

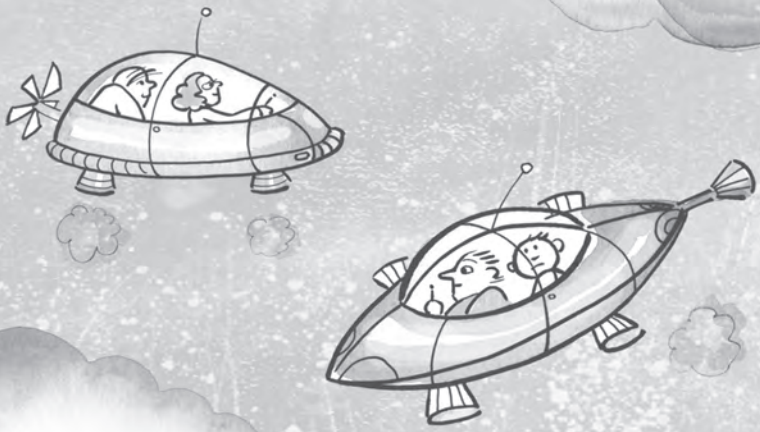


A ROBOT GIRL RUINED my SLEEPOVER

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ANDERSEN PRESS



First published in 2020 by
Andersen Press Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 2SA
www.andersenpress.co.uk

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available.

ISBN 978 1 78344 947 7

MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C012700

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Limited, Elcograf S.p.A.

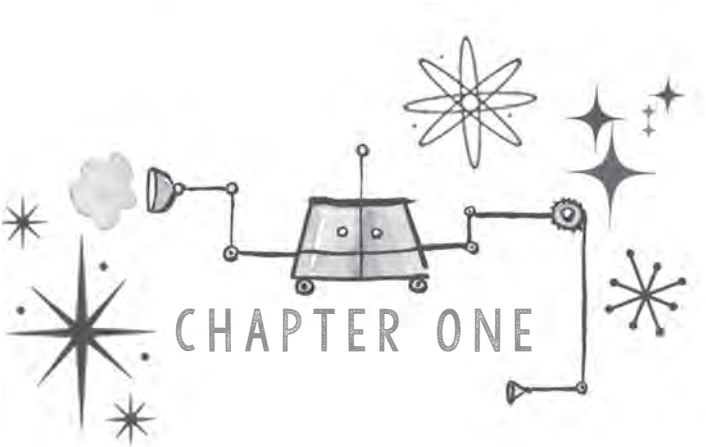


For Susanna









CHAPTER ONE

'HURRY UP, GUS!' I yelled from the car, 'I do NOT want to be late!'

My little brother Gus had spent the last five minutes rolling about on the launch pad having a massive strop about not being allowed to take Sparks, our cyborg cat, in for Show and Tell.

'Whyyy not?' he was yelling, 'I don't see whyyyyy NOT!'

'Because he's worth a fortune and he's not a toy!' said Mum, getting into the car.

Gus stopped rolling, but he was still just lying there, looking up at all the cars in the sky.

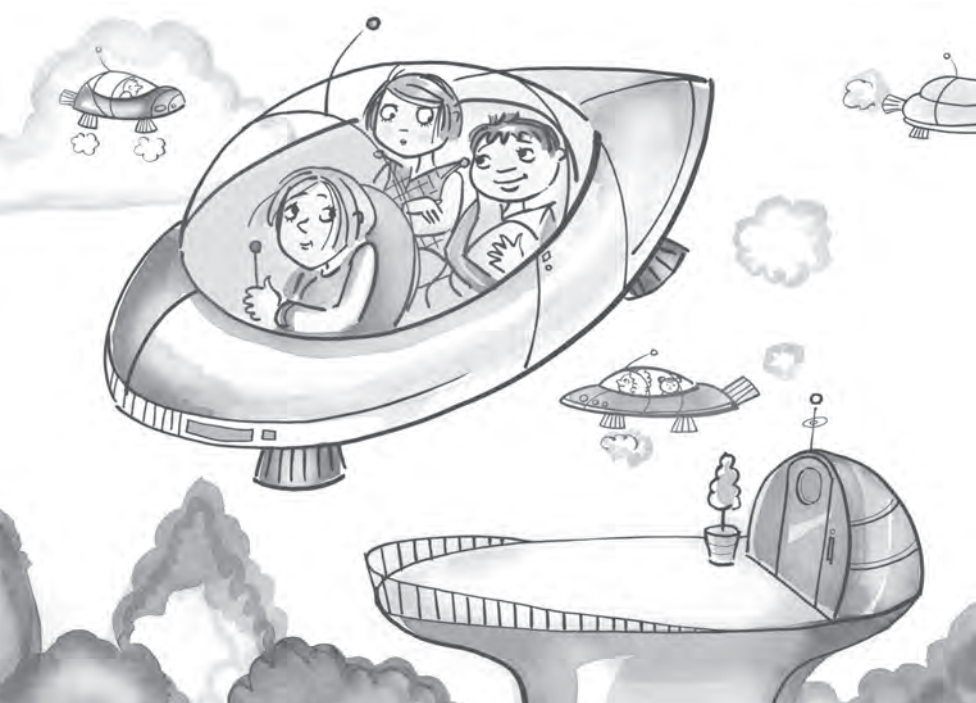
'I'm counting to three and then I'm flying off!' said

Mum, firing up the jets. Gus turned his head to look at us and scratched his ear.

I sighed and folded my arms and said to no one, 'I cannot tell you how much I'd prefer a big sister called Tamara!'

Mum started counting, 'One . . . two . . .' and placed her finger dramatically over the lift-off button. Gus got to his feet, dragged his bag across the floor and clambered in next to me, 'Shove up, Boggle McScruff Pants!!' he said.

'Gus!' said Mum, smiling a little as she flew up to join the other cars in the Fly Zone.





Gus admired the reflection of his chubby face in the curved glass of the windows, 'Your best friend Bianca said I'm the cutest kid in Year One!'

I ignored him and carried on looking out of the window, down at the buildings and trees.

Gus carried on, 'Eight and a half people in my class want to marry me already! No one wants to marry you, Lyla!' he said, prodding me.

'Good, 'cause I don't want to get married!' I snapped back.

'How can half a person want to marry you?' laughed Mum, as we landed on the Lime Grove Edu Hub launch pad.

'Evan is the half because he's in love with me and Laura!' explained Gus breezily, as he jumped out. Mum did her *Isn't-he-just-adorable* face at me.



I ran down the launch-pad steps. In the distance my best friend Bianca waved. She ran towards me as I charged across the playground, 'Hi, Lyla!' she yelled.

'Hi! Hey, I made you this,' I said, 'at the weekend.'

I gave Bianca the tiny model of her I'd made out of my Clay 'n' Move set. I'm quite good at making models and this stuff is good, once the model is dried it can shuffle about a few steps by itself. She looked at the little figure walking about in her palm, 'Aww, it's cute!' she laughed. 'But I'm not that lumpy! How big did you make my ears?! And look at my nose!'

'Oh it's pretty accurate!' I laughed and ran on towards the portals.

Bianca chased behind me laughing, saying she'd do one of me and include my big bug eyes.

We sat down on the wall giggling and calling each other Bug Eyes and Lumpy in stupid voices.

Mercedes turned to us, 'Gonna be interesting today!'

'What is?' I said

'The visitors!'

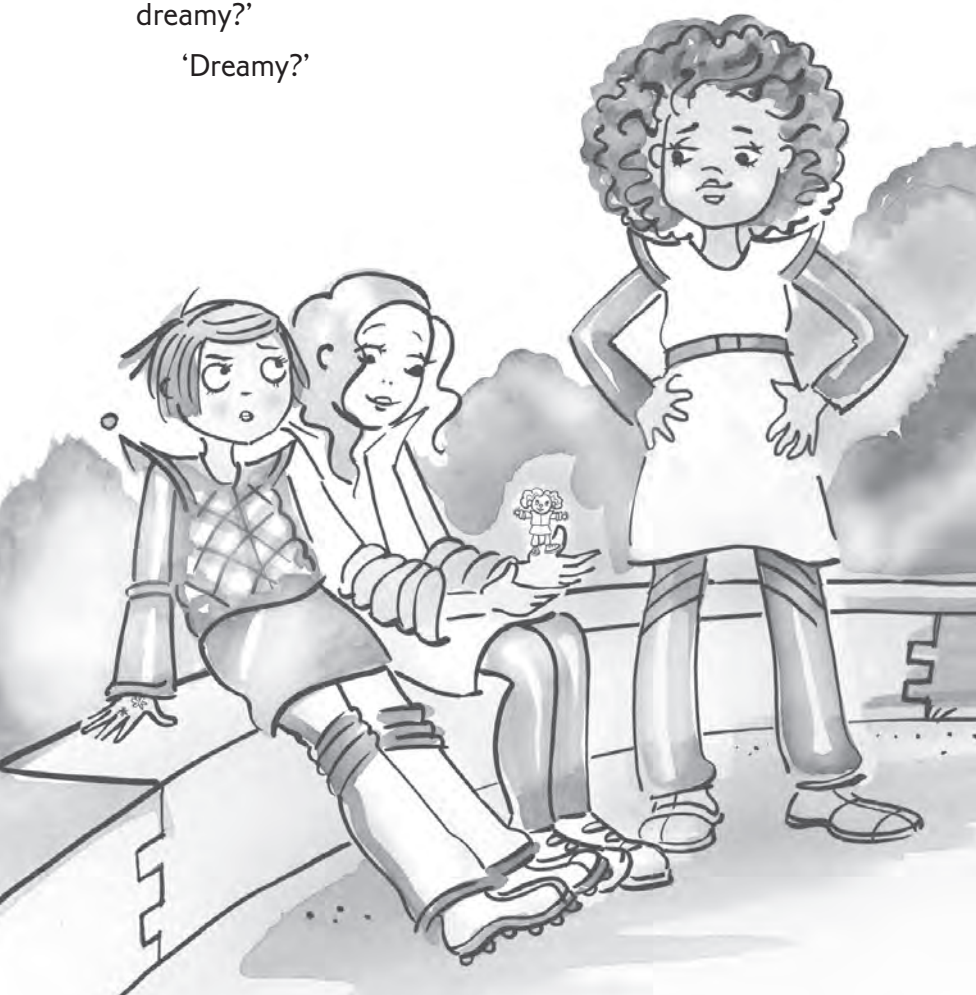
I looked puzzled.

Mercedes stood in front of me, hands on hips, 'Duh! Lyla! How can you forget? I know you're a bit slow but Mr Caldwell's only been going on about this for like ever!'

'I'm not slow!' I said.

Mercedes shrugged, 'OK, well you're not slow . . . dreamy?'

'Dreamy?'



'I mean you spend a lot of time in class drawing on your hands,' said Mercedes, looking down at all the little white flowers and stars I'd doodled on the back of my fingers and hadn't washed off.

Bianca showed Mercedes the little clay figure I'd made, 'But look what she did for me! It's a tiny me in clay! It can walk!'

Mercedes didn't look too impressed, 'Girlfriend, Clay 'n' Move is for little kids!'



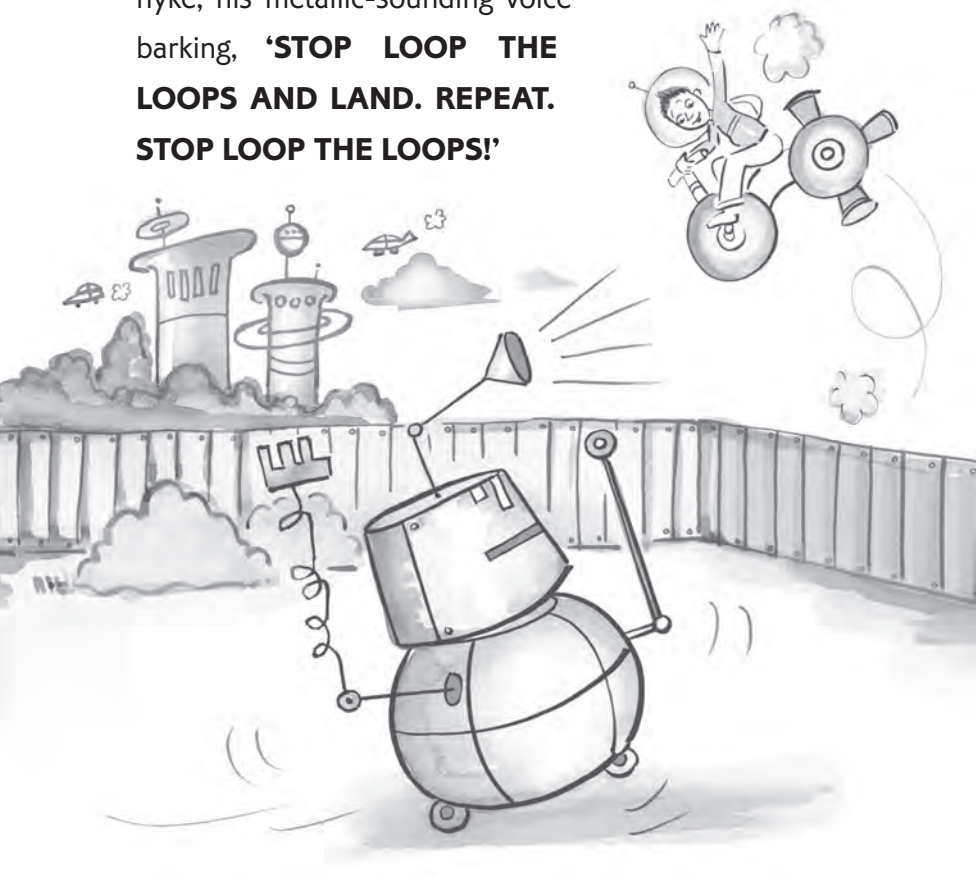
I looked up and across the playground and saw two boys from our class, James and Burak, strutting about with their arms straight out in front. They were putting on silly robot voices, 'I AM A BA-BY RO-BOT! BEEP! BEEP! I WILL DO YOUR MATHS? ALLOW ME TO DO YOUR SPEL-LING TEST!'

And then I remembered, 'Oh yeah! The cyborg robot kids come today!'

The two boys came over. James pushed his cool moonshades up his nose, 'Robot day is here! This is gonna be so funny!'

'I know! Maybe we'll have to get them out of their boxes when they arrive,' said Mercedes, 'like massive dolls!'

Burak shook his head, 'Nah, I've seen the adverts for these. They look good, realistic. Way better than Old Junky Smelly!' He nodded towards the other side of the playground where Mr Martinelli, our ancient electronic school caretaker, was telling Louis MacAvoy to land his flyke, his metallic-sounding voice barking, **'STOP LOOP THE LOOPS AND LAND. REPEAT. STOP LOOP THE LOOPS!'**



'Mr Martinelli is so old!' said Bianca. 'Look how he rolls now!'

Mr Martinelli is really just a big metal bucket thing with a few lights. Everyone calls him Mr Junky Smelly. You can say it to his face because he is such a primitive robot with really basic hearing and he can't tell the difference. We used to have an electronic playground assistant called Miss Fritz, but she got upgraded with a new motherboard and was so much better at everything that she left our school last December and became an estate agent on Mars.

Louis landed his flyke, 'There you go, Mr Junky Smelly! I'm down on the ground.'

Mr Martinelli flashed a green light, which is his low energy way of saying 'OK', and rolled away.

'Hope these electric kids are better than that old can!' laughed James.

Louis sat down next to us on the little wall and put on a serious face, 'Yeah, but the trouble is, these latest electric kids – they're not safe! That's what my uncle Dan says, lots of glitches. I'm keeping well away from them! Well away!'

James nudged him and said, 'Louis you're not going to be allowed near one, mate!'

'What do you mean?'

'Come on, Louis, you're not exactly reliable. Who tried to set fire to the school skybus?'

'When I was seven!' said Louis, folding his arms. 'That's ages ago!'



It's true, Louis MacAvoy is officially the naughtiest boy in our class, and in the last few weeks he's been even worse, but he's actually quite nice. He's as short as me. Maybe even shorter. At break he hangs out in the little kids' playground showing off to them. I've heard him tell them his real dad is a trillionaire and has a Chrysler Comet Intergalactic with a gold tint windscreen. He sits next to me now in class. I used to sit next to Bianca but two weeks ago Louis was messing about so much at the back on his floaty seat going, 'I'm Mr Wobble! All hail The Wobbleman!!' Mr Caldwell told him to swap places with Bianca at the front.



Bianca put the little clay model away in her pocket. 'Thanks for this, Lyla. It is really sweet,' she said quietly. Then Mr Caldwell opened the classroom portal and we all went in. The boys shoved their coats into the suction hatches discussing all the terrible ways an electric child could kill you. Louis had heard they can pass on a strange electrical disease that makes your own eyes glow like car headlights for the rest of your life. Felicity rolled her eyes and said to Franka and Mercedes, 'They're totally safe. I'm just worried they're gonna be really super pretty! The ones I saw on the adverts are like models!'

'But you ARE really pretty!' squealed Franka.

Felicity shrugged, 'Yeah, I guess we're all quite attractive in this class in our own different ways.'

'Yeah!' agreed Amia, tossing her hair. 'And the people who aren't so super pretty make up for it by having . . . great . . .' she paused and glanced at me, 'personalities!'

Bianca nudged me, 'That's right, Bug Eyes. You have a great personality!'

'Just like you, Lumpy,' I laughed back.





I walked into the classroom and sat next to Louis.

'Oi, keep your elbows on your side of the desk, Pie Face!' said Louis, helping himself to my stylus, my memory cube and two of my highglowers.

I wouldn't mind him borrowing my stuff if he didn't give it back to me half chewed and all spitty!

Mr Caldwell said we had just a few minutes before our amazing visitors arrived, 'This is a first!' he said excitedly. 'Cyborg children about to take part in mainstream education alongside normal organic ones like you lot. You can tell your grandkids you were part of history!'

'Yeah, well, my uncle Dan says they're not safe,' said Louis.

'Yeah,' said Mercedes, 'what if they go rogue and try to kill us?!'

Mr Caldwell tutted and rolled his eyes to the ceiling, 'Nonsense, the Luna Livewires Corporation has been perfecting these children for years . . . And here they are now!'