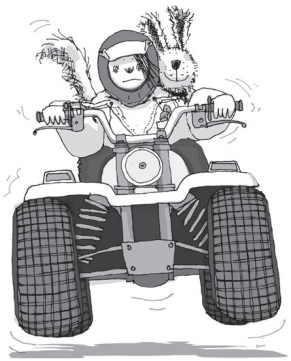


AND THE ACCIDENTAL ADVENTURE

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OLLIE SPARK

AND THE ACCIDENTAL ADVENTURE



GILLIAN CROSS
AND ALAN SNOW

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To Lyra

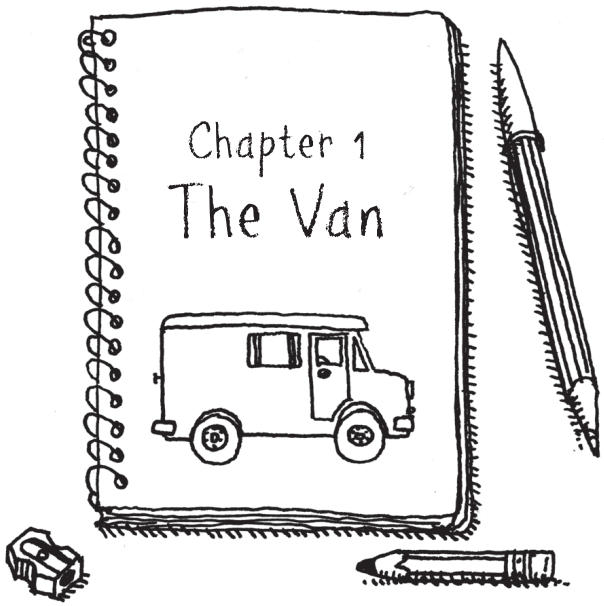
G.C.



To Errol

A.S.





I was up on the roof when Mum started shouting.

'Ollie! Come and mend the washing machine!'

She made me jump and I nearly dropped my mini-drone.

'I'll be there in a minute!' I shouted back. 'I'm just finishing the jackdaw scarer!'

I *had* to stop jackdaws falling down my bedroom chimney. It's already a squash in there, with me and three of my little cousins. There's no space for birds

flapping around in a panic. They spray soot everywhere, and the cousins all start screaming.

'But I need the machine *now*!' Mum yelled. 'The kitchen's full of dirty washing!'

'It's all right!' I shouted. 'I can fix it!' There are loads of people in our house, but I'm the only one who understands machines. I *love* them.

But I needed to finish the jackdaw scarer first.

It would only take a couple of minutes. The next time a jackdaw set foot on the chimney, it would start up the mini-drone and send me a signal. The drone would fly straight at the jackdaw and then chase it away – steered by my phone.

I'd spent days making the drone, and all I had to do now was fix a pressure pad on the chimney. Only had three more screws to go . . .

'The washing can't wait!' Mum shouted.

'Just coming!' I called. But as I reached for the first screw –

SCREECH!!!!

I nearly fell off the roof.

A huge green van swerved up our road. The driver was crunching the gears and shouting my name.

'Ollie! OLLIE!!! Look what I've got!'

It lurched to a stop outside our house and Aunt Caz jumped out. She waved her arms at the van, yelling, 'Look what I've got! Isn't it wonderful?'



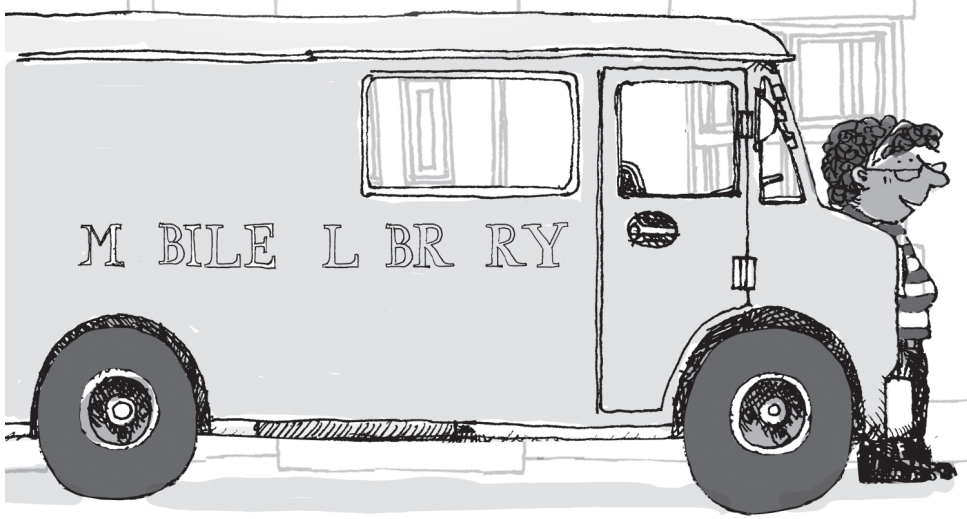
It didn't look wonderful to me. I could hear at least three things wrong with the engine and one of the huge tyres was going flat. Even the name on the side was flaking off.

The other grown-ups came pouring out of the house, all trying to fit through the front door at once: Mum and Dad, Granny, Aunt Laura and Aunt Dionne, Grandad Peel and all the uncles. And two of my little cousins leaned out of the bedroom window, squealing with excitement. Everyone was talking at once.

'Where did you find it?'

'Can we go for a ride?'

'Caz, you're amazing!'



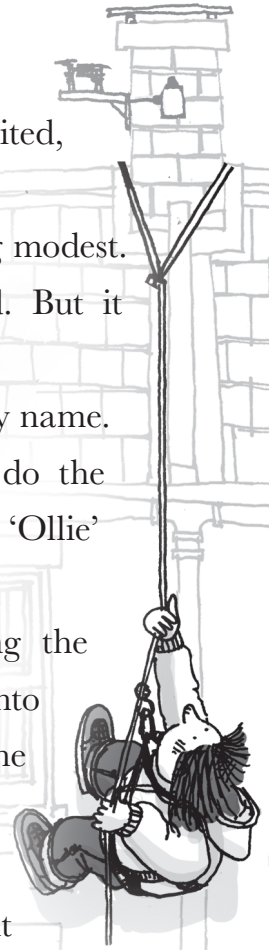
When people in my family get excited, they get *really* excited.

Aunt Caz stood by the van, looking modest. 'It'll be wonderful when it's finished. But it needs a bit of work.'

Suddenly, everyone was shouting my name. 'Ollie!' 'OLLIE!!' '**OLLIE!!!**' (Why do the words 'work' and 'Ollie' always go together?)



I sighed. Dropping the last three screws into my pocket, I tucked the mini-drone into my toolbelt and abseiled down from the roof. Before I even hit the ground, the grown-ups were crowding around, grinning and shouting at me.





‘Look what Aunt Caz has found!’

‘Isn’t it huge?’

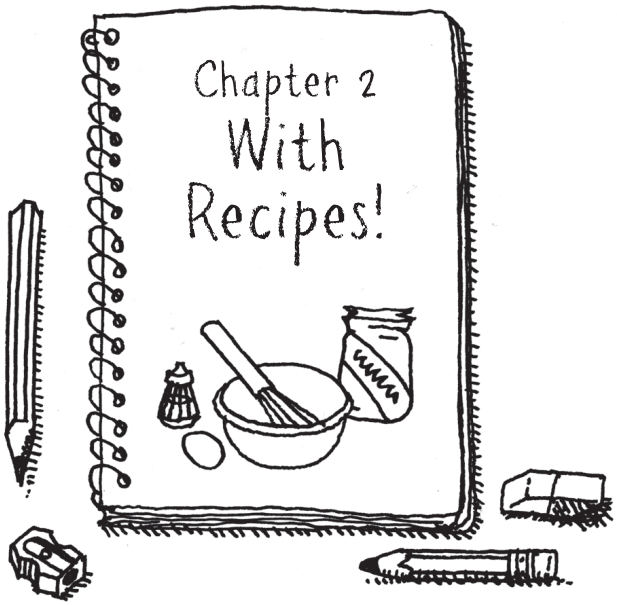
‘It’s going to be fantastic!’

I looked up at them all. Then I looked at the van. ‘What is it *for*?’ I said. ‘And how did you pay for it?’

No one in our family ever has any money. They all stopped shouting and turned to look at Aunt Caz. She gave a huge, triumphant smile.

‘Beddington Potts!’ she said.





All the grown-ups looked at each other. Then they looked back at Aunt Caz.

‘What’s Beddington Potts?’ said Grandad Peel.

‘He’s my spy,’ Aunt Caz said proudly. ‘Faster than a rocket! Sharper than a needle!’

I didn’t understand. ‘What do you mean *your* spy?’

Aunt Caz’s smile got bigger. ‘I’ve found a publisher who wants me to write SIX Beddington Potts books. They’ve paid me some money already.’

Mum gave her a hug and everyone cheered – especially me. I love spy stories! And Aunt Caz was actually going to be *paid* for writing them. I couldn't wait to read about Beddington Potts!

'I hope you've bought us some cake,' Dad said. 'To celebrate.'

Aunt Caz laughed. 'There was no money left for cake. I spent it all on the van.'

Everyone stared.

'*All* of it?' Aunt Dionne said.

Aunt Caz nodded. She was still grinning.

'But –' I still didn't get it. 'Why did you buy the van?'

Aunt Caz put an arm round my shoulders. 'To live in, silly! So I can travel abroad to do research – and collect recipes.'

'Recipes?' said Uncle Rashid.

Aunt Caz gave another huge smile. 'That's my brilliant idea. They're going to be spy stories WITH RECIPES.'

'Yay!' shouted my cousins. They love food.

I looked at the van. 'You're going to live in *that*?'

'It needs a bit of work,' Aunt Caz said airily. 'But there's loads of space inside. I thought you could just do a few alterations . . . Look!' She pulled me towards the side of the van and tugged the doors open.



She was right about the space. But it wasn't the sort of space you could *live* in. There was nothing inside except rows and rows of empty bookshelves – and a battered old quad bike. (What was *that* for?)

Aunt Caz jumped into the van and stroked the front of the bike. 'They threw this in for nothing when I bought the van. Wasn't that nice?'

'Bet it doesn't work,' I said.

Aunt Caz beamed at me. 'I'm sure you can fix it! When you've done the alterations.' She patted my arm. 'Why don't you draw up some plans – while I go and start writing!'

She tossed me the keys and jumped out of the van. With a wave at my cousins, she swept into the house, leaving all the other grown-ups to follow.

I looked round the van. *Be sensible*, I told myself. *You haven't got time for anything extra*. There were hundreds of things in the house that needed fixing. And most of the week I had to be at school. I couldn't work on the van as well.

But . . .

I couldn't resist taking a look inside. And the moment I did, my brain started racing. *I could fix a flap-down table over there. With storage under the seats. If I take down the shelves, I'll have lots of wood. And that's a good place to fit in a toilet . . .*

I took out my notebook and pencil and unrolled my steel tape measure. No harm in making a few measurements and drawing some diagrams . . .

