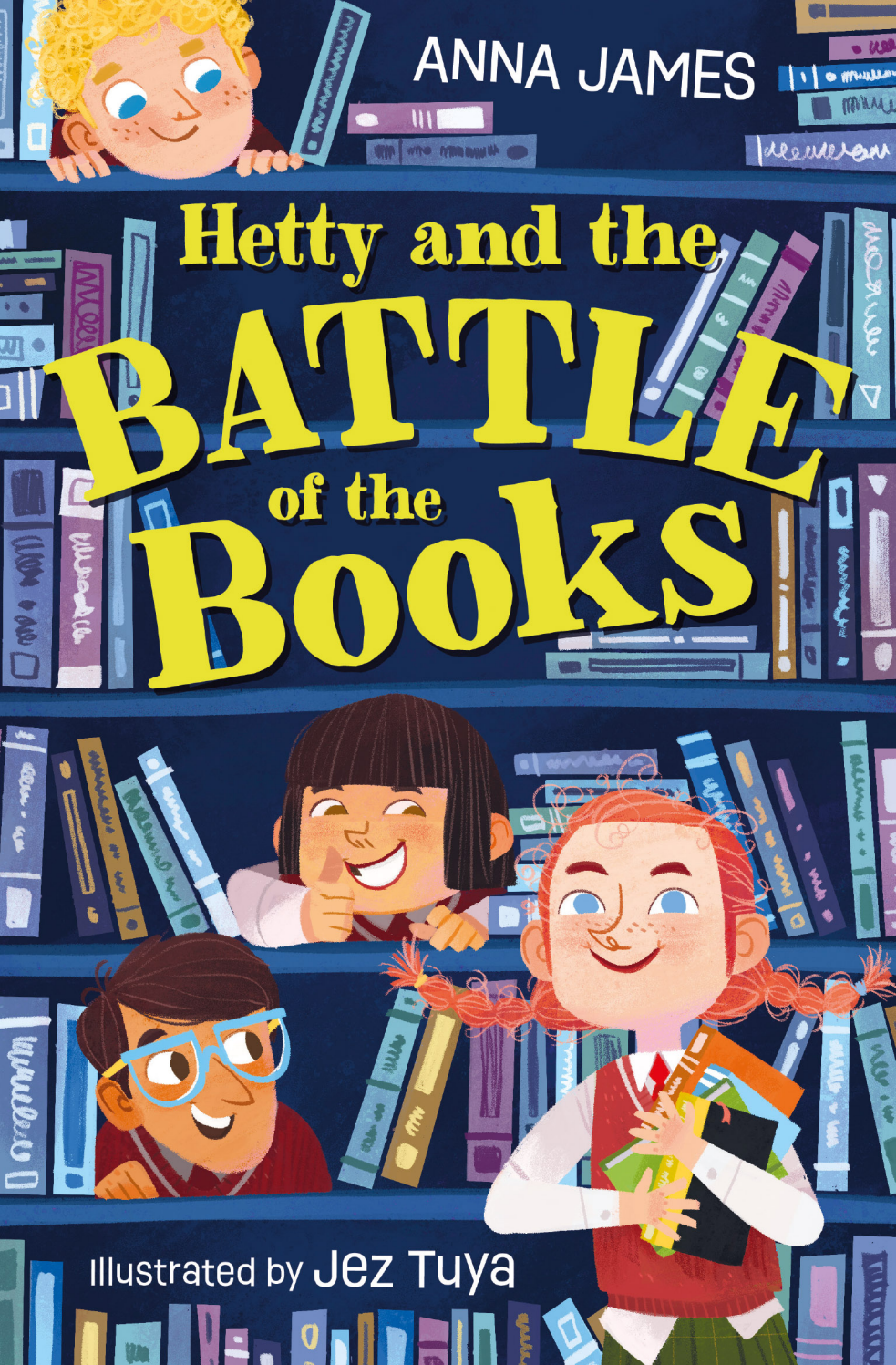
ANNA JAMES

Hetty and the BATTLE of the Books



Illustrated by Jez Tuya

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Barrington Stoke

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For every reader at
Heart of England School 2009–2014,
I loved being your librarian.

Chapter 1

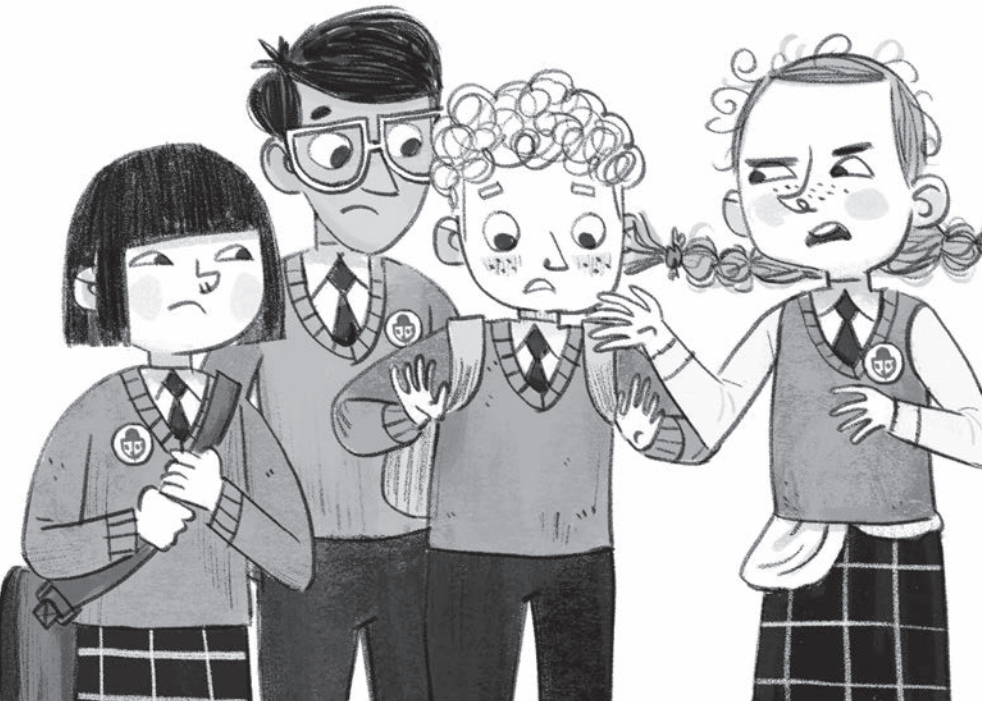
Some things change, and some things stay the same. That's what my dad says. I don't like to give him too much credit, otherwise we'll never hear the end of his sayings, but I can't argue with this one.

The things that have changed are my friends. The thing that has stayed the same is how I feel about the library. It might be a different school, with a different library, but my feelings are the same.

Mei, Rocket, Ali and I met on the first day of Reception when we were put on the Ladybird table together. Our teacher started calling us the Ladybirds, and the name stuck.

The name stuck all during primary school. Then I guess it lost its glue because it fell off. It didn't just fall off, actually. It fell into a bin and had a pigeon poo on it. Then it lived in the bin juice at the bottom of the bin, feeling worse and worse about having fallen off in the first place.

You may think I'm using a metaphor, but we all wore actual ladybird stickers on our first day at secondary school, and Rocket's had fallen off before lunchtime. The bin and pigeon-poo bit is a metaphor.



Secondary school all seemed to be going well to begin with, but then it was my birthday, just before half-term in February. That's when the Big Falling Out happened. I'll tell you more about that in a bit, but you should prepare yourself for the biggest betrayal ever. I'm told I exaggerate things, but not this time. I'm trying to think of something from history to compare it to, but there's nothing that even comes close, so I won't bother.

What you need to know right now is this: we were the Ladybirds, and then the others found new things. Mei is super involved in the school newspaper, and Rocket pretty much runs the Dungeons & Dragons club. Ali watches all these intense black-and-white movies with the film club. The only thing we have in common any more is the school library, which is where those clubs and the newspaper happen. As well as book club, which is *my* thing.

The library has always been my favourite place, whatever school I'm in, whoever I'm friends with. I've always loved reading and stories. The limit of borrowing only six books at the public library is the worst. Thankfully the school library is more flexible, so between the two I'm sorted.

Stories are how I make sense of the world and how I feel about stuff. You know when you read a book and somehow some author you've never met has written down exactly how you feel about something? And then it helps you have the right words for how you feel? That's what I love about reading. And that's why the library is so important to me.