
PLANET
JOY

Also by Jenny Valentine

*A Girl Called Joy*

*Love From Joy*






# JENNY VALENTINE

Illustrations by Claire Lefevre

SIMON & SCHUSTER

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*To all the Bright Sides*



# 1



My name is Joy Applebloom, and I am nearly eleven years old. My family used to be always on the move, in different parts of the world, but then we stopped and came back to the UK, to 48 Plane Tree Gardens, which is where my grandad lives. He is Mum's dad and his name is Thomas E. Blake. Home to him is a tidy house on a street of other tidy houses. The five of us are all packed in tight like sardines

in a can, but with a lot more conversation about table manners and a constant queue for the bathroom.

According to my big sister, Claude, our real address is The Square Root of Nowhere. She says if we don't get out of here soon she is going to combust, and the rest of us one hundred per cent believe her. Grandad says he would rather she didn't do it on his hall carpet, because thanks to Dad and a certain dropped cup of coffee, he has just paid to have it professionally cleaned.

When we moved back to live here, there were a lot of quick changes.

Claude and I went to an actual school for the first time ever, instead of doing our lessons on the move.

Mum and Dad started looking for jobs and

flats and doctors and furniture and other long-term things that you can't just put in a suitcase and take with you when it's time to go.

Grandad's house went from so quiet he could hear a pin drop to so noisy he couldn't hear himself think.

We made friends and noise and mess and chaos. And even though we have been here for a little while now, life is still crammed full of upsides and silver linings and surprises.

Claude says, 'You would think that. Even if we were stuck up to our necks in a crocodile-infested swamp in a monsoon.'

My sister thinks I have silver linings drawn on the inside of my eyelids.

Dad says he doesn't want to think about what she has on the inside of hers.

All I know is we are being bombarded with

exciting new things. They are fizzing like just-discovered comets through our sky.

I have a new teacher and a brand-new hobby, and I have started learning a whole new set of languages that I never knew existed.

There is new girl in 6C, who is even newer than me.

Our old teacher Mrs Hunter has a new actual *knee*.

Claude has at least two brand-new political causes. She is very busy getting angry about the state of the world and standing up for things and fighting the oppressor and going on marches. My sister is twenty-four-hours-a-day LIVID, and for once, Mum and Dad say she has every right to be, and that they could not be more proud.

She also has a new boyfriend, and a new

favourite word, which is PRIVACY, and apparently she is not getting any of it. Dad says he doesn't know where she is finding the time for love when she is so busy being absolutely outraged about everything, and Claude sticks her chin out like a fighter and opens her eyes up extra wide, which is her way of saying MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS.

Grandad has a new interest in gardening because of his new friend, whose name is Miss Hedda Wolfe. Together, they have turned his grey concrete backyard into a flowery paradise, bird-filled and buzzing with bees. It is quite a transformation, and I am not just talking about the garden. Grandad used to be spotless and sort of nailed down and grey, and now his hands are always muddy and his cheeks are mostly pink and his fingers have turned out to

be extremely green. It is like the old Grandad got dragged through a hedge backwards, in the best possible way. He used to spend a lot of time sitting very still in a chair and now he is mainly digging or snipping or crouching over seedlings with his bum in the air. He does a lot of whistling. He says Hedda Wolfe has given him *a new lease of life*, and he is grateful because it was me who introduced them.

I look at Grandad's cat, who has a sparkly new collar and extremely high cheekbones and a thousand-yard stare.

I say, 'Well, it was Buster, really.'

Miss Wolfe lives at number 57. Buster used to disappear to have his dinner there and stay the night, and now so does Grandad.

Claude does not want to talk about it.

Dad has just started his new job at the

big community centre at the bottom of Sunningdale, the block of flats on the Meadows Estate where my best friend Benny Hooper lives with his family. It has been *refurbished* which means it is as good as new. Now, the community centre is called My Second Home and it is going to be a drop-in place for the elderly, and a preschool nursery and a library and a café, all in one place, around one courtyard. Dad is the executive chef. This means he is the one in charge.

'Just like at home,' he says, and everyone rolls their eyes. Even Grandad.

When Dad talks about his new job, I can tell how much he likes it. Apparently, the team at My Second Home are performing Community Magic, and Dad says he cannot wait for us to see it. We are all going to the big open day at

the end of the month. Grandad is bringing Hedda Wolfe as his plus one, and Benny's whole family is coming, which means Claude's new boyfriend will also be there due to the fact that he is Benny's big brother, Sam.

Claude has a new smile and Mum has bought herself a new dress. Dad says both of these things are delightful and surprising. He calls it *the dawn of a new era*, which makes Claude look like she wants to bury herself head first in the bin.

The new girl in 6C looks like she wants to be buried head first in a bin too. She is definitely not looking like she wants to be in school, that's for sure, and I sympathize because I can still remember how that feels. I think she is very enigmatic and mysterious. So far, Benny says he is finding her about as cheerful as a

ghost train and less enthusiastic than a hole in the ground. But something tells me that she is about to come out from behind what is eclipsing her and turn out to be our newest friend. I tell Benny I am almost convinced of it. I am hoping that this feeling isn't what Claude has started calling, 'Life on Planet Joy.' This is my sister's way of saying that I know nothing about the real world and I am way too optimistic about people and life in general. I am crossing my fingers that the new girl doesn't agree with her. Only Claude can make the word *upbeat* sound like it is dripping with poison.

Lastly, I'm almost certain that we won't be staying in Plane Tree Gardens for much longer.

I think I overheard Mum and Dad talking

about it. I'm not supposed to overhear their conversations, so I can't know, but if it's true then we are on the move again, and I'm honestly not sure how I feel about that. The four of us are very good at packing up and saying goodbye to the old things and hello to the new. We have done it all my life, and it has always been pretty brilliant and exciting. But for the first time ever, we have put down some roots, like Grandad's new roses, and we are not nearly the seeds on the breeze that we used to be.

I am on the lookout for more clues, but I am trying not to talk or think or worry about it yet, because I have so many other new things to be busy with. And I am quietly working on remembering the silver linings of our old life on the road. There are hundreds, like having

everything you need in just one suitcase, and Dad's fireside songs, and how Mum feels about a sunset, and so many kinds of foods, and the way flying fish keep up with your boat in a clear blue sea.

If we go, Grandad will have his quiet tidy house back. I am wondering if he will miss us and all our chaos at 48 Plane Tree Gardens, or throw a party to celebrate. The new, refurbished version of Grandad means this is actually quite hard to predict.



# 2

Our new teacher came into our lives out of the blue like a surprise gift, which is much more dramatic and interesting than the kind you've been expecting.

A few Fridays ago, Mrs Hunter thunder-clapped her hands at the front of the class. This was her way of saying she was about to make an important announcement. At the time, I was very busy sticking scrunched-up lumps

of black tissue paper on to my model of a bat. I wasn't in 6C at all any more, but in a cave near San Antonio that was overflowing with Mexican free-tailed bats. The air was thick and smelly. The opening looked like a giant's eye in the ground, and the sky around it was a living thing, beating with wings, incredibly loud and incredibly quiet at the same time. When Mrs Hunter told us all to stop what we were doing *immediately* and put our hands in our laps and LISTEN, I had to hurry all the way back from Texas. This is not the kind of extra effort that Mrs Hunter has ever tended to notice or appreciate.

We were supposed to be looking only and exclusively at her. This was way harder than it sounds because we were also trying to look at someone on the other side of the door, waiting

to come in. Through the round porthole graph-paper window I could see their hair, which was black and shiny, and a corner of their shirt, which was tablecloth white.

Mrs Hunter cleared her throat and leaned a little bit on her desk for support. She told us she was taking the rest of term off to get a new knee, and she looked straight at me when she said, 'I will allow five minutes for questions.'

New knees are made out of metal and plastic. Doctors move the kneecap out of the way like a sliding door so they can get to the bones behind and then they glue the new parts to the old ones with a kind of cement. Afterwards you have to have painkillers and physiotherapy and a lot of rest, and for a while you will be a bit swollen and have to walk with a stick. You can come

back to work when you are good and ready.

Mrs Hunter let in the mystery person waiting outside, and it was as if she had opened the curtains to let in the day. The visitor was a dazzling patch of sunlight. Mrs Hunter was a wet clump of fog. They stood together at the front of the class. When two things are the same but different, like me and Claude, or Dad and the prime minister, Grandad says they are like chalk and cheese. This was more like glitter and brick dust.

'This is Mr Suarez,' Mrs Hunter said. 'He is going to be your teacher while I am away.'

A flurry of excitement broke through the room like a wave. Bailey Parker did a fist pump and I think Mrs Hunter saw it. A sad little shadow scudded across her face. She looked deflated, but Mr Suarez did not.

‘Two replacements,’ he said. ‘One knee and one teacher,’ and everyone apart from the wet lump of fog laughed.

Mr Suarez’s beaming smile moved over us like a searchlight. His hair was slicked back and shiny under the lights. His trainers had rainbows on them. He seemed electrified with enthusiasm. I already knew I was going to like him.



He said, 'I am super excited to be joining you in 6C. This is my first ever real-life teaching job, so this class will forever be special and I will never forget you.'

Mrs Hunter sighed loudly, like she had just carried a hippopotamus up ten flights of stairs with no help. She was the opposite of electrified. She said, 'I am sure you will all make Mr Suarez feel very welcome,' and then the bell rang for the end of the day.

'Hooray for the weekend!' said Mr Suarez. 'Hip! Hip!' and I couldn't help noticing that Mrs Hunter's face was more like a damp Tuesday in November.

When I started school for the first time, me and Mrs Hunter were not exactly the best of friends. We couldn't agree on anything. My old

teacher found me too loud and too opinionated and too fidgety, and I thought she was not friendly enough and very gloomy and much too strict. She didn't believe that I had ever been inside a volcano, or bottle-fed an alpaca, or slept in the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro, and she definitely did not want to hear about *any* of it. She wanted me to do as I was told and stop talking and be more still and think less thoughts. And I wanted her to relax. She needed me to be a bit less Joy, and I needed her to be a bit less Mrs Hunter.

It took us a while, but in the end, I think we were just starting to understand each other. Mrs Hunter was learning to put up with me, and I was doing my best to cheer her up and keep it zipped. She really made me get better at a lot of difficult things: percentages and fractions,

punctuation and neat handwriting. Timetables. And the meaning of words like *intolerable* and *untrammelled* – and *flibbertigibbet*, which has turned out to be one of my all-time favourites.

I'll admit I had high hopes that our new teacher would find me one hundred per cent more interesting and at least three quarters less of a pest. Mr Suarez looked like he might be a lot more curious to know about the way sea-ice sounds almost *exactly* like a snoring giant, or how the buildings of Jaisalmer actually do turn golden at sunset, or the time I saw a black bear, full of honey and fast asleep in a tree. But I was a little wary of finding out. Mrs Hunter did not even pretend to enjoy it when I talked about stuff like that. She did not have the time to listen and she wasn't even one tiny

bit inquisitive. I think she is the kind of person that could stand on the top of a mountain and miss the view.

But, like every-single-body in the whole wide world, Mrs Hunter does have her own silver linings, if you just know where to find them. She is keen on historical things, like Grandad, and she knows loads about the outside world. She is kind to caterpillars and she loves chocolate, and she did her best to help me and Benny when we tried to save the enormous ancient oak tree in the playground. When her knee wasn't hurting and we were all very much doing exactly as we were told, she could sometimes almost look like she was starting to enjoy herself in 6C. I knew it wasn't going to be the same at school without her. Mrs Hunter and I might be very different people,

but that still didn't mean I would be glad to see her go.

So while everyone else was hurrying out of the classroom and getting stuck in the hallway traffic jam, I took my time packing my pencil case and I put my books in my bag extra slowly. Mrs Hunter says I am a dawdler, which means I take too long to do the things she wants me to be quick at. I could hear the special foot-tap she always does when she feels I am out-staying my welcome in 6C. Mr Suarez had his back to me because he was reading all the workings on the whiteboard. That morning we had been doing long division, which is another thing I dawdle at, mainly because it ties my brain in tight little knots that take about a century to unpick.

'Are you a tiny bit sad to be leaving?' I

asked her. 'Or mostly just excited about your new knee?'

I could tell by her face that she didn't really want to talk about it. 'Oh,' she answered, with zero enthusiasm. 'I'll be back.'

'Well,' I said. 'I will miss you when you're gone.'

Mrs Hunter looked petrified, like I was Medusa and my hair was made of snakes and I had just that minute decided to turn her instantly and irreversibly to stone.

Mr Suarez spun right round on the ball of one foot, with his smile on high beam.

'Well, aren't you kind!' he said. 'What's your name? What a lovely thing to say.'

Mrs Hunter glared at him. She used her hands, palms up, the way Claude does when she's arguing, which is often.

'Mr Suarez. Meet Joy Applebloom.'

And her glare said something much less welcoming than that.

If she contained even just one atom of sadness or excitement about leaving, Mrs Hunter didn't show it. Not a peep. She didn't want any fuss, thank you very much, and she was categorically not interested in a big noisy send-off. Her last week in 6C was just like any other week, apart from a big assembly on Friday, when our head teacher, Miss Stilwell, made a very nice speech. She said the whole school would feel lost without its longest-standing member of staff, and that everyone was already looking forward to welcoming her back.

Later, Bailey Parker said he would not exactly be counting down the days, and Benny

pointed out that Mrs Hunter never did stand for very long, but we all clapped anyway, and Miss Stilwell gave her a big bunch of flowers and a card that had been signed by all of the teachers.

Mrs Hunter looked like a beetroot under a raincloud from start to finish. Some people just don't like saying goodbye.