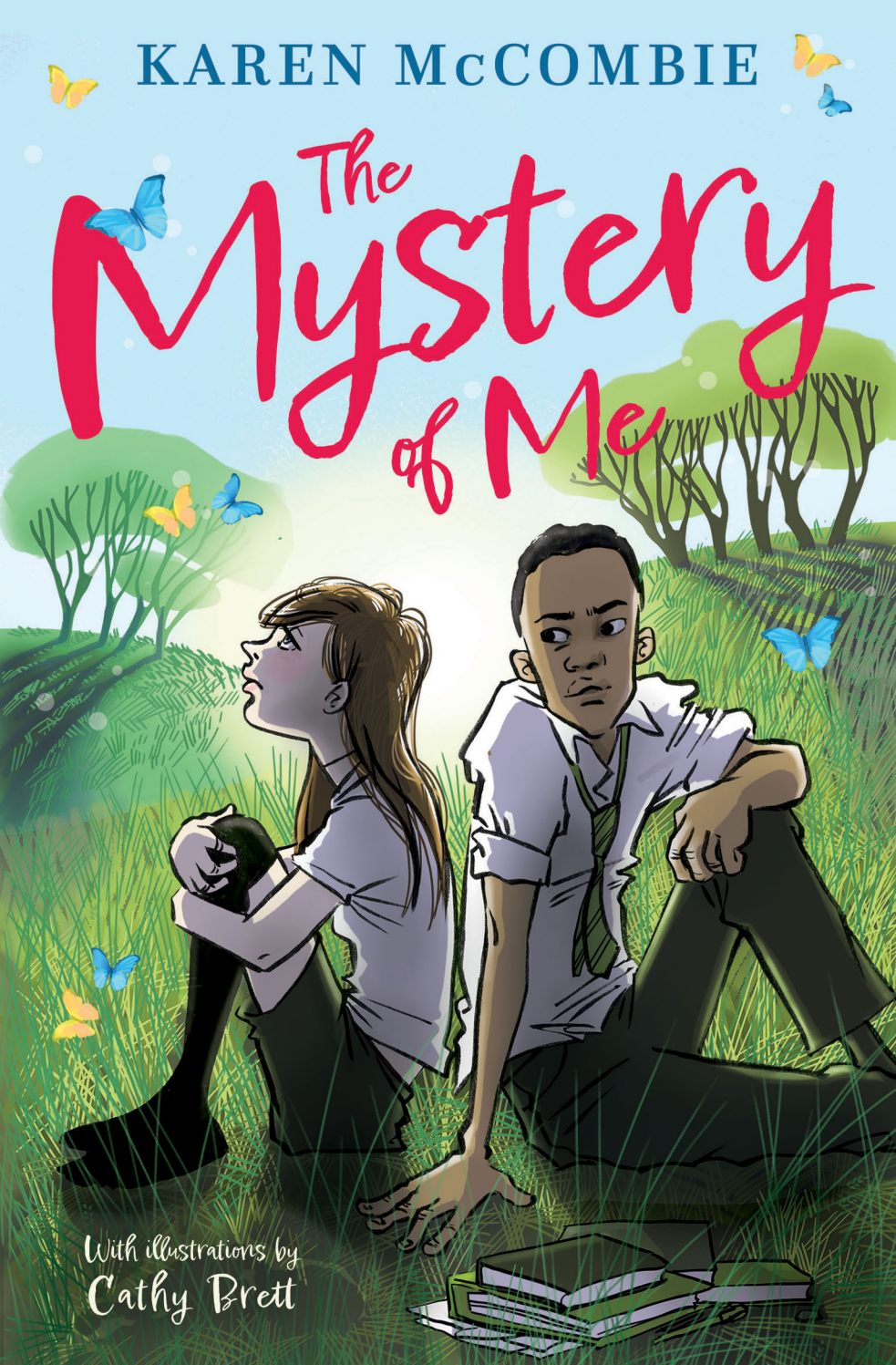
KAREN McCOMBIE

# The Mystery of Me



With illustrations by Cathy Brett

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KAREN McCOMBIE



With illustrations by
Cathy Brett

Barrington Stoke

*For Daisy Weston (and her fairy godmother, Margaret Sawkins, who made this happen!)*



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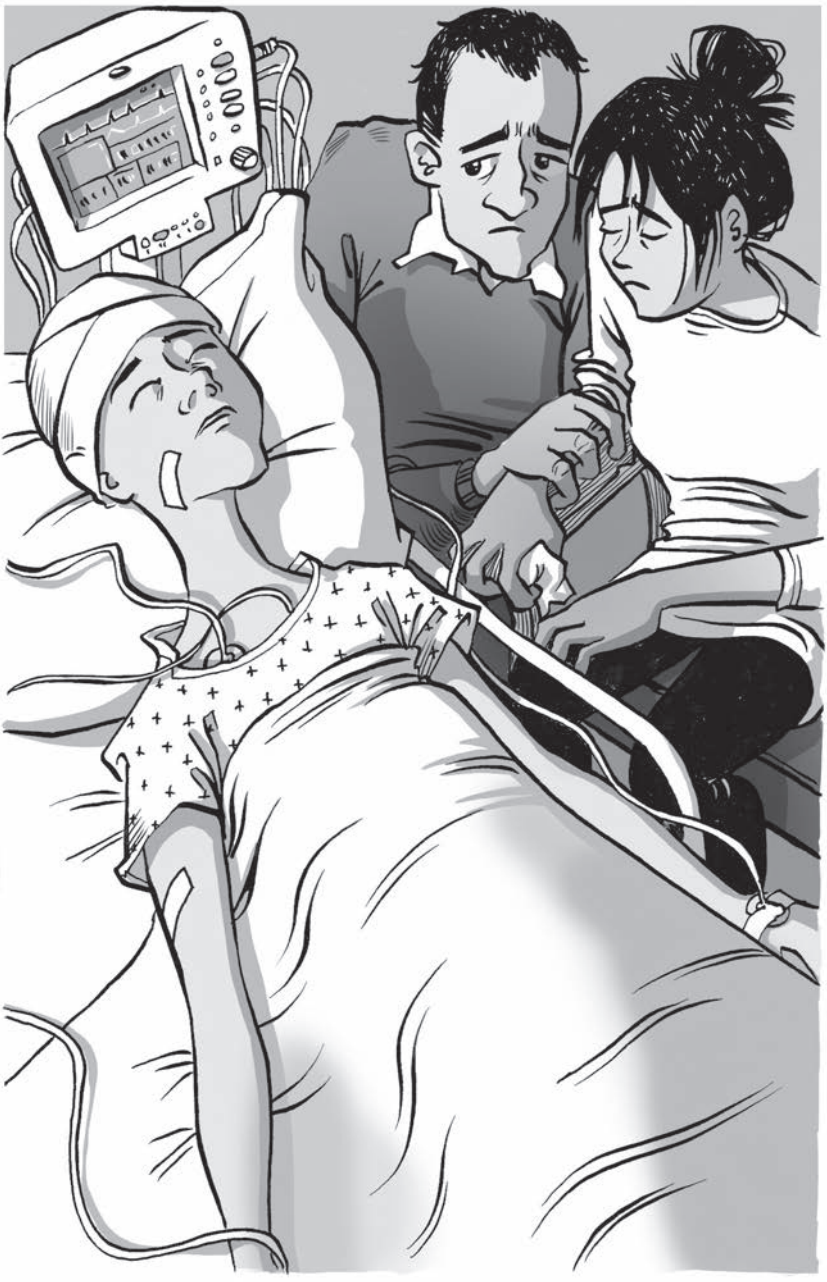
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# CHAPTER 1

## The same old Ketty?

I can't remember dying.

But it was only for 2 minutes, 39 seconds. Then the paramedics got my heart started again.

I can't remember the crash, or anything in the two weeks after it. That's because I was in a coma all that time.

Mum and Dad sat by my hospital bed for hour after hour, day after day, holding hands and hoping. Just hoping I'd wake up and be me, their sweet little Ketty.

The doctor warned them that people can seem different after a head injury. A fun-loving person may turn serious. A shy, easy-going person may turn loud and get angry. She said that maybe – if I had lots of rest – there'd be no change at all. No one knows how it's going to be.

Everyone says, though, that I ended up the same old Ketty.

Not that I know who the old Ketty is ... I don't really remember, like I don't remember the crash.

I've been off school the last couple of months, and my memory is creeping back in scraps and wisps. Faces, places, people pop into my mind at odd times.

The first time Mum and Dad took me for a walk in the park, I looked at the children's playground and I remembered sitting on the swings. I remembered the way they swayed to and fro, and the thick, cold links of metal in my hands, the giggles of girls beside me.

"That must have been Adele and Urmi! Your best friends!" Dad said when I told him my memory.

I've seen Adele and Urmi one time since the crash, but it felt like it was the first time I'd ever met them.

When they came to the house, we were all a bit shy, and it felt weird when they hugged me. I smiled and nodded as they spoke about teachers and kids at school who sent their love, but the names they said didn't mean anything to me. I couldn't match the names with faces – or even with feelings – at all.

But perhaps today it will happen at last, cos today is my first day back at Hartford Academy.

"You'll only be here for the morning, Ketty, so you won't get too tired," Mum tells me as we walk in the front door of the school.

"OK," I say with a nod as I stare around me.

I do know this place. That feels good.

Here is the corridor with the grey floor tiles, the blue sofa for visitors, the office with the smiley lady behind the glass window. There are no crowds of kids – my parents and the

school thought it was best for me to come in after the mad crush at the start of the day.

"Hello, Ketty! How nice to see you!" the smiley lady says. She gets up and comes out of a door to greet us.

I can't remember her name. It flutters around in my mind like a moth, but I can't seem to catch hold of it. That happens a lot. Even simple words are in my head for one second and gone the next. My doctor says this will get better bit by bit. She says I have to try not to get frustrated.

That's easy for her to say.

“Stella!” I shout out too loudly as I suddenly remember the smiley lady’s name.

“Yes, well done!” she says. Stella and Mum smile at each other as if I’m a toddler who has learned a new word.

I was pleased when I remembered, but that look they share makes me feel a bit stupid.

“Now, don’t worry at all today, Ketty,” Stella says. “Everyone knows you need to take it slow. And everyone knows not to talk about …”

Stella goes red.

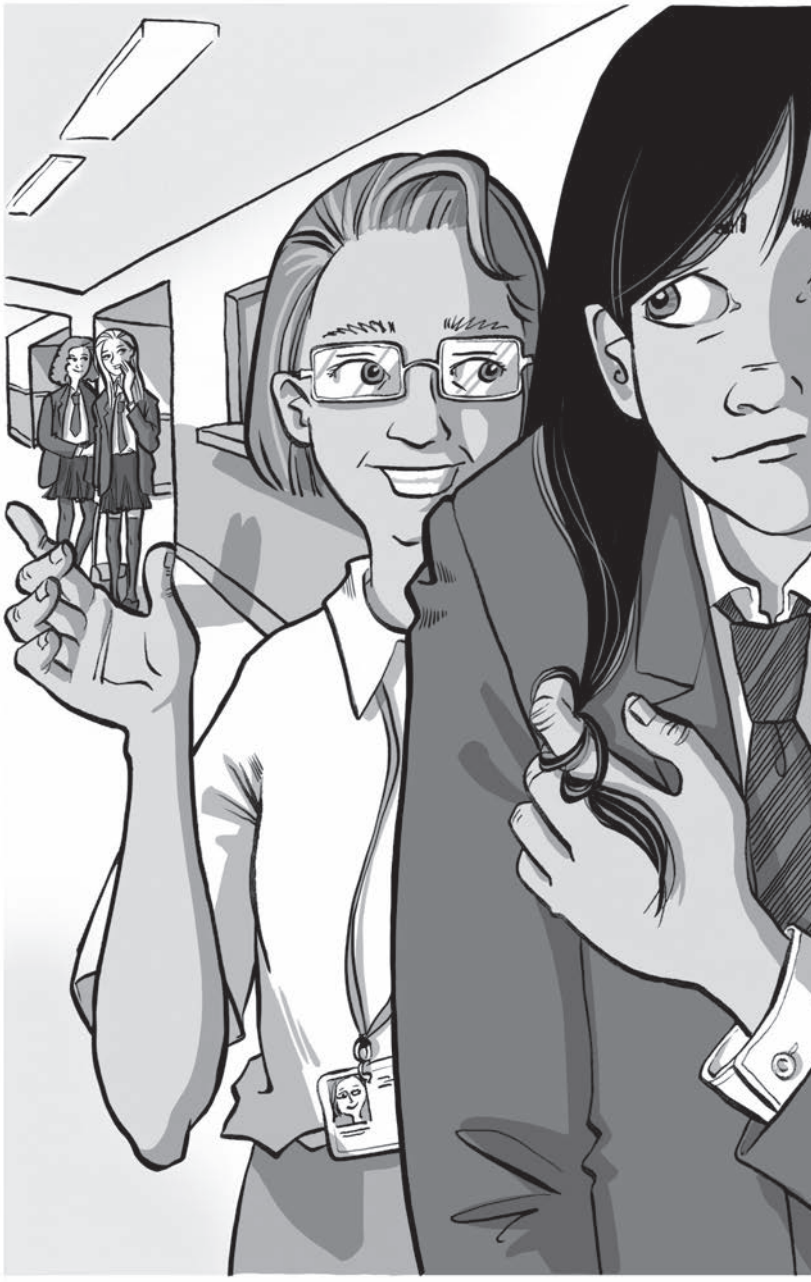
She was about to say “the crash”, but she stopped herself.

Does she think I’ll get very upset if I think about that? Like I say, it’s all a blank to me.

“Good luck, darling,” Mum says, and she gives my arm a little rub. “It’ll be fine.”

As soon as she waves and leaves, I turn to Stella, who will take me to my first class.

And then I see two girls further up the corridor. Their school shoes have stopped pitta-patting on the shiny floor, and they’re staring at me as if I have two heads and three noses. They’re whispering, and I can hear



some of what they're saying. They're talking about me.

Uh-oh.

Is Mum right? Will I be fine?

I'm not so sure.