'Williamson's empathy for young people shines through in the first of the series . . . funny, touching and wise. As good as Jacqueline Wilson at her best.'
The Bookseller

'Heartfelt and funny, this is a story about staying true to yourself, no matter what – and about real friendship.'
Sinead O'Hart, author of *The Time Tider*

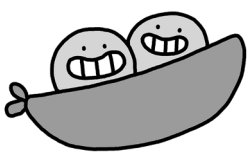
'This warm, true-to-life story will hit the spot with so many readers!'
Karen McCombie, author of *Catching Falling Stars*

'A fresh, funny story filled with feelings around the highs and lows and ins and outs of friendship.'
Jake Hope, *Youth Libraries Group*

'A delight! It's warm and engaging, and perfectly pitched. We are all Lola and we all know a Cleo!'
Abie Longstaff, author

'A warm, funny and bittersweet story of growing up and growing apart. This will resonate with so many young people, especially those leaving primary school. I just loved it.'
Tamsin Winter, author

'Williamson shows a rich insight into the emotional life of a Year 6–7 child going up to secondary school and manages to portray all of the pain and delights of this without making anyone too much of a villain . . . I can't wait to get this into my school library.'
Jenny Jones, librarian, Clifton College



‘A perfect read to show how tricky that timeless, gut-wrenching experience of changing friendships can feel.’
Ros Roberts, author

‘It made me laugh and cringe in equal measures as Lola tries to make sense of the changes in her life. I absolutely loved it. A perfect transitional read!’
Jo Clarke, author of *The Travelling School Mysteries* series

‘Warm, witty and wise, and with stunning illustrations throughout, this is a gem of a book in a fantastic new series from the incomparable Lisa Williamson.’
Kevin Cobane, teacher at The University of Birmingham School

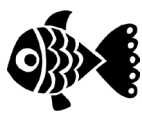


Lisa Williamson

Best Friends Forever



illustrated by
Jess Bradley



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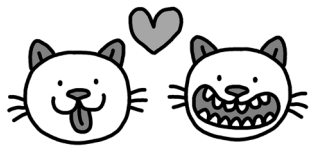
For Triple Jeopardy
LW

For my Jakey B
JB



Chapter One

Some people don't believe me when I tell them that Evie Peng and I have been best friends forever, but it's totally true – I swear on *both* my cats' lives. Our mums met at a mother and baby group at the community centre. According to them, we were obsessed with each other from the very start.

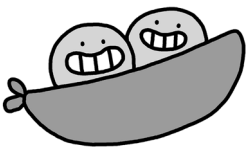


One of my favourite photos is of the two of us when we were babies. Evie is a teeny tiny thing with rosy cheeks and loads of dark, silky hair. Next to her, I look like a proper chunker with my big, bald head and double chins covered in dribble.

These days though, Evie is the bigger one. In the past year, she's shot up loads, and now, when we stand facing each other, she can rest

her chin on the top of my head like it's a shelf.

When we were little, we used to pretend we were sisters, but I'm not sure anyone actually ever believed us. Evie and I might not look all that much alike, but we're the same in lots of other ways – important ways. We finish each other's sentences and laugh at the same stuff, and sometimes, we text each other at the exact same time. Our mums say we're two peas in a pod.



Evie has been in Hong Kong for two weeks visiting her grandparents. The second her plane landed earlier this afternoon, she texted me and asked me to come over.

'Won't she be tired from the long flight?' Mum asked as I put on my trainers.

'Not too tired to see me,' I replied.

'Is that jam on your top?'

I glanced down. There was a red smear on my T-shirt.

'That's not jam, it's blood,' I said, rubbing it with my finger. 'From where I picked my scab.'

Of course, Mum had to make a *huge* thing about it.

'You can't turn up at someone's house covered in blood!' she cried (and *she* calls *me* dramatic).

If I actually thought Evie would be bothered, I'd have gone upstairs and got changed, but I knew she wouldn't. Evie is really neat and tidy (she always makes her bed and folds her pyjamas without being asked), but it never seems to bother her that I'm not.

It usually takes me exactly seven minutes to walk to Evie's house. Today, I was so excited I sprinted the whole way and got there in four minutes flat. I was still panting when Evie's dad opened the door.

'Hello, Lola,' he said.

Before I could gasp out 'hello', Evie came hurtling down the stairs.

'Good grief,' her dad said as we hugged and screamed and jumped around. 'You'd think it had been two years, not two weeks.'

Evie and I ignored him and ran upstairs to her bedroom.

'I missed you *so* much!' I cried, bouncing on her bed. 'I've been bored out my brain all by myself!'

'I missed you too!' Evie replied. 'My cousins are nice and everything, but I'd much rather be hanging out with you.'

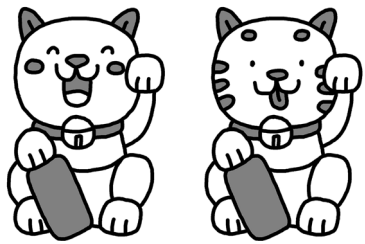
'Well, of course you would!' I said. 'Who wouldn't?'

I struck a pose, making Evie giggle.

'Do you want your presents?' she asked.

I let out a squeal. 'Yes please!'

She'd brought back loads of cool stuff for me – stationery, and KitKats in crazy flavours like yuzu and matcha, and a gold waving fortune cat.



'I got one too,' she said when I took it out of its box. 'They're supposed to bring good luck.'

We gave both our cats names. Evie called hers Jiayi, which means 'lucky one' in Chinese and I called mine 'Lionel' because pets with grumpy old men names always make me laugh.

We spent the entire afternoon catching up. After two weeks apart we had a lot to say to each other and didn't stop yapping until Mum called and told me it was time for dinner.

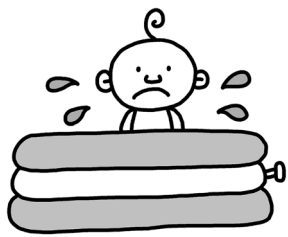
When I got home, a *For Sale* sign had appeared in our front garden.

'Mum!' I called, kicking off my trainers and dashing into the kitchen. 'The sign is up.'

'Brilliant,' Mum said. 'I'd been hoping they'd get round to that.'

Mum and Dad got divorced earlier this year. Dad moved into a little flat of his own while the rest of us (me, Mum and my stinky older brother Matthew) stayed behind. Then a few months ago Mum announced she wanted us to move out too.

The thing is, I don't want a fresh start! I want to stay here, in the house I was born in. I'm not even kidding – nearly twelve years ago, Mum gave birth to me in a paddling pool in the conservatory and there's a really disgusting video to prove it.



Every time I imagine a different family going up and down our stairs, and flushing our loo, and cooking in our kitchen, I get this ache, deep inside my tummy.

'Did Evie have a nice holiday?' Mum asked.

'Uh-huh,' I replied, opening the fridge to see if she'd bought any more chocolate milk (nope). 'Are *we* going to go away on holiday next year?'

'We'll see.'

Humph. I didn't go away this summer. Well, not properly. Now Mum's decided we're moving, she's trying not to spend too much money. We stayed with my boring Auntie Hayley for a week while our house was being painted. It wasn't much of a holiday though. I spent most of it looking after my annoying little cousins who do nothing apart from jump all over me and ask for snacks.

