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G.M. LINTON

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For my godmother, Coral (Honey) Palmer,
and in loving memory of Mr and Mrs Porter and Maria Ogiste

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SUNSHINE SIMPSON

Cooks up a Storm

G.M. LINTON

Illustrated by Fuuji Takashi and Asma Enayeh

USBORNE

Dariuszkz
(aka Daz)

Auntie Sharon

Grandma
Pepper

Granny Cynthie &
Grampie Clive

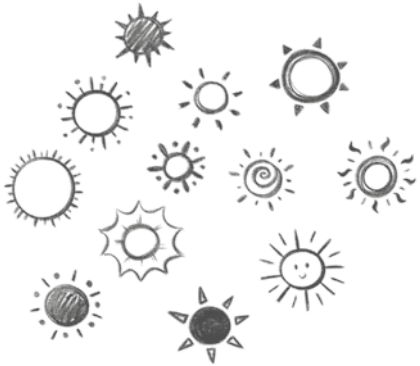
Mum & Dad

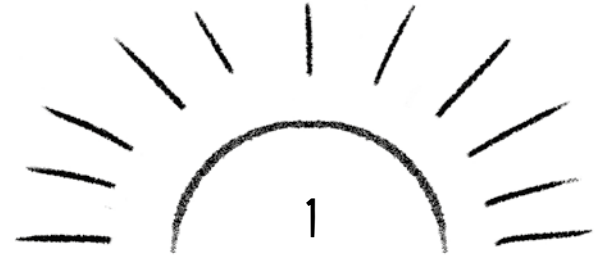
Meet my family – and welcome to my rollercoaster life!

Me (age 6)

Grandad Bobby

The Twinzies (Lena & Peter)





1

ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Have you ever played the **A-to-Z All-Around-the-World** game?

I play it like this…

I go through countries alphabetically, from A to Z, and name their capital cities.

If I'm really testing myself, I try and name a country and capital city that begin with the same letter — like Bridgetown is the capital city of Barbados, Brussels is the capital city of Belgium, and Brasilia is the capital city of Brazil. Maybe it's something about the letter B. If I can't remember what the name of the capital city is, I make up something silly like Bear Central is the capital city of

Bulgaria, or Crocodile Rock is the capital city of Cameroon.

I love learning about new places. Geography is my most favourite subject in the whole world. One day, I'd love to go travelling. From the North Pole to the South Pole and all the way to Timbuktu – I want to go **EVERYWHERE**!

Anyway, before I wander off any further…

I tried to play the A to Z game with my friends Charley, Arun and Evie in the playground one morning, at break a couple of weeks into starting Year Six. It didn't get off to the best start, as we hit a stumbling block at the very first letter.

"Canberra is definitely the capital city of Australia," I said.

"No, it's *definitely* Sydney," Evie told me.

We went back and forth until we eventually checked it out on her phone.

"Well, it should be Sydney," said Evie, in a huff, when she realized *she* was wrong. Evie shook her phone as if willing it to change the answer. Her phone's good, but not that good!

That's the trouble with Evie Evans – she knows it all. One of the things I've grown to ~~love appreciate~~ understand about Evie is that she is bossy. A bossyboots. Bossier than a pair of wellington boots that would be too big even for the giant from Jack and the Beanstalk to wear. I'm just saying.

"I don't really like this game," said Evie. "Can we play something else?"

"At least no one's going to argue about what the capital city of England is," chirped Charley.

"Good one, Charley!" said Arun, equally chirpily. I think Arun and Charley had sensed "a situation" brewing.

Arun and Charley are my absolutely bestest friends in the whole entire world. We always look out for each other, no matter what. Meanwhile, Evie and I had been patching up our friendship ever since we had a falling-out in Year Five. But sometimes, just sometimes, the plaster falls off.

Unless someone thinks the capital of England is Scotland, I thought to myself. (I didn't say it out loud, that would not be a very patchy-up kind-of-thing to say and also a bit rude.)

"Yes, let's just play something else," I said, trying to sound as bright as possible, even though all the fun had been sucked out of my new game.

"Should we talk about 'the elephant in the room', as my mum would say?" said Charley, double shuffling her eyebrows.

I looked around. We weren't in a room, we were in the playground, and there were definitely no elephants. I'd have noticed. But really, I did know **EXACTLY** what Charley meant. In morning assembly, our head teacher, Mrs Honeyghan, had given Year Six a talk about us being the oldest in the school now, and about being responsible, as the younger kids were looking up to us. She also talked about moving on. The thought of moving on made me feel quivery inside.

"High school," whispered Charley, like they were naughty words that needed to be spoken in hushed tones.

"Charley, we only started Year Six like a minute ago. I really don't want to think about high school just now," I said, feeling even more fed up.

"Is that why you've made up this babyish game for us to play, because you're a bit scared?" asked Evie.

"There is nothing babyish about geography, Evie. Geography is literally the **WHOLE** entire world!" I drew a big circle with one of my fingers to prove the point. "And, no, I'm not scared," I snorted.

Evie made a pouty doubting face, which just made me feel even worse.

"Well, Annette and Clodagh say that Year Sevens are initiated – that's high-school speak for being properly accepted – by getting their heads flushed down the disgusting school loos by the older kids," said Charley.

Annette and Clodagh are two of Charley's big sisters. They keep telling her terrifying stories about secondary school and then laughing hysterically once they're done. Charley then shares these horror stories with Arun and me, so that we can be equally terrified. Charley says, "We share everything." Sometimes, I wish we'd share a

little less.

"But my biggest sister, Shannon, says that we shouldn't worry, because although the high-school loos are disgusting, no one will flush our heads down them," said Charley.

This was only ever so slightly comforting.

Arun gulped.

"Don't worry, Arun. Shannon's just graduated from university, so she's very mature and wise. And she knows lots about everything. At least she thinks she does," added Charley.

"No, no, I'm not worried about the loos — much," said Arun. "I just hope my parents let me audition for the School of Music and Dramatic Arts next month. They kind of don't mind me singing and acting now, but they see it as more of a hobby. They want me to concentrate on my 'academics' in high school." Arun yawned as he wrapped his fingers around the word "academics". "Sorry, it just brings out the snooze in me," he said.

"Well, I think 'academics' is very important," snapped Evie. "I've been doing extra tuition since I was five! And I'm definitely sitting the test for grammar school. I'm fully

trained. I'm ready."

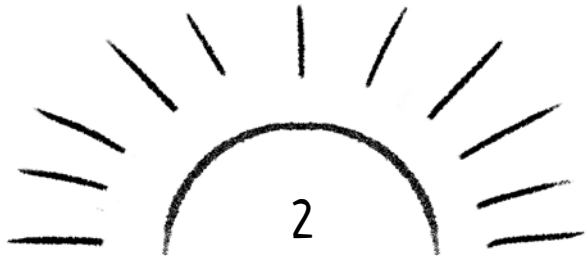
"No one says that academics, or whatever, isn't important, Evie. But can't we just enjoy Year Six while it lasts?" I was starting to get hot and itchy, scratching at my neck. My parents had already been chatting to me about what high school I might like to go to and about "focusing" on my schoolwork in Year Six for the upcoming SATs, but I was in no mood to be talking about this right now at school. "Can we *please* talk about something else for a while?" I muttered.

"Well, yes, now that we're **TOP** of the school, I suppose we can talk about anything we want and do anything we want!" said Evie, getting slightly carried away with herself.

I guess being in the top year of primary school did mean doing things that were very top-of-the-schoolish, but like, what, exactly? We now got to sit on the benches in assembly while all the other school years had to sit on the floor. I suppose that was good. Actually, that was great. But…was that it?

My parents are always telling me, "School days are the best days of your life, Sunny." So why did I feel so strange

about being in Year Six? These weren't feeling like the "best days". My heart felt like it was beating ten times faster anytime anything to do with being in Year Six or going to high school was mentioned. It was as if an actual elephant was strapped to my back, weighing me down, and I couldn't shake it off no matter how hard I tried.



2
NO WORRIES

Now I look back on it, I think Evie was right. I'd taken to playing my geography game as a distraction from all the things that were bugging me, like thinking about high school.

It felt as if there were worry worms in my tummy, tangling themselves into one giant knot. Sometimes, little butterflies excitedly fluttered and danced, too. But the worms were always trying to eat the butterflies.

As I thought it might help, I started writing a list of my worries in a new notebook. You see it on telly, don't you, when people keep a diary and tell it all their secrets? Well, I called my secret book, my **No Worries** book. It's an

"ironic" title because it means the opposite of how I am really feeling. At least I think that's what ironic means. Anyway, I was very pleased with my clever title, especially as it should have put my parents off the scent if they ever found where I'd hidden it (stuffed at the bottom of my wardrobe, underneath a shoebox where I put all my old drawings that I like and want to keep). I really didn't want them to know I was worried. They worried about us all enough already, especially after my Grandad Bobby died in the summer.

I kept my **No Worries** book alongside my **Things and Places of Interest** notebook, where I write down new things and experiences, like if I meet someone from a place I've never heard of. When I first met Evie, at the beginning of Year Five, I wrote down that she'd moved to where I live in the West Midlands from an area in England called the Home Counties, which I'd never

heard of before. Another place to visit when I'm older! My **Things and Places of Interest** book is full of fun notes and plans for the future. My **No Worries** book is not.

These are some of the things I jotted in my **No Worries** book (not in any particular order of worriedness):

1. I'd been at Beeches Primary School since I was five years old. Exactly half of my life. That's a long time! Apart from my family, my classmates and teachers were the people who I saw the most every day. As much as school could get on my nerves, I wasn't sure I was ready to swap it for another, especially high school – or "BIG school" as my parents like to call it. Making high school sound even bigger wasn't helping. This brings me to worry number two.
2. High school was around the corner. Not literally around the corner, I'd need to take a bus. It was just the thought that after this school year, I would be swimming (maybe drowning) in a stormy sea filled with older kids who may or may not want to flush my head down a disgusting high school loo! From **TOP** of the school to the **BOTTOM** of the sea (or toilet).

3. I was dreading having to catch a bus to school. The thought of travelling on a bus without my parents was scary. Suppose I missed my stop and didn't know my way back? The grown-ups in my family spend half of their lives complaining about public transport. How it never turns up on time, is too full, too smelly, too fast, too slow, too noisy, so I didn't want to be driving around on a bus for longer than I had to. The other half of grown-ups' lives is spent complaining about the weather. (I hope I can find something more interesting to talk about when I'm a grown-up.)
4. I desperately wanted a mobile phone, but **MY MOTHER** said I **COULDN'T** have one until **MAYBE "BIG"** school. So now I had to be in a hurry to get to Year Seven, which after suffering the trauma of Charley's flush-your-head-down-a-loo stories, I actually wasn't very much in a hurry to get to.
5. Before I could even get to secondary school, there would be tests. Tests to check how we were doing during the school year and tests for some of the schools we'd be trying to get into. Tests + tests = more tests and **NO FUN**. I can't help but say this: these were testing times.

Don't get me wrong, I know that lots of kids look forward to starting secondary school or high school or big school or whatever you want to call it, but I was starting to realize that I wasn't one of them. Too much had changed in my world already and I just needed change to stop for a bit.

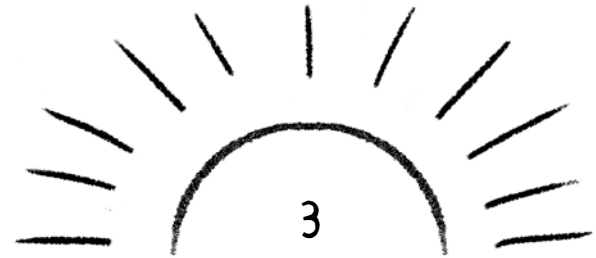
I wanted to go back to a time when my Grandad Bobby was well, when I only worried about smaller things, like what to pack in my lunch box or whether to wear tights or socks to school, instead of worrying about bigger things like what on earth we'd do without Grandad.

And, as for my mum, she'd been starting to behave a little strangely. So quiet and distant. At first, she'd just kept going as usual after we'd lost Grandad, but something about her, lately, seemed different. Mum was quickly becoming my newest worry.

"Worry is a ghost that jumps out at you, shouts 'boo', then won't stop following you. You have to turn round and face it – and shout 'boo' right back in

its face!" Grandad Bobby said that to me once. Whenever I felt scared or worried, he'd wrap me up in one of his great big hugs and say just the right thing to make me feel better. But now Grandad wasn't here to talk to about my worries, I'd have to deal with all of these changes and new things by myself. Without his words and hugs to warm me I was nervous. Actually, scared stiff.

Why did things have to change?



3

TWINKLE FLAKES

I only realized it was the start of October when the air suddenly turned colder and I let out a shiver. To be fair, this sudden drop in temperature could have been caused by two other things:

1. The dripping (I'll explain this in a bit).
2. The chilly atmosphere when I tried to sneak into the kitchen during breakfast. (The sneaking in was also related to the dripping.)

Dad was speaking in a hushed voice to Mum as she was standing at the sink. They'd both been doing this a lot recently. *Whisper, whisper, whisper*. There was something definitely going on that they didn't want to talk about in