

‘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



Lisa Williamson

Best 
Friends
Forever



illustrated by
Jess Bradley



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For Triple Jeopardy

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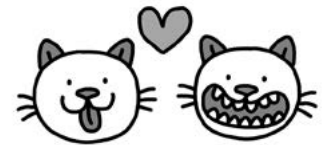
For my Jakey B

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.'

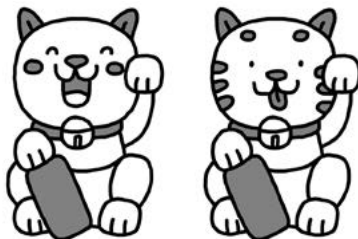
'Well, of course you would!' I said. 'Who wouldn't?'

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.

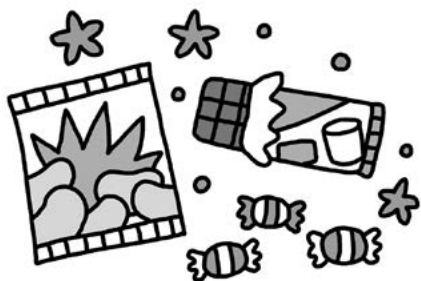
'Did Evie have a nice holiday?' Mum asked.

'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.



Chapter Two

Two days later, Evie and I went into town to buy some new stationery for school. In just under a week, we'd be starting Year Seven at Henry Bigg Academy.

'I keep dreaming about our first day at school,' Evie said as we walked into Finders Keepers, a really cute stationery and gift shop on the high street and one of our favourite places in the entire world.

'Are they good dreams or bad dreams?' I asked, shaking a snow globe as hard as I could.

'Bad. In the one I had last night, I turned up wearing nothing but a giant-sized school tie. I tried to wrap it around me, but it kept slipping down.'



'I haven't had any dreams,' I said, putting the snow globe down and watching the glitter fall. 'But every time I imagine our first day, I get this sick feeling in my belly, like I might throw up any second.'

'I know exactly the feeling you mean,' Evie said, linking her arm through mine. 'If only we were in the same tutor group, Lola; I wouldn't be half as nervous then.'

For the very first time ever, Evie and I were going to be in different classes. When they made the announcement at the end of last term, we both spent days crying our eyes out. We begged our parents to ring up the school and ask them to put us in a class together. Mum was a proper meanie and refused.

'It will be good for you to meet some new people,' she said.

I was so cross I didn't speak to her for three whole days. Evie's dad at least tried, but when he spoke to the school, they told him that there was nothing they could do.

Evie and I have made a vow to eat lunch together every single day no matter what. It



won't be the same, but we figure it's better than nothing.

We took ages picking out pencil cases. In the end, I went for one with cats on it. I assumed Evie would pick the same one because she's even more cat-mad than me (she's literally obsessed with my cats Twiglet and Tizzy), but she went for a pink leopard print design instead.

We were about to join the queue to pay for them when I spotted a really cute pen with a tiny rubber koala clinging to the top.

'Let's both get one!' I said.

Evie looked at it and chewed her lip.

'What's wrong?' I asked.

'Nothing . . . I just wonder whether it's a bit . . . babyish. You know, for secondary school.'

'It's only a pen,' I pointed out.

And anyway, who cared what people thought?

'I know,' Evie said quickly. 'We don't want to look like babies though, do we?'



'I suppose not.'

I gave the pen one last look before putting it back on the display. I thought it was cute.

'Oh, guess what?' Evie said, once we'd paid. 'The house two doors down from mine is for sale. You should buy it!'

What a brilliant idea! I hated the idea of moving house, but I loved the thought of being closer to Evie.

I told Mum about it the second she picked us up.

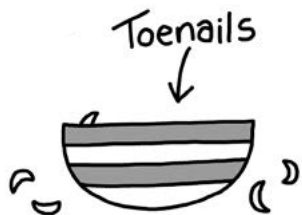
'Oh, sweetheart,' she said. 'I'll have a look but I'm pretty sure it's going to be out of our budget.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, when we sell the house, Dad and I will halve the proceeds so we can each buy something of our own. We're probably going to have to move somewhere quite a bit smaller than where we are now.'

'How much smaller?' I asked, panic swooshing around my body. 'Will I still have my own room?'

I'd rather eat my own toenails than share a bedroom with Matthew full-time.



'Yes,' Mum said. 'But you need to be prepared for the fact that it might not be quite as big as your room here.'

'We'll still be able to walk to school together, won't we?' Evie said, looking worried.

'Oh, I expect so,' Mum said. 'We're not planning on going far.'

'Good,' Evie and I said in unison.

Being in different classes was quite bad enough.

Back at my house, Evie and I made butterfly cakes and played with Twiglet (Tizzy was hiding) and watched TV. When it was time for bed, we got changed into our pyjamas and brushed our teeth side by side, pulling the ugliest faces we could in the mirror.



After that, we went to my bedroom and played one of our favourite games – *Would You Rather?*

Evie went first.

'OK,' she said. 'Would you rather get married to a zombie or give birth to a zombie?'

'Easy! Get married to a zombie,' I declared.

'But then you'd have to kiss it!'

'Not necessarily.'

'What about "you may now kiss the bride"?''

'It's a suggestion, not an order. And anyway, I could always divorce the zombie straight afterwards. If I'm the zombie's mum, I'm stuck with it for life.'

'It might be cute.'

I pulled a face. I'm not mad about normal human babies, never mind zombie ones.

'OK, fine,' Evie said.

'Answer accepted. Your turn.'

'OK,' I said, rubbing my hands together. 'Would you rather eat dog food for the rest of your life, or cat food?'

'Ew! Neither!'

'Oh, come on, you know the rules, you *have* to pick one.'

'Why are your questions always so disgusting though?'



'Because it's more fun that way! Come on, pick one: dog food or cat food?'



'I told you, neither!'

'Evie!' I said in a warning voice. 'You know what happens if you don't answer.'

I began to wiggle my fingers. Evie (who is probably the most ticklish person I have ever met) let out a squeal.

'OK, OK!' she cried, scrambling out of arm's reach. 'Dog food!'

'Evie loves dog food, Evie loves dog food!' I chanted.

She grabbed a pillow and chucked it at my head.

I chucked it right back and before we knew it, we were having a full-on pillow fight.

It was cut short by Mum banging on the wall and telling us to go to sleep.

Giggling, Evie and I turned off the light and climbed into bed – me with my head at one end, and Evie with her head at the other (luckily, neither of us have stinky feet).

'Do you think we'll still have sleepovers when

we're grown-ups?' Evie asked as we wriggled about trying to get all nice and comfy under the duvet.

'Of course,' I replied.

'Even when we've got kids and stuff?'

'Sure. Why not?'

'My mum doesn't have sleepovers with any of *her* friends.'

'Well, we'll be different,' I said.

'Right . . .' Evie sounded uncertain though.

I switched on the lamp and sat up. 'How about we make a promise,' I said, 'that we'll always be best friends, no matter what.'

Evie sat up to face me. 'OK,' she said.

'Best friends forever?' I asked, holding out my littlest finger.

Evie hooked her pinkie with mine.

'Best friends forever,' she echoed.



Chapter Three

The night before we started school, Mum sent me up to bed almost straight after dinner.

'But it only just got dark,' I moaned.

'That doesn't matter,' she replied, practically shooing me up the stairs. 'Tomorrow is a big day, and you need to be well rested.'

Well, it was a total waste of time because two whole hours after Mum tucked me in, I was still wide awake. I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to relax all the muscles in my body and make lists in my head – all the usual stuff I did when I couldn't get to sleep – but it was no good; no matter what I did, my brain just wouldn't shut off – all I could think about was school tomorrow.

