

‘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!’

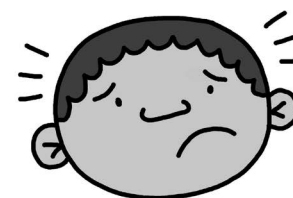
Jo Clarke, author of *The Travelling School Mysteries* series

‘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

Double Drama



illustrated by
Jess Bradley



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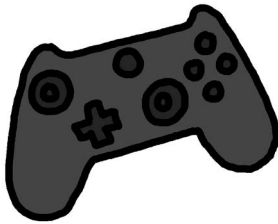
For Winnie.

LW

For John-Paul, just because.

JB

Chapter One



‘You nearly ready, Dan?’ my mate Ollie asked.

‘Almost,’ I said, adjusting my headset so I could hear him properly. ‘Just lining up my refreshments.’

‘What are you having?’

‘Er . . . a bag of Hula Hoops, a jammy Wagon Wheel and a glass of Coke,’ I said, looking at the snacks I’d just laid out on the coffee table.

‘What flavour Hula Hoops?’ Ollie asked.

‘Barbecue.’

‘Solid.’

I grabbed a cushion from the sofa and got comfy on the floor in front of the TV. When I’m gaming, I like to be as close to the screen as possible.

‘Battle mode or Creative?’ Ollie asked.



'Battle.'

'Wanna team up?'

'Definitely,' I replied (Ollie is really good at *Fortnite*).

We were on our third battle and there were just sixteen players left when the door burst open, and my little sister Nia came running in wearing her Princess Tiana dress and a pirate hat.

'Nia! Move!' I shouted as she ran in front of the TV.

'Can't,' she replied. 'I'm hiding from Nelly.'

'But you're supposed to be playing upstairs.'

'Upstairs is boring!'

'Who are you talking to?' Ollie asked.

'No one important,' I muttered, trying to concentrate on the screen. But I could hear Nelly in the hallway counting to twenty.

'Daniel!' Nia said. 'Cover me with this.'

She was standing on the sofa holding up one of Mum's fleecy throws.

'Cover yourself up!' I said. 'I'm busy.'

'Please!' she whined. 'She's nearly finished counting. Please!'

I groaned. 'If I do, do you promise to go play somewhere else afterwards?'

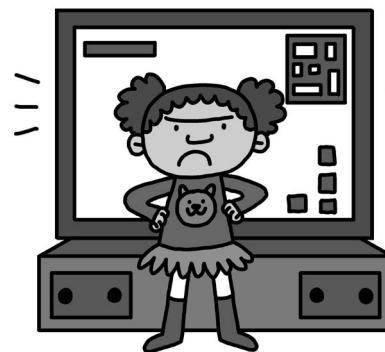
'Promise!'

I told Ollie to give me a second and removed my headset. I covered Nia with the blanket and a load of cushions. Because she's so teeny, you really couldn't tell she was under there.

'Sorry about that,' I said to Ollie as I pulled my headset back on. 'My twin sisters are so annoying.' Ollie is an only child, the lucky thing.

'Coming! Ready or not!' Nelly bellowed. I could hear her crashing about looking. But our house isn't all that big so it didn't take long for her to work out that the only place Nia could be was in the living room.

'Where is she?' Nelly demanded, planting herself slap-bang in front of the TV.



'Nelly, out of the way!' I shouted. 'You're going to get me killed!'

She moved but not before another player had shot me in the back.

I chucked down my controller in frustration.

‘Don’t worry, Dan,’ Ollie said. ‘I’ve got some med-mist – I can revive you.’

That wasn’t the point though – I never would have died in the first place if it weren’t for the twins barging in.

The original plan had been for me to game round at Ollie’s house, but because Dad had to work and Mum was having one of her bad days, I was stuck at home keeping an eye on the Terrible Twins.

I tried to get back into the game, but it was hard to concentrate with Nelly prowling about behind me.

Finally, Nelly figured out Nia’s hiding place, tearing off the blanket. Nia sprang up, roaring like a lion and sending the cushions flying. Nelly started shrieking and within seconds they were chasing each other around the room, screeching their heads off and running back and forth in front of the TV.

‘Get out of the way!’ I shouted.

But it was too late – I’d been massacred with a bow and arrow.

Angrily, I yanked off my headset and jumped to my feet, banging my knee on the corner of the coffee table. The entire table wobbled, including the almost full glass of Coke. Frozen in horror, all I could do was watch as it toppled, the contents gushing out of the glass . . .

. . . and straight onto my Xbox.

There was a weird fizzing noise. I grabbed my controller, frantically pressing the buttons. For a few seconds, it seemed like everything was still working, but then the screen went all stripy.

I held my breath as I turned the console off and on again.

Please, I chanted as I waited for it to fire up again. *Please, please, please.*

Nothing happened. I stabbed at the buttons some more. *Still* nothing.

My Xbox – my favourite thing in the entire world – was broken.

And it was *all* the twins’ fault.



Nia and Nelly must have called Dad because twenty minutes later he burst through the front door.

I was in the downstairs loo (the only room in the house with a door that actually locks) and the twins were sitting on the stairs, crying their eyes out which made zero sense seeing as I was the one with the fried Xbox, not them.

‘Daniel!’ Dad hollered. ‘Daniel!’

I stayed where I was, balled up on the toilet seat.

I heard Nelly tell Dad where I was. Within seconds he was on the other side of the door, hammering on it with his fist.

‘Daniel Benjamin Littleton, come out here this instant!’

‘No!’ I shouted, burying my face in my knees.

‘I’m going to count down from ten. If you haven’t come out by zero, that’s it, you can forget going to Ollie’s tomorrow. Ten, nine, eight . . .’

I *really* didn’t want to miss spending the day at Ollie’s house.

‘Seven, six, five . . .’

I slid off the toilet seat and peered at my reflection in the mirror. My eyes were all puffy and my cheeks were blotchy and stained with tears.

‘I mean it, Daniel! Four, three, two . . .’



I wiped my face with the heels of my hands and opened the door.

Dad was standing with his arms folded across his chest.

‘What the hell is going on?’ he bellowed.

‘It’s them!’ I yelled, pointing at the twins who were peeping out from behind his legs. ‘They broke my Xbox!’

‘No, we didn’t!’ Nia cried. ‘*You* did!’

‘And then he said a bad word!’ Nelly chimed in.

‘*Three* bad words!’ Nia added.

‘You little snitches,’ I cried, lunging towards them.

Dad blocked my way.

‘Don’t you dare,’ he said. ‘You’re in quite enough trouble as it is. Girls, go to your room.’

‘But I’m hungry!’ Nia whined.

‘I don’t care. I need to talk to your brother.’

The twins pouted but did as they were told.

Dad waited until they were all the way upstairs before turning to face me. ‘What the hell were you playing at?’ he demanded. ‘I had to tell work it was an emergency!’

‘I didn’t ask the twins to call you.’

‘You can’t just lose it with them like that,’ Dad snapped. ‘I don’t care how angry you are. And you *know* how I feel about swearing.’

I once made the mistake of swearing at Dad. I’ve never seen him get so angry. He shouted at me for about ten minutes straight then took my Xbox controller off me for two weeks.

‘But it’s broken,’ I said, fresh tears rolling down my cheeks.

Dad sighed. ‘Not necessarily, it might just need drying out.’ His voice was a bit calmer now.

‘Mike? Is that you?’

Mum’s voice floated down the stairs. She sounded sleepy, like she’d just woken up.

‘Yes, love,’ Dad called back.

‘Is everything OK? I thought I heard shouting.’

‘It’s fine. You go back to bed; I’ll be up in a bit.’

The floorboards above us creaked as Mum shuffled back to the bedroom.

‘Now,’ Dad said, turning back to me. ‘How about you tell me what happened?’

‘What’s the point?’ I muttered, fiddling with the towel rail. ‘You’re only going to take Nia and Nelly’s side, the same way you always do.’

Dad frowned. ‘That’s not true.’

‘Yes, it is. They get away with everything.’

‘Daniel, they’re five.’

‘I don’t care. I wish they’d never been born.’

‘You don’t mean that.’

I looked him right in the eye. ‘Oh yes I do.’



I didn’t always feel this way about the twins. When I was little, I wanted a younger brother or sister more than anything else in the world, so when Mum and Dad first sat me down and told me that Mum wasn’t having one baby, but two, I couldn’t quite believe my luck.

The next day I told my teacher and everyone in my class that I was going to be a big brother



to twins. And then at lunchtime, I told the dinner ladies, and Mr Keen the caretaker. And then on the way home, I told the lollipop man, and a random old lady who was watering her flowerbeds. I was so proud I thought I might burst.

The rounder Mum's belly became, the more excited I got.

The twins finally arrived on a snowy day in February. That night I lay in bed unable to sleep because I was too busy imagining all the fun we were going to have together.

Then the twins came home, and it wasn't fun at all.

It was noisy and smelly and boring.

All they did was sleep and poo and scream their heads off.

And all Mum did was feed them and bath them and try to get them to stop crying. And in the gaps, the only thing she seemed to want to do was sleep.

'All new mums are tired,' Dad explained whenever Mum was too exhausted to read me a

bedtime story or take me to the swings, like she used to before the twins were born. 'Be patient. She'll be back to her old self soon.'

Well, that was five years ago now and I'm still waiting.



Chapter Two

Back in September, Ollie Marsden and I sat next to each other in French on our first ever day at Henry Bigg Academy. I introduced myself with a joke ('Why do French people eat snails? Because they don't like fast food!'); he laughed, and we've been mates ever since.

Ollie is the coolest. He has hair like John Stones, and the latest iPhone, and a different pair of Nikes for every day of the week. Today was the first time I'd ever been to his house and I was excited.

Dad dropped me off after breakfast.

'Someone's doing all right for themselves,' he murmured, as we pulled up outside a big sprawling house at least four times the size of our tiny terrace. 'Are you sure this is right?'



I looked at the bit of paper I'd scribbled Ollie's address on, then checked the number on the shiny red door.



'Yep, this is definitely it,' I said, undoing my seatbelt and opening the door. 'See you later!'

I ran up the driveway without looking back and rang the doorbell.

Inside, Ollie's house was even nicer than it looked on the outside. It had two living rooms, a posh one that was just for show, and a comfy one with two huge squishy sofas and the biggest flatscreen TV I'd ever seen in real life, a massive fridge full of cans of Coke, and an entire drawer stuffed with crisps and sweets and chocolate bars.

'Take what you want,' Ollie said.

I didn't need telling twice, helping myself to a bag of pickled onion Monster Munch, a Toffee



Crisp and a packet of Skittles.

'Where is everyone?' I asked as we headed through the empty house up to Ollie's bedroom.

'My mum's gone out for the day and my stepdad's at work. Do you want to play *Grand Theft Auto*?'

'Yeah!'

I didn't have *Grand Theft Auto* at home. Dad says it's way too violent, but Ollie's mum let him play anything he liked.

Ollie was really sympathetic when I told him about my broken Xbox.

'Have you tried drying it out?' he asked.

'Yeah. I left it under the radiator all night, but it didn't do any good. It won't even turn on.'

'My cousin's been on about selling his old one. Do you want me to find out how much he wants for it?'

'Yes, please,' I said eagerly.

Ollie reached for his phone and typed out a message. He got a reply almost straight away.

'He could give it you for two,' he said.

My heart leaped. 'Two pounds?'

Ollie laughed. 'No, you dope. Two hundred.'

'Duh, I knew that,' I said, pretending to laugh too. 'I was just joking.'

'So, do you want it or not?'

'I'll have to check,' I said, even though I knew for a fact that my piggy bank was empty.



I asked Ollie if I could use his toilet because I'd drunk two cans of Coke and was bursting. The bathroom, like everything else in Ollie's house, was absolutely massive with a separate shower and bathtub, and this thing that looks like a toilet crossed with a sink which I think might be for washing your bum in.

When I came out, I noticed the door opposite was ajar. I stuck my head inside to discover a similar-sized bedroom to Ollie's. The walls were plastered with posters of cars and footballers and tanned girls in bikinis. On the rumpled duvet, I spotted a TV remote and an Xbox controller.

'Who has the room opposite the bathroom?' I asked when I got back to Ollie's room.

'What were you doing in there?' he demanded (he seemed really cross for some reason). 'You didn't touch anything, did you?'

'Course not.'

'You'd better not have.'

'Why? Whose room is it?'

'My stepbrother's,' Ollie muttered, passing me a controller.

'Where is he?'

'At his mum's.'

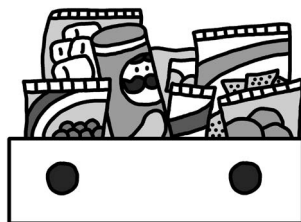
'How often does he come here?'

'Not very,' Ollie said, looking annoyed. 'Look, are we playing this or not?'

'Playing,' I replied quickly. 'Definitely playing.'

Luckily, Ollie's grump didn't last long, and the rest of the day was great. At lunchtime, Ollie logged into his mum's Deliveroo account and ordered Domino's, and in the afternoon, we played *Call of Duty* (another game I'm not allowed at home), and took turns taking penalties in the massive back garden, and raided the treat drawer again, *and* shared an entire tub of cookie dough ice cream. By the time Dad called to say he was coming to pick me up, my stomach was gurgling and groaning.

'Do you wanna come round tomorrow?' Ollie asked, as I put on my trainers.



I badly wanted to say yes, but I was going to be stuck at home watching the twins. When I told Ollie this, he pulled a face.

'Again?'

'My dad's got to work.'

'What about your mum? Can't she look after them?'

'She's . . . she's not very well at the moment.'

'Your grandparents then?'

'They're not around.'

My mum's parents live in Scotland in this tiny village in the middle of nowhere. Dad's mum died when he was a kid and he hasn't spoken to his dad in years and years.

'Your dad should pay you,' Ollie said.

I laughed before realising he was being serious.

'Why not?' he asked. 'My mum pays me to clean my room.'

'Does she?'

'Yeah. A tenner a go. Fifteen if I vacuum too.'

'How often do you do it?' I asked.

'When I can be bothered,' Ollie replied with a shrug.

I stared at him open-mouthed. If I knew I could get fifteen quid for tidying my room, Dad wouldn't have to bug me to do it ever again!

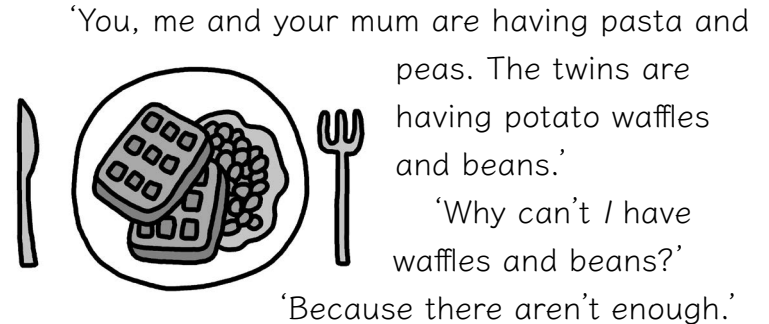
After spending the day at Ollie's, our house felt even pokier than usual.

The twins were watching *Encanto* in the living room for about the millionth time so I headed straight upstairs. I popped my head in to see if Mum wanted a cup of tea or anything, but she was fast asleep. I gently pulled the door shut and went to my room.

I used to have the second biggest bedroom in the house, but when the twins were born, I got moved to the box room. It's teeny. All I've got space for is a single bed, a chest of drawers and the world's tiniest wardrobe.

With no Xbox to play on, I quickly got bored and headed back downstairs to see what we were having for dinner. My tummy ache from earlier had worn off and I was feeling hungry again.

'What are you making?' I asked Dad. There were a couple of saucepans on the hob.



'But we had pasta and peas yesterday.'

'I'm aware of that, Daniel.'

'But we *always* have pasta and peas.'

Dad turned around and glared at me.

'You'll get what you're given,' he snapped.

'Now, can you set the table, please?'

I wanted to argue but I knew Dad would only get even more stressed out if I did.

'Ollie's having Chinese tonight,' I said grumpily, as I yanked open the wonky cutlery drawer and grabbed a fistful of knives.

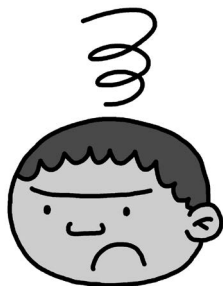
'Good for Ollie,' Dad muttered, stirring the twins' baked beans.

'He gets paid to do chores too,' I said.

'Does he now?'

'Yep. He gets fifteen quid for tidying and vacuuming his room.'

I hadn't a clue why, but that made Dad roar with laughter for the first time in what felt like forever.



Chapter Three

On Monday, I went back to school. After a week stuck at home with the terrible twins, I actually couldn't wait.

While Dad was busy getting the twins ready, I made some toast and a cup of tea for Mum.

'What would I do without you?' she said as I placed them carefully down on her bedside table.

Mum has a condition called CFS, which stands for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. It means she feels tired almost all the time, even after a really good night's sleep. It's not just about feeling tired though. Often Mum struggles to concentrate, or forgets names and numbers and certain words, or takes forever to get a sentence out. When this happens, she apologises for her 'foggy brain' and I can't help but picture her head full of a thick grey swirling mist.