





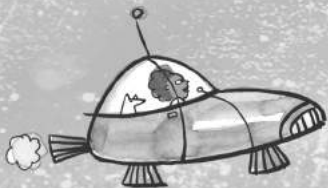


A MOON GIRL STOLE *my* FRIEND

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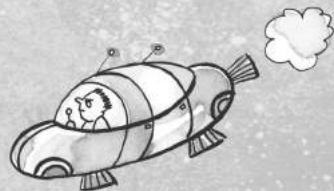
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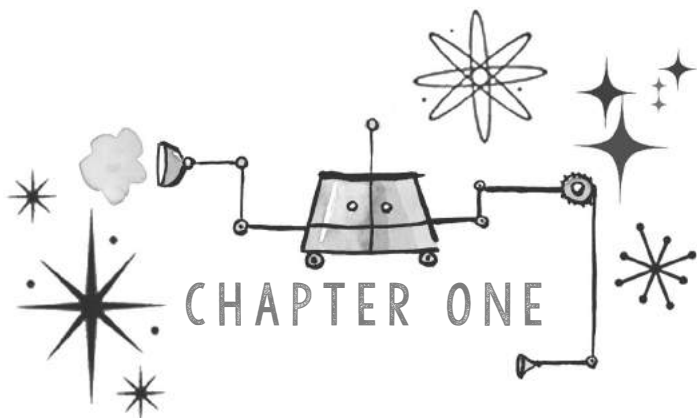
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For the children at
Mayfield Primary School





Bianca had been planning her birthday since June. At a sleepover at mine in the summer holidays, we were floating about my room on the Float 'n' Sleeps and eating jellyfish crispies and I jumped from my Float 'n' Sleep onto hers and threatened to tip us both off if she didn't tell me every detail.

'You have to tell me! We're practically sisters!'

'Lyla! You're making me drop crispies everywhere!' She was giggling like mad and trying to keep her float steady. 'Stop it! We're crashing into the wall! I'm sliding off!' She was grabbing my leg now as I made her Float 'n' Sleep tip. 'Obviously I'll tell you! Just get back on your own float!'

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I jumped back.

Bianca brushed crumbs off her knees. 'So . . . my granny said I can have the party at hers! You know she's got a pool. It's a pool party!'

'Oh! I love your granny!' I said. 'And I love her house!'

Bianca spun her Float 'n' Sleep around in the air with excitement. 'Also! Granny's going to make sure the concierge guy sets the weather to sunny and hot in the dome!'

Bianca's granny lives in the Havendome in the Outer Sector. It's a gated community. Quiet and super classy! I've been round a few times; Bianca's granny is an elegant old woman. Once she gave me and Bianca loads of her old perfume and we just poured it all over our heads and stank for weeks. No one would sit near us, but we didn't care – we called ourselves the Stink Sisters. That was when we were in Year Three.

Bianca lay down on her floating bed and looked up at my star-covered ceiling. 'But Granny said I really have to limit the numbers. Just invite my very best friends. She said the neighbours don't want to hear too many shrieking girls. Granny says it's six girls tops, so that's

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four friends plus you and me. But you know what some girls in our class are like if they're not invited to a party. We have to keep this party really, really quiet until I give out the actual invites.'



I had been so excited about the party I had bought Bianca's birthday presents early, just after we all went back to school in September. Really good presents! I got her a packet of Crazee stickers, the walking penguin ones.

You stick them on a wall and the second they're stuck they start walking about all over the place, like a cartoon. You never know where they'll get to. My mum doesn't let me have them as she doesn't want them wandering about and looking tacky on our walls.





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I also got Bianca those flying sweets! The blackcurrant Jelly Gum Bats that you suck, and then open your mouth and they fly out! Mum doesn't let me have them either because they make a sticky mess on the ceiling. But I knew Bianca would be really pleased because we've been talking about getting some since the last sleepover at hers when we saw the advert.



I'd put the presents in the little hatch above my sleeping pod so I could admire them from my bed. They've been there almost three weeks now.



Gus stomped into my room. He's only six, little, so I don't know how he stomps so loud. He clambered right up onto my sleeping pod and said, 'Lyla! You didn't charge Sparks. He's not purring! He's just lying on the floor like he's DEAD!' Then he climbed over me as I lay there, walking up my back like I was a small mountain range.



'Get off, Gus! I'm asleep!'

'No. You're talking. It's Tuesday, school!'

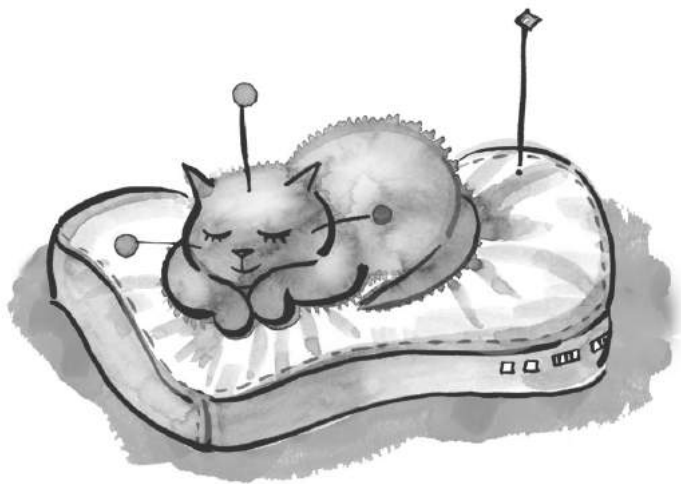
Get up and fix Sparks! Why didn't you charge him?'



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'I forgot,' I said, following Gus out of my room to find Sparks.

Sparks is our little cyborg cat. Sparks wakes up when you clap your hands and goes to sleep when you say: 'Bedtime, Sparks!' He's cute and small; he fits into your hand. But you have to let him charge up for about sixteen hours a day. It's my job to put him on his charging cushion at night so he's ready for the next day.



Gus used to fly Sparks around the kitchen in his Mars Mission toys. All Sparks's Mars Missions have been banned by Mum since Gus crashed Sparks into her omelette.

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Another thing that Mum has banned is that aquagro cereal, Choccy Boom Blast – the kind where you put a drop of water onto a speck of cereal stuff and it swells up and fills the bowl with cereal and milk. Gus can't be trusted with it. He used to put way too much in his bowl, and then when he added the water he got a pile of cereal as big as him.

Anyway, we're always running late so we usually just grab a Vita-tab.

I chewed my Vita-tab and tried to get my stupid hair to stay flat. I always get this sprouty-up bit. I was squashing it down with gel when Mum yelled, 'Lyla, come on! Launch pad NOW! I have to be in Eastern Central Zone for a meeting at nine!'

I patted my hair as flat as I could, glanced at those perfect presents for Bianca, then ran up to the launch pad to join Mum and Gus in the skycar.

'Shove over, Gussy!' I said.

'Don't call me that, tufty head!'

'Well, shove up anyway!' I said, putting my hand over the sprouty bit of hair and keeping it there all the way to school to keep it flat.

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Our skycar is so old it doesn't even have a transparent floor. That means we can't see directly below us, and one of the back jets is faulty too, so me and Gus always have to shove up together on the right side of the back seat to get it balanced when we fly. Mum hates doing a vertical takeoff; she always makes us check the airspace, saying, 'Is there anything above me? Look up, kids, anything coming over?'

'Nothing above me! All clear,' I said.

Mum fired up the jets and off we went, our skycar taking its place in the long line of traffic up in the Fly Zone.

'Bianca's having her party soon! She's giving out the invites today!' I said, looking out across the city and clouds. 'What should I wear? I wish my hair was long enough to do a bun!'

'It's a girls' party, Lyla, so it will be terrible,' said Gus. 'My best friend, Evan, he had Mr Dinosaur at his birthday and Mr Dinosaur makes a real, live, massive Triceratops from a bit of DNA! Right in front of you! He did it in Evan's front room but his mum wants a refund because the Triceratops did a bit of dinosaur wee on their carpet.'

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Bianca should definitely get Mr Dinosaur.'

Mum began bringing the skycar down onto the school launch pad. I could see Bianca below, already making her way to the Year Six portals.

'Right,' said Mum. 'We're here. Out, you two! See you later! Jump!'

Mum hates firing up the jets for takeoff, so she always makes us jump down while she hovers a little bit above the ground. We're used to it. Gus did his commando army roll when he landed and we both dashed down the launch-pad steps to the playground.



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Gus ran off to the Infant Zone and I ran to catch up with Bianca. ‘Hi! Did you give out the invitations yet?’

Bianca was shoving her coat into the suction hatch in the coatpod. ‘Um . . . no . . . not yet,’ she said, not quite looking at me. ‘Lyla . . . I need to explain something. I’ve had to make the party a bit . . . different.’ She just carried on squishing her coat into the hatch.

‘Different? How?’ I asked.

‘Let me just hand out some invites and then I’ll explain.’

Bianca opened her hand and there, right in the middle of her palm, was a print of a pink flower. It’s the latest thing: instead of sending out the invitations electronically, the new craze is this – you get invites stored in your palm, and if you high-five a friend or shake their hand, the details of the party show up on their hand. It’s supposed to ‘promote a sense of closeness and wellbeing’.

‘Ooh, Palmprintz! Having a party, Bianca?’ said Mercedes, peering into Bianca’s hand. ‘I’m guessing the fabulous Mercedes Bonnay is on your hot party guest list?’

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'You are!' said Bianca, giving her a high-five.

'And I take it you're inviting me too?' said Amia, doing her sassy little head flick.

'Sure,' said Bianca, shaking Amia's hand.

Mercedes looked into her palm. 'Wait! Does it wash off?'

'It fades,' said Bianca briskly, high-fiving Franka and Felicity.

Amia was gazing at her printed palm. 'I love the way the writing has come out glittery on our hands!'

'That's it! All done!' said Bianca, brushing hair off her face.

I held my palm out to her. 'Whoa, you forgot mine!'

She looked awkward. 'I didn't forget, Lyla, it's just... you know... I can't have just anybody this year.'



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‘How am I “just anybody”?!’ I said. ‘You’ve been talking to me about this party for weeks!’

‘I know!’ she said, walking towards the classroom portal. ‘I thought you’d understand. I had to invite Mercedes and Amia, you know what they’re like. Every girl in the class has been hassling me for an invite! I’m sorry, Lyla, I’ll explain later.’

‘What?’ I said, but she was walking in front of me so I was talking to her back. ‘Explain what?’

But she couldn’t explain then as Mr Caldwell said, ‘Less talking and more walking!’

Once we sat down in the class hub I said softly, ‘So you invited four people, but you said you could invite five!’

Bianca looked ahead and mumbled, ‘I’m sorry. I didn’t want to upset you . . .’ Then she turned round in her seat because someone was poking her in the back.

It was Petra Lumen!

Petra Lumen, whispering, ‘Bianca, this will be my first Earth party!’ and doing a tiny wave at Bianca, her palm all glittery with the invitation.



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I looked at Bianca and hissed, 'You invited Petra instead of me?! She's only been here five minutes!'

'Three weeks and a day, actually,' muttered Bianca. 'She's new and I thought she might be lonely!'



Petra Lumen is NOT lonely! From the second she stepped into our class with her long, glossy Moon Colony hair she was invited to three sleepovers. Franka and Felicity have given her two tours around the Central Zone and the Trading Hub on two Saturdays in a row, and Amia has taken her to the Alpine Ski Sensadrome. James Defries is going to almost definitely ask her to the end-of-school disco too – even though that's not till June! He's been wearing the moonshades he got from his holiday last year every single day, even if it's rainy, just to look extra cool and impress her. She's always chatting to someone, swishing her hair about and laughing.

'Bianca, Petra is the opposite of lonely!' I said. 'She's the most popular person in our class since ever!'

'But that's not how she feels inside,' said Bianca.

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I rolled my eyes.

Bianca looked at me hard, especially at my sprouty hair. 'OK, I wasn't going to even mention this, but Petra is surprised you and I are even friends. She said I was one of the few girls she could actually talk to here. But she said you seemed a little bit—'

'Enough talking, class!' said Mr Caldwell. 'Learning interfaces up, please!'



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‘What?’ I whispered. ‘A bit what?’

‘Well . . . she said a lot of things about you,’ muttered Bianca, looking straight ahead.

‘When?’

‘When I went to her house.’

‘I didn’t know you’d been to her house!’

‘Well, why would you? We’ve not been close lately,’ whispered Bianca, shrugging her shoulders a little.

‘So I’m not invited, but she is?!’ I said to the side of her face.

She turned her head and looked straight at me. ‘Not everyone gets invited to every party, Lyla. We’re not in Reception!’

Then Mr Caldwell said, ‘Lyla! I’ve been watching you distract Bianca since you came in. Petra, could you swap places with Lyla? Thank you!’

As Petra and I pushed past each other between the desks Petra gave me a mean little jab with her elbow. And it wasn’t a mistake.





Petra Lumen had arrived in the middle of a ‘First Settlers of Mars’ history lesson just over three weeks ago.

Miss Fritz, our really ancient cyborg receptionist and playground supervisor, brought her in. Miss Fritz is almost thirty years old and all her wires are starting to poke out. She has very slow word recall too, so when she came in with this new girl, Petra, she said, ‘Hello, Mr Cald. Well. Here is the new. Stude.’



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And loud boy Louis got told off for saying, 'A stude, Miss Fritz? Sounds like a vegetable!'

Miss Fritz blinked her big glassy eyes and carried on in her robotty voice, 'Stude . . . Stud. Ent. She is called . . . Petra Lu . . . men.'

'Thank you, Miss Fritz! Hello, Petra!' said Mr Caldwell, standing up to shake Petra's hand, like she was a grown-up. 'Class, let's give Petra Lumen our best Lime Grove Edu Hub welcome!'

So we all mumbled, 'Hello, Petra.' Felicity and Franka were so over-excited they waved madly to Petra from their desks.

Mr Caldwell grew up on the Moon and said it was wonderful to meet a fellow 'Moonite'. He said he hadn't been back to the Moon Colonies for years. 'It was all pretty grim and primitive back then,' he said, 'but I think it's all got a bit more exciting these days!'

'Oh, yeah! It is kind of flashy up there now!' said Petra in her smooth, Moon Colony accent. 'I've lived in Catena Yuri all my life; my mum's a mineral scientist and my dad's in ore export. We relocated to Earth for the schools.'

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I don't know why anyone would relocate from the swanky Moon Colonies to send their child to Lime Grove Edu Hub with Mr Caldwell droning on about the history of Mars and Louis shouting out every five seconds, but Petra Lumen explained that her parents thought the Moon Colony schools were way too competitive.

Mr Caldwell said, 'Well, yes, we are a very friendly school!'

I remember Bianca whispered to me, 'She's so cool!' and she shoved our seats apart and asked Mr Caldwell if Petra could sit between us.

'Well, it's probably best if Petra takes that space behind you two,' he said. 'But how about you and Lyla show Petra around today – you can be her guides!'

And Bianca turned and smiled at me like we'd won a prize.



In the breaks that first day, Petra was surrounded by everyone, asking her how she got her hair so shiny and was it true everyone on the Moon lived in massive

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mansions? Even Louis, who never really talks to girls, was there, standing up on the little wall at the back and saying his uncle had worked in the Moon mines and did Petra know his uncle? She smiled at him and said, 'Well, no, the Moon is kind of . . . you know . . . big! I don't know everyone!' They all laughed like this was the best joke they'd ever heard.



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At lunch we sat as a three with Petra between me and Bianca. It was mostly Petra and Bianca doing the talking. I just ate my noodles and caterfilla and listened to them discussing how they were both only children, and Petra was saying that probably made them way more outgoing and sociable than people with siblings. Bianca looked my way and said, 'Well, I'm mega sociable! But Lyla has a little brother. And I think you are a bit less outgoing than me, Lyla. You find it harder to make new friends, don't you?'

'Maybe,' I said, and walked off to spend a long time putting my rubbish into the degrader tubes.



Anyway, at the end of the not-getting-an-invitation-to-Bianca's-party day, Bianca came up to me in the coatpod. Petra was standing just behind us, putting on her silky Moon-girl coat thing.

Bianca came close to me and said, 'Lyla, we're still friends? Yeah?'

I pulled my coat out of my suction hatch and sighed, 'It's OK. It's your party. It's totally OK.'

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But it *wasn't* totally OK. Bianca and I had been best friends for almost seven years. That's longer than my little brother has been alive!

'My dad's waiting on the launch pad!' said Petra. 'Come on, Bibi!'

Bibi! When was Bianca ever called Bibi?! Never! And I should know because I met Bianca on day one, in Nursery, and we were best friends. We just got on straight away, and we said we were the Magic Princess Twins because our hair was the same length then.



One of the best things about Bianca is that she can add really good stuff to any game. In Year One she made up this game called 'Get the Bogwitch!'

It was a really dark, windy winter playtime and we were playing a game with twigs by the real bushes and the perimeter fence. I can't remember what we were doing with the twigs, but the wind dropped for a moment, the leaves stopped rustling and we heard a voice saying something like, 'Shadow!' on the other side of the fence! We were so scared! It was brilliant. We both heard it.

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It wasn't like one of us pretended to hear it and the other person went, 'Oh yes, me too!' We *both* did.

'It's . . . THE BOGWITCH! Get the power twigs!' said Bianca.

Every playtime after that, Bianca and I would be over there by that bit of the perimeter fence making all sorts of stuff up about the Bogwitch on the other side. Bashing power twigs on the fence and yelling, 'Bogwitch! We can smell you!'

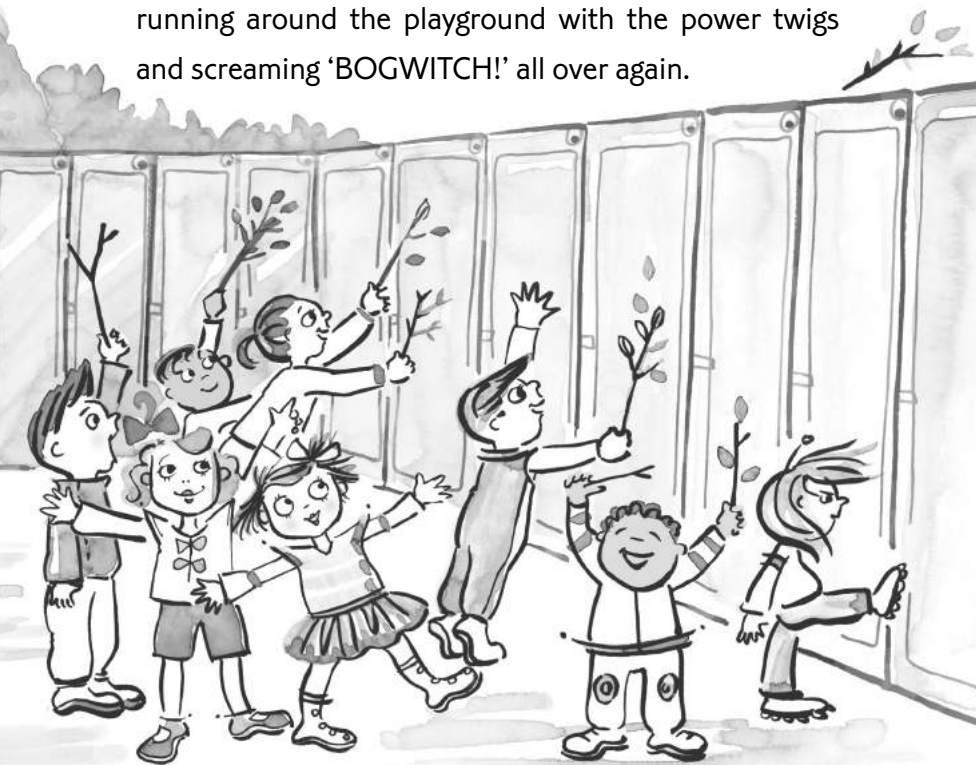
Soon loads of people wanted to join in. And there would be masses of us whacking our power twigs on

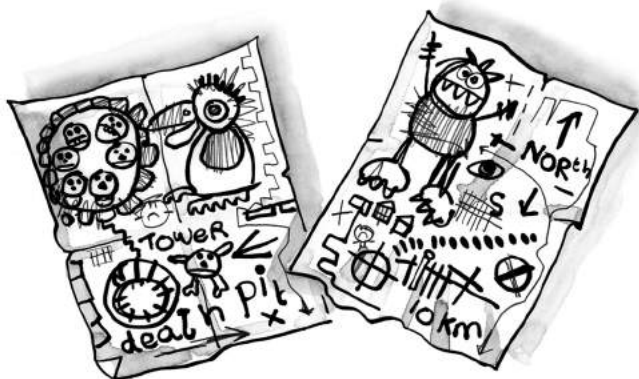


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the fence. Eventually we had to make a rota to say who could play when. We were spending more of the play time sorting out the rota than actually playing. James Defries got really cross when he wasn't on the rota and shouted at everybody, 'Idiots! No one lives over there – it's just old broken houses!'

Bianca said very slowly, 'James, you didn't HEAR what we HEARD!' And then she and I held our twigs above our heads and said, 'THE BOGWITCH said SHAAAADOW!' That's all it took to send everyone off running around the playground with the power twigs and screaming 'BOGWITCH!' all over again.





Bianca made little maps and messages from the Bogwitch at home, and she'd bring them to school and show everyone and say stuff like, 'This here on the map is the deadly death pit! Right by this huge statue of a griffin is the Tower of the Mighty Bogwitch with all these skulls round the top!'

And we didn't really believe her, but at the same time we did.

Eventually it got out of control with masses of kids playing it, but not playing it properly, just yelling and bashing big sticks on the perimeter fence. The head teacher, Mrs Fradley, did this big assembly about the dangers of playing with twigs and said if she ever caught somebody so much as touching the perimeter fence, never mind hitting it, there would be serious consequences and did she make herself quite clear! It's funny, you hear the little kids talking about the

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Bogwitch now like it's a fact, when it was just me and Bianca making stuff up.

Even now we're older, if we're having a sleepover and it's really late, Bianca does her old Bogwitch voice in the dark, whispering 'Shaaaadow!' And I always end up hiding under the covers going, 'Stop talking about it! You are freaking me out!'



When we were in Year Two we both got married to James Defries. We weren't in love with him and he wasn't being cool then in his moonshades and would still play weddings. We all just wanted a massive wedding in the lunch-time break.

Felicity was the vicar because her mum is an actual real-life vicar and she knew all the words for getting married. She married us in a ceremony by the flyke sheds. She found some little caterpillars in a real bush and made us put them on our noses.



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Bianca said that wasn't what happened in a real wedding but Felicity said, 'I think I should know HOW to marry someone! My mum's in charge at St Giles Omni Faith!'

After the caterpillars on the noses bit we all ran out into the playground and the whole class joined in, chasing after us and singing, 'HERE COME THE BRIDES!' Miss Fritz got all overheated shuffling after everybody, trying to calm us down. Bianca, James, Felicity and I got lined up in a corridor by Miss Fritz doing her electro-command voice and then we got really told off by Mrs Fradley for messing about by the flyke sheds and we had to miss the afternoon break.



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But even now I only have to say, ‘With this caterpillar I thee wed,’ and Bianca and I start laughing. Sometimes I whisper it in a quite serious assembly about anti-bullying or the First Moon Mineral War, and we just have to have the silent, shaking, cannot-stop-giggles.

Before Moon Girl arrived we had a sleepover at each other’s houses nearly every week. We know each other’s houses so well it doesn’t feel like a sleepover. Our mums just leave us alone to get on with stuff. Which is probably why, when we were six, we broke her family teleporter.

We tried to teleport all her teddies to my house. But it was the kind of teleporter that’s only supposed to send food – an old model. We shoved all her teddies into the sending hatch and pressed the buttons, but the teddies just disintegrated and messed up the whole machine.

Bianca’s dad went totally mad when he saw the melted fur all over the inside of the teleporter. He really yelled at Bianca, but not so much at me, as I was just the visiting child. He was shouting, ‘Do you have ANY IDEA how much a teleporter costs to replace, young lady?’

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The really good thing was, though, that one teddy did successfully teleport to my house!

Except he'd arrived really, really small, shrunken by the teleportation process. Like this! Bianca said I could keep him, and I still have him. I keep him up on that hatch above my sleeping pod, the one where I put Bianca's birthday presents.

I call him Nano Ted.



Bianca can do amazing accents, and every time Bianca and I meet we do a really stupid but hilarious (to us) greeting we have perfected since the end of Year Five. We pretend we're teenagers from the Moon Colonies and put on our Moon Colony accents and say, 'Today ain't no Moon day and this Earth day is too long for me!' and we do the handshake thing you see them do in all the shows.

We do it all the time. Well, we used to, but on the Monday before Bianca handed out her invitations, Petra caught us playing it in the coatpod and said in her real Moon Colony accent, 'To be honest, you two

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sound more Canadian than Moonite!’

Bianca said, ‘Oh no! Do we?! That’s soooo funny! It’s just a silly game Lyla makes me play! You’re not upset, are you?’

‘Not at all,’ said Petra, smiling and looking sort of shy. ‘People always try to copy me. I’m kind of used to it!’

So I said, ‘We weren’t copying you. We played it before you arrived.’

‘*We played it before you arrived.*’ Petra mimicked my voice to make it sound really babyish. ‘I bet you did, like your Bogwitch game – I’ve heard all about that too. Get some new friends, Lyla . . . maybe your brother’s age?’

Bianca didn’t say anything. She just bit her lip.

