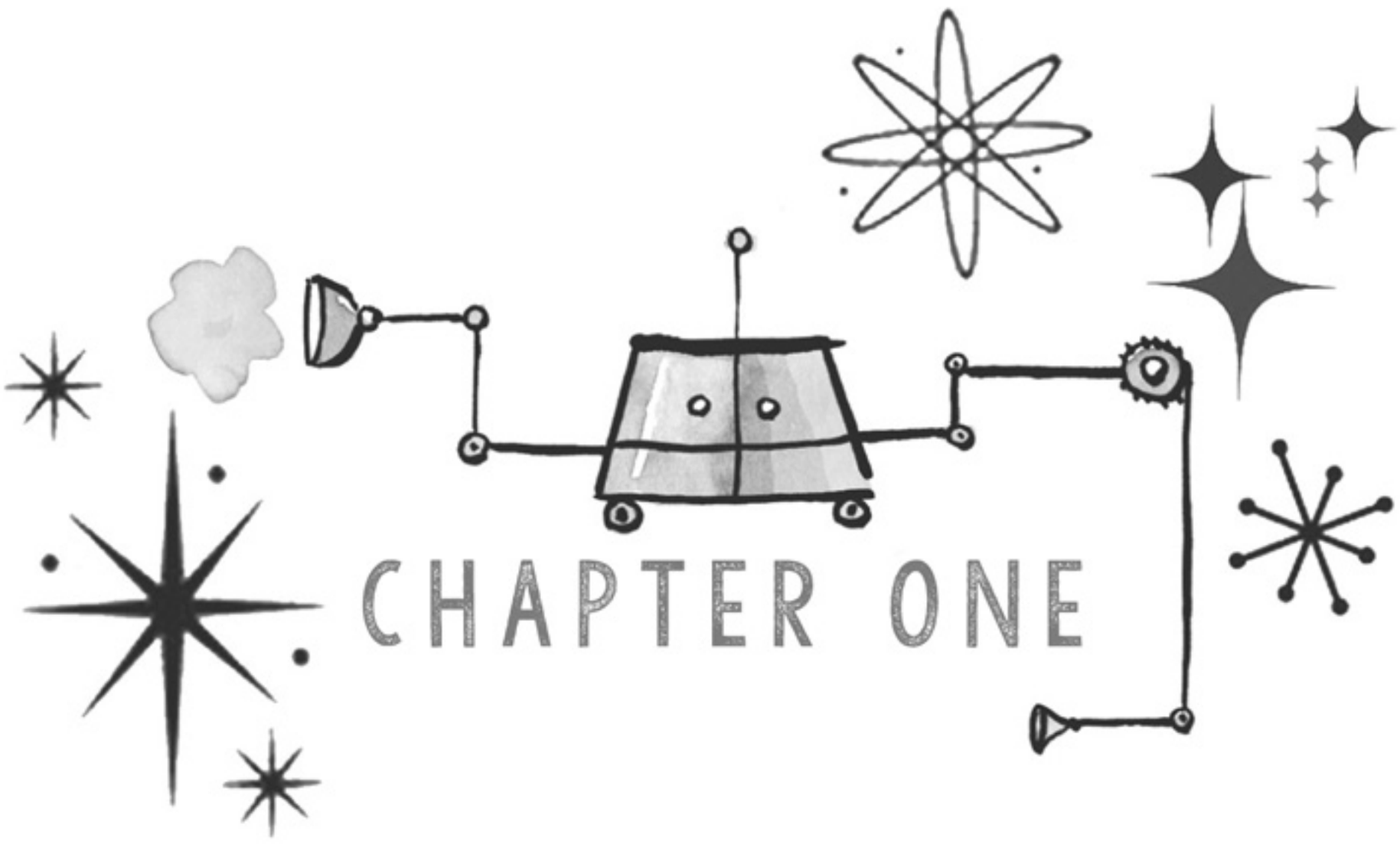
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CHAPTER ONE

Bianca had been planning her birthday since June. At a sleepover at mine in the summer holidays, we were floating about my room on the Float 'n' Sleeps and eating jellyfish crispies and I jumped from my Float 'n' Sleep onto hers and threatened to tip us both off if she didn't tell me every detail.

'You have to tell me! We're practically sisters!'

'Lyla! You're making me drop crispies everywhere!' She was giggling like mad and trying to keep her float steady. 'Stop it! We're crashing into the wall! I'm sliding off!' She was grabbing my leg now as I made her Float 'n' Sleep tip. 'Obviously I'll tell you! Just get back on your own float!'

I jumped back.

Bianca brushed crumbs off her knees. 'So . . . my granny said I can have the party at hers! You know she's got a pool. It's a pool party!'

'Oh! I love your granny!' I said. 'And I love her house!'

Bianca spun her Float 'n' Sleep around in the air with excitement. 'Also! Granny's going to make sure the concierge guy sets the weather to sunny and hot in the dome!'

Bianca's granny lives in the Havendome in the Outer Sector. It's a gated community. Quiet and super classy! I've been round a few times; Bianca's granny is an elegant old woman. Once she gave me and Bianca loads of her old perfume and we just poured it all over our heads and stank for weeks. No one would sit near us, but we didn't care – we called ourselves the Stink Sisters. That was when we were in Year Three.

Bianca lay down on her floating bed and looked up at my star-covered ceiling. 'But Granny said I really have to limit the numbers. Just invite my very best friends. She said the neighbours don't want to hear too many shrieking girls. Granny says it's six girls tops, so that's

four friends plus you and me. But you know what some girls in our class are like if they're not invited to a party. We have to keep this party really, really quiet until I give out the actual invites.'

I had been so excited about the party I had bought Bianca's birthday presents early, just after we all went back to school in September. Really good presents! I got her a packet of Crazee stickers, the walking penguin ones.

You stick them on a wall and the second they're stuck they start walking about all over the place, like a cartoon. You never know where they'll get to. My mum doesn't let me have them as she doesn't want them wandering about and looking tacky on our walls.





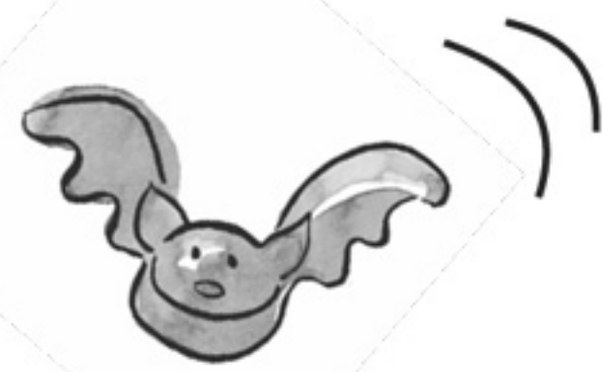
I also got Bianca those flying sweets!



The blackcurrant Jelly Gum Bats that you suck, and then open your mouth and they fly out! Mum doesn't let me have them either because they make a sticky mess on the ceiling. But I knew Bianca would be really pleased because we've been talking about getting some since the last sleepover at hers when we saw the advert.

I'd put the presents in the little hatch above my sleeping pod so I could admire them from my bed. They've been there almost three weeks now.





Gus stomped into my room. He's only six, little, so I don't know how he stomps so loud. He clambered right up onto my sleeping pod and said, 'Lyla! You didn't charge Sparks. He's not purring! He's just lying on the floor like he's DEAD!' Then he climbed over me as I lay there, walking up my back like I was a small mountain range.



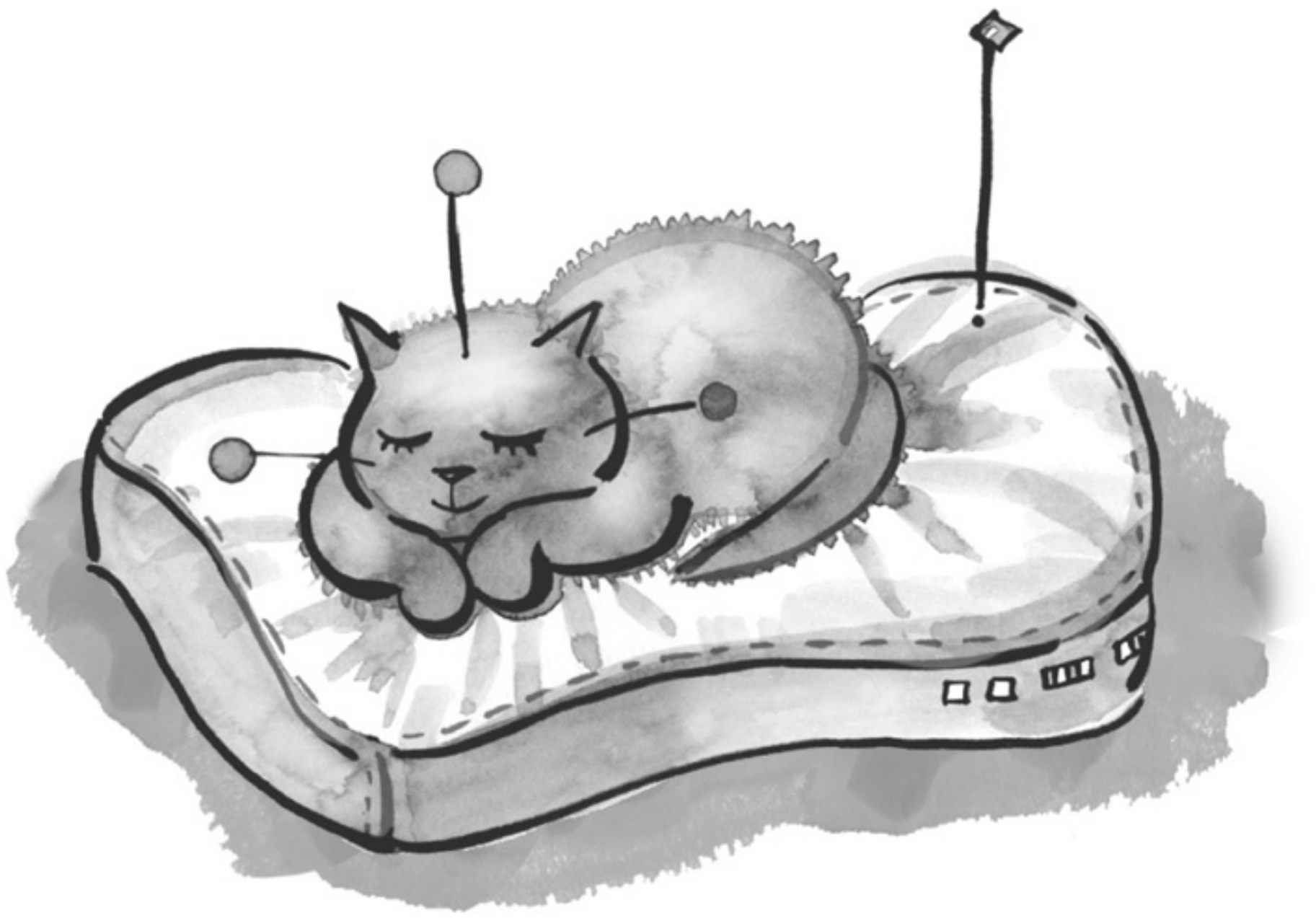
'Get off, Gus! I'm asleep!'

'No. You're talking. It's Tuesday, school! Get up and fix Sparks! Why didn't you charge him?'


FLYING
BATZ

'I forgot,' I said, following Gus out of my room to find Sparks.

Sparks is our little cyborg cat. Sparks wakes up when you clap your hands and goes to sleep when you say: 'Bedtime, Sparks!' He's cute and small; he fits into your hand. But you have to let him charge up for about sixteen hours a day. It's my job to put him on his charging cushion at night so he's ready for the next day.



Gus used to fly Sparks around the kitchen in his Mars Mission toys. All Sparks's Mars Missions have been banned by Mum since Gus crashed Sparks into her omelette.

Another thing that Mum has banned is that aquagro cereal, Choccy Boom Blast – the kind where you put a drop of water onto a speck of cereal stuff and it swells up and fills the bowl with cereal and milk. Gus can't be trusted with it. He used to put way too much in his bowl, and then when he added the water he got a pile of cereal as big as him.

Anyway, we're always running late so we usually just grab a Vita-tab.

I chewed my Vita-tab and tried to get my stupid hair to stay flat. I always get this sprouty-up bit. I was squashing it down with gel when Mum yelled, 'Lyla, come on! Launch pad NOW! I have to be in Eastern Central Zone for a meeting at nine!'

I patted my hair as flat as I could, glanced at those perfect presents for Bianca, then ran up to the launch pad to join Mum and Gus in the skycar.

'Shove over, Gussy!' I said.

'Don't call me that, tufty head!'

'Well, shove up anyway!' I said, putting my hand over the sprouty bit of hair and keeping it there all the way to school to keep it flat.

Our skycar is so old it doesn't even have a transparent floor. That means we can't see directly below us, and one of the back jets is faulty too, so me and Gus always have to shove up together on the right side of the back seat to get it balanced when we fly. Mum hates doing a vertical takeoff; she always makes us check the airspace, saying, 'Is there anything above me? Look up, kids, anything coming over?'

'Nothing above me! All clear,' I said.

Mum fired up the jets and off we went, our skycar taking its place in the long line of traffic up in the Fly Zone.

'Bianca's having her party soon! She's giving out the invites today!' I said, looking out across the city and clouds. 'What should I wear? I wish my hair was long enough to do a bun!'

'It's a girls' party, Lyla, so it will be terrible,' said Gus. 'My best friend, Evan, he had Mr Dinosaur at his birthday and Mr Dinosaur makes a real, live, massive Triceratops from a bit of DNA! Right in front of you! He did it in Evan's front room but his mum wants a refund because the Triceratops did a bit of dinosaur wee on their carpet.

Bianca should definitely get Mr Dinosaur.'

Mum began bringing the skycar down onto the school launch pad. I could see Bianca below, already making her way to the Year Six portals.

'Right,' said Mum. 'We're here. Out, you two! See you later! Jump!'

Mum hates firing up the jets for takeoff, so she always makes us jump down while she hovers a little bit above the ground. We're used to it. Gus did his commando army roll when he landed and we both dashed down the launch-pad steps to the playground.

