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MY NAME IS SUNSHINE SIMPSON

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MY NAME IS SUNSHINE SIMPSON

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For my children,
and in loving memory of my parents,
Lester and Rena.
Without you, this book would not be.

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Illustrated by Fuuji Takashi and Emily Bornoff

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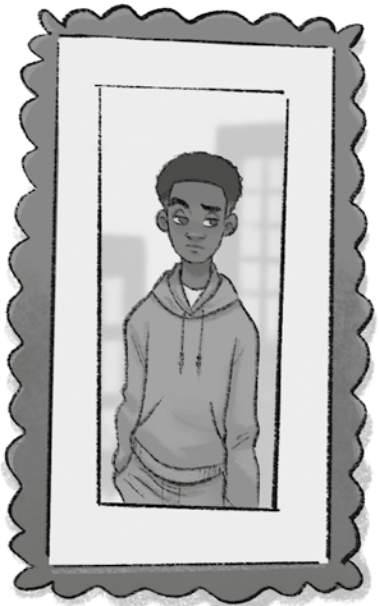


Dariuszkz

Auntie Sharon

Granny Cynthie &
Grampie Clive

Mum & Dad

Meet my family – and welcome to my rollercoaster life!

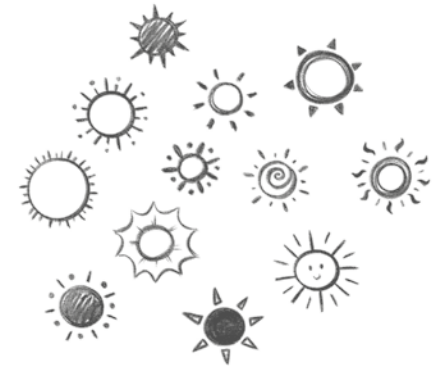
Me (age 6)

Grandad Bobby

The Twinzies (Lena & Peter)

"Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars."

Dr Martin Luther King Jr



Hello.

My name is Sunshine Simpson and I'm very pleased to meet you.

I don't entirely know why I'm starting the story this way, it just seems like a proper introduction. Polite.

Actually, I do know why I'm starting the story this way. I want to ask you a question and I didn't want to launch into it by throwing myself at you too quickly. That seemed rude.

But now I've got the good manners part done, here goes…

Have you ever wished you had a **magic button** that you could press to play back all the best bits of everything that happens to you, but then delete all the bad bits that you don't like as much? I have, but no magic button has ever appeared. If it had, maybe my life would be different now.

I must warn you: there are no wizards or any **magic** fixes in this story to make everything better – although there are a few unicorns and a dragon (sort of). And there are things you'll find out that have changed my world for ever. I know that sounds a bit dramatic, but it's true – I've been through **big-time drama** of the highest order lately.

I should let you judge for yourselves really, so I'm going to get on with telling you what actually happened. It's always best to start a story at the beginning. Well, that's what my teacher, Miss Peach, tells me. She says a good story always has a beginning, a middle and an end. Miss Peach is very wise, despite being named after a fruit, so I'll follow her advice, and take you back to the beginning of last summer term, when everything started to go horribly wrong.

1

HORSEY OLD LADY FACE

Focus. Power, I chanted under my breath. **Focus. Power. You've got this, Sunshine. You've. Got. This.**

Near the start of every summer term, each class at my school takes part in a skipping fitness challenge. All the kids gather in their classes on the school playground and playing fields, kind of like a mini sports day, and have to do as many skips as possible in one minute, using posh skipping ropes with in-built counters. The top skippers from each class get to have their photo and name displayed on the **Wall of Fame** in the school hall.

The Wall of Fame is really called "**the celebration wall**",

and you get to be on it whenever you do anything great at school, but us kids have always called it the Wall of Fame to pep things up a bit. Give it a bit of **star quality**. Being good at skipping was my claim to fame. Maybe it was a small claim to fame, but it meant a lot to me.

Even though the teachers always said, "It's not a competition, it's the taking part that counts", I'd won the "it's not a competition" skipping challenge for two years in a row – so this time I was going for the hat-trick of three wins. But this time, as it turned out, was different.

You see, I have a friend called Evie Evans. She started at our school at the beginning of the school year, last September. And Evie is brilliant – at *everything*.

Evie was skipping next to me and my heart heaved in my chest as I desperately tried to keep in time with her. I could feel my pride and my title literally skipping away from me.

Pocus. Fower, I told myself again. Huh? My focus was un-powering or my power was un-focusing. Whichever one it was, this wasn't a good sign.

I kept stealing glances at Evie. Watching her as she

jumped effortlessly, leaping like a gazelle, with her ponytail of dark, bouncing curls bobbing beautifully behind her; not even the tiniest bead of sweat on her forehead. My forehead looked like someone could dive in and take a swim in it.

When the minute was up, I'd got dead-on one hundred skips – five skips down on last year. But Evie had got 106 skips – the most in the whole class (the most **EVER**). I was the washed-up runner-up. Evie had won.

"Don't worry, Sunshine, you mustn't be down in the mouth about this," said Miss Peach, as she took a photo of a beaming Evie for the Wall of Fame. "It's not a competition, it's the taking part that counts."

Right.

"It's those long legs, Sunny. You're very gangly, aren't you." Evie told me (she wasn't asking). "**You need to focus.** Keep it all together so that you're not flopping about all over the place. Keep your back straight like I do.

DON'T raise your legs too high. And **DON'T** look down at your feet." Evie was giving me lessons, like she was the teacher and I was her pupil. If only she knew how hard I *had* been trying to focus. There was virtually smoke coming out of my ears.

My best friends, Charley and Arun, rolled their eyes, obviously very offended on my behalf. Charley and Arun always have my back. It's a shame they couldn't have held the skipping rope to help me go a bit faster too.

"I'm just not great at skipping any more, I guess," I said, realizing that I was now holding on to a bucketload of hurt as well as the useless skipping rope.

I mopped at my brow and then held my hand out to shake Evie's hand, fair and square. Evie made a squirmy face as she saw my sweaty palm approaching. And then, right on cue, accidentally proving the point that I wasn't great at skipping any more, I tangled my legs in the rope, tumbling to the ground like a chopped-down tree.

Evie's face lit up. "But you're really good at being silly! I love that about you," she laughed. "And your face goes all **crinkly like an old lady's** when you're concentrating

on something. You almost put me off my skips! I'll have to start calling you **Silly Sunny**."

"Oh," I said, and then laughed a ridiculous, exaggerated laugh back at her.

I wasn't sure if I was meant to be offended or not. Crinkly old lady? I go to primary school!

And, yes, even though I am taller than a lot of other kids at Beeches Primary, and maybe because of that seem a bit older, I was sure I didn't need to buy a trolley load of wrinkle cream just yet. Or maybe I did?

I decided to check in with my Grandad Bobby after school. I could talk to my grandad about anything, even about looking like my own grandmother!

"Aww, and the way you throw your head back so I can see all your teeth and down your throat...**you're kind of like a cute horse** when you laugh. I'm so glad that Miss Peach asked

you to be my school buddy," said Evie.

I immediately shut my mouth. **A cute horse? Hmph!** Next she'd lead me to the playing fields and start feeding me a bag of apples and a few carrots.

But instead of saying anything, I raised my hand to wave Evie off as she happily skipped over to Miss Peach (this time without a skipping rope). I assumed they were both about to skip off together into the school hall and remove me from the Wall of Fame.

"You would have beaten Evie if you didn't keep looking across at her," said Arun, helping to free me from my ropey prison, and lifting me to my feet.

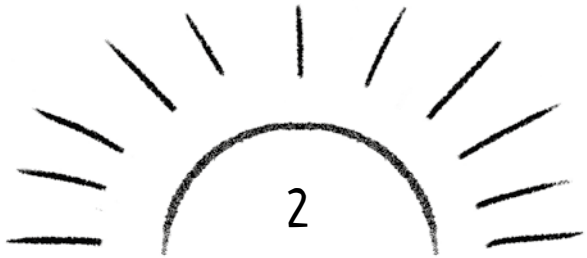
"Yes," said Charley. "You're a great skipper. You're good at lots of things, especially school stuff and gymnastics. Don't let her put you off."

I know you have to accept defeat as graciously as victory or whatever, but I'd been proud of being on the Wall of Fame. I'd never been the true champion of anything before. And, yes, Charley was right, I like school stuff — English and geography, even maths. But I had never been special, never particularly interesting. Even my gymnastics

skills were basic. I could do the splits, one-handed cartwheel and a backwards walkover — which Charley seemed to think made me an Olympic champion like Simone Biles — but that was it. And now it was just a matter of time before I'd be erased from the Wall of Fame, replaced by Evie's angelic, smiling face.

I stamped my foot, not meaning to seem bad-tempered; it was more to remove the remaining rope, which had now seemingly come to life and was snaking its way back up my leg. "I don't let her put me off. I just need to raise my game," I said.

My friends shrugged. And that was what I was going to do — shrug the whole **horsey, crinkly-old-lady-face** thing off and start all over again. Or so I thought.



2

ALL ABOUT EVIE

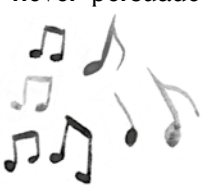
I was Evie's official "**school buddy**".

She was new in town, so I'd been assigned to look after her when she started at school. I was meant to show her the ropes — but definitely not skipping ropes! It was more like where the toilets were, having lunch with her, teaming-up on school projects, that sort of thing. **So life became all about Evie**.

In the early days it was a dream. I really enjoyed hanging out with Evie and learned quite a lot about her. Like how her proper first name is Evonne, because she was named after one of her grandmothers.

Evie told me she didn't like her proper name because it was "**soooo old-fashioned**", and that, secretly, she immediately hated anyone (except her parents) who used it — even teachers! She said I was the only person she'd ever told about the secret hating thing. I mean, I actually thought it wasn't everyone else's fault that she was called Evonne and at least it was different, but I didn't say that. Instead I'd beamed, full of a secret I would never tell. I got the feeling that Evie had lots of secrets that she never told anyone about. But I was prepared to give her time to settle in, to win her trust, because I liked Evie and I thought Evie liked me.

Evie's favourite drink in the whole, wide world was **hot chocolate with gooey marshmallows, cream and chocolate sprinkles on top, just like mine**! And we loved the same **music**. Evie would tell me what songs she liked to listen to on her phone. Yes, Evie had **her own phone!** I've always wanted my own phone, but could never persuade my parents to get me one. Evie had the



best phone money could buy, by the look of it. It looked more expensive than a *house*! I wasn't envious I told myself, just appreciative.

Evie was great.

I'd overheard Evie's dad tell my grandad that their family moved up to where we live from somewhere called the Home Counties, because Evie's mum was "from this part of the world and she wanted to come home". They'd both managed to transfer their jobs, which had made the move easier. Evie's mum does important things with computers and her dad is a lawyer. And they both used to commute into the **"big city"** for work.

"Ooh, posh," said Mum when Grandad told her.

"Oh," I said. I'd never heard of the Home Counties before. And I didn't know what commuting into the big city meant. But it gave Evie – and her family – that additional air of mystery. I was loving it.

I like to learn about places, especially places I've never been to before, so I jotted it all down in my little notebook, where I write down ***Things and places of interest*** to look up later.

Our house is pretty busy – I live with my mum, dad and my twin brother and sister, and my mum's dad, my Grandad Bobby, also lived with us. But Evie only lives with her mum and dad since her older sister, Hannah-Jade, went to university in London and only visits in the holidays.

Even though Evie and her family had moved to be closer to her mum's relatives, I thought about how Evie was probably lonely without her old school friends and her sister, and what with leaving all she knew behind to come and live in the West Midlands. And I didn't want her to feel alone.

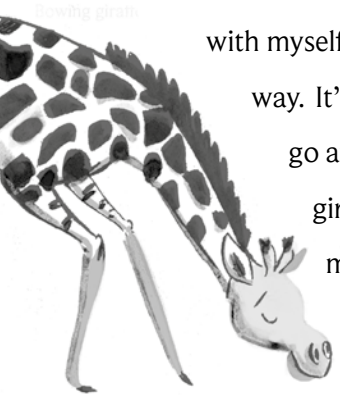
As it turned out, Evie may have been far away from the Home Counties, but she certainly made herself quite at home at Beeches Primary. She quickly turned into the **star student** in our class.

If you could make a model of a perfect student, they would probably look and act like Evie. She's really clever and everything about her is neat and tidy: perfectly ironed

school uniform; two rows of perfectly straight, sparkling teeth; perfectly pouting mouth. Even the cool dark freckles on her warm brown face look like they've been neatly laid out on either side of her nose in a precise and perfect order. She has big brown eyes like **luminous full moons** beneath a lush forest of perfectly fluttering eyelashes. And her dark brown curls seem to bounce perfectly in time with her footsteps as she moves. She always ties her hair neatly away in a ponytail and wears a hairband to stop her curls falling into her eyes. But if I was her, I'd let my curls fly free. They're perfect too.

I know I'm using the word perfect quite a lot here, and I should be using a wider-ranging vocabulary, as Miss Peach would no doubt tell me. But it's true: Evie is practically perfect in every way.

I'm tall and lanky. I'm never quite sure what to do with myself, as my arms and legs keep getting in the way. It's like I've been stretched as far as I can go and never shrunk back again. Elastic-band girl. I get it from my dad. His height would make a **giraffe** bow its neck in adoration.



Evie holds her head high with such confidence. I wished I could do that. Even though my mum always said I should "**stand tall and proud**", I'd often stoop to make myself look a little shorter, just to feel like I was fitting in with everyone else.

And it was easy to sink into the background once Evie joined our school. That became clearer as the days went by.