



EVA DAY  
*and The Newshound*

by Clara Vulliamy

*Overview*

Eva lives with her little sister Macy, her big brother Wes and their Mum, in a small flat. And now there's also a scruffy, skinny dog called Wafer – although there shouldn't be, the landlord does NOT allow pets.

But who is he, and doesn't he have a home of his own to go to?

Eva is a reporter. Together with her friends Simone and Ash, she runs a newspaper called *The Newshound* – investigating stories, uncovering secrets, righting wrongs. If anyone can get to the bottom of this, it's them.

But what Eva doesn't know is that an even bigger story is brewing right under their noses, one in which Wafer proves himself to be the best newhound of all.

NB this story is pitched a little older than Dotty Detective and Marshmallow Pie, for readers 7+; the heroes are in Year 6, so around 10/11 years old. I envisage it as the first in a series.

## Chapter One

‘WHAT IS GOING ON?’

Mum is standing in the kitchen doorway with a shopping bag in each hand. My little sister Macy is peeping out from behind her, mouth wide open like a goldfish.

‘What,’ I say.

‘WHAT. IS. *THIS?*’ she says again.

‘What’s what,’ I say, as casually as I can manage, intently studying my chocolate biscuit.

But it’s no good, I just can’t keep it going. Mum is staring – appalled – at underneath my chair. There are loud snuffling, grumbling and crumb-licking noises. It’s pretty small, our flat. Definitely not enough space to hide a dog.

Okay, so this needs explaining.

I first saw the dog last week, on my way home from school, outside the corner shop. I just assumed his owner was inside, buying something. The next day I saw him again, this time licking an empty ice cream wrapper on the ground. Today he was still there, behind a pile of crates. He came up to me. ‘Hi there,’ I said quietly, gently stroking his bony head.

At that moment a delivery van pulled up onto the pavement and the driver jumped out, opening the side door with a clatter. The sudden loud noise spooked the little dog, who darted away towards the kerb. As he leapt into the road, a motorbike came around the corner.

I dived forwards and just managed to get my arms around his neck, pulling him back to safety. The motorbike swerved and roared away, the rider shouting angrily.

The dog was trembling. 'You've got to be MUCH more careful!' I said to him, my heart knocking in my chest. He shouldn't be out in the world all on his own, surely?

When I finally walked on, extra slowly, he followed me. By the time I reached our front door, he was right by my side, looking up at me, head tilted to one side. I let myself in, and - I didn't mean it to happen, but I didn't mean it *not* to happen either - the dog came in too.

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'He will need to go back to his own home *right this minute*,' Mum is saying.

'But Mum, I don't know if he even HAS a home - he doesn't have a collar - and look, he's *so* thin.'

'Well there's absolutely no way he can stay here,' says Mum. 'Seriously, NO WAY. The landlord would have a fit, pets are absolutely forbidden.'

We are interrupted by Wes my brother shuffling into the kitchen.

He steps over the dog as if he wasn't even there, opens the cupboard, takes out a bag of crisps and leaves again without saying a single word. Honestly what weird stuff happens to your brain when you're a teenager?

'Oh come *on*, Mum - we CAN'T just throw him out,' I persist. 'He's not safe out there on his own. And I bet he's really cute once you get to know him.'

We all look at the dog, who is nibbling at a knot in his fur with crooked teeth. He stops to stare up at us. Mum hesitates for just a fraction of a second, and - YES! I seize the moment.

‘He can share with me and Macy,’ I say over my shoulder as I hurry him out along the hallway and into our tiny bedroom. ‘I’ll look after him!’

‘Just for one night, you hear?’ Mum calls out after me. ‘I mean it, Eva - ONE NIGHT!’

One side of my bed is pushed up against Macy’s bed, on the other side I have a small cupboard where I keep my things. Everywhere else is jam-packed with Macy’s toys. There isn’t enough room for a wardrobe so I have a row of pegs to hang up my clothes - my trackies, a hoodie with a surfing grisly bear on it, and my precious dark green baker boy hat.

I bunch up a blanket to make an improvised bed for the dog. He sniffs around in it and settles down. I give him a gentle belly-rub. He has big dark eyes and a worried face... he’s not quite a puppy but I think he’s still young. And he really is wafer-thin... that’s it! That’s what I will call him. Wafer.

Meanwhile Macy is getting totally on board with the whole Wafer thing. She is sitting on the floor, felt pens tipped out everywhere, drawing lots and lots of pictures of him, surrounded by hearts and flowers. She has a habit of giving a running commentary on everything she’s doing.

‘First a little bit of yellow, then a little bit of pink...’

She also has *three* imaginary friends - Bert, Bertina and Daisy - and chats away to them constantly. As if it wasn’t crowded enough in here already.

With much exasperated huffing and puffing Mum goes out and comes back with a packet of dog food, *chicken with spring vegetables*.

‘This is the SMALLEST size I could find,’ she says firmly to Wafer, when we’re all having our tea, ‘because you’re *not* staying.’ His bowl is empty again in seconds. I secretly slip him half a sausage roll under the table.

Before bedtime I stay up watching TV with Wafer until after Macy has gone to sleep. Then I creep into our room, bringing Wafer with me, and treading - the

AGONY – on a piece of Lego. With only a silent *ouch*, I get into my bed, and Wafer gets into his.

I watch him snuffle and fidget until he finally falls asleep.

Who *is* he, and where does he come from?

I can't turn on the light in case it wakes up Macy. Instead I reach for an old shoebox I keep under the bed. I take out my torch, my extra special notebook and a double-ended pencil - one end blue, the other red.

There's something else you need to know about me. I'm an ace reporter, brilliant at investigating stories and uncovering secrets. Together with my best friends, we run a newspaper called The Newshound. If there's anybody who can get to the bottom of this mystery, it's us.

## Chapter Two

'Get a move on, folks,' says Mum, 'we're going to be late – AS USUAL.'

I finish my cereal and give Wafer the last few pellets of food from the packet, which he hooovers up appreciatively. I think he might like some fresh air, too. There's a roof garden out at the back of our flat – well, 'garden' is a bit of an exaggeration: there's an upturned flowerpot to sit on, a washing line and a generator that makes a never-ending buzzing noise like a massive bee. But I love being so high up, looking out across the rooftops and the railway towards the park in the distance. And it's perfect for Wafer - with the window propped open he can go in and out as much as he likes.

Mum *might* be saying something about taking Wafer to the animal shelter, but she has a piece of toast clamped between her teeth - brushing Macy's hair with one hand and wiping toothpaste off her sweatshirt with the other - so I *definitely* can't hear her.

I give Wafer a bowl of water and one last scratch behind the ear, then I shove my notebook in my pocket, grab my backpack and it's time to go.

We shout out goodbye to Wes but he has his headphones on and doesn't answer. Then me, Mum and Macy hurtle down four flights of stairs and out of the front door. Mum rushes on ahead to drop Macy off at school before going to work at the Sunny Side Up Community Diner. Mornings are her busiest time, getting ready for the lunchtime rush.

I meet my two friends who are waiting for me on the corner, and we walk to school together.

Simone and Ash have been my best friends since we were really small. They run *The Newshound* with me. I am the main writer, while Simone is BRILLIANT at art, and does all our lettering and illustrations. Ash is the cleverest person in the whole world - they are the newspaper's STAR RESEARCHER.

Yes - they! Ash doesn't feel like a girl, but doesn't feel like a boy either. So instead of he and him or she and her, for Ash we all say they and them. They say it feels loads better not to be put in a box with the wrong label stuck on the outside. 'I'm just me!' they tell us. Simone made them a cool badge, to remind everyone.

'We've got a new story for *The Newshound* to investigate!' I say. 'And this one is going to be HUGE.'

To be honest we haven't covered anything as important as this before. We wrote a story about when Orla saw a ghost in the playground behind the recycling bins, and another when Vijay won a dance competition. But with Wafer the stakes are *really* high.

I tell them both all about Wafer as we walk along. 'I found him outside the shop, he had been there for DAYS and he *nearly* got run over...'

'Oh no!' Simone gasps.

'It was a really close shave,' I say. 'Then he followed me home, but Mum says he can't stay - if we don't find out where he comes from, he will be sent away to the shelter.'

'I wish you could keep him,' says Ash.

'Me too,' I say with a sigh.

'It must be amazing to have a dog, even if only for a little while,' says Simone. 'Me and my sisters have been begging for a pet FOR YEARS, but anything hairy makes my dad sneeze and his eyes itchy. He says if we got a dog either him or the dog would have to live in the shed, and he knows it would end up being him.'

Ash has a cat called Frank. 'He's on a diet again,' they tell us. 'We *really* think it's going to work this time.'

We arrive at school, and wander over to join our class at the main door. 'Line up quickly!' says Mr Fuller our teacher, dunking a digestive into his cup of tea.

Some of the girls are in a huddle, intently looking at something. Turns out it's Amy's birthday party invitations. We don't expect to be invited, which is as well because we're not.

'You aren't invited,' Max says to us with a smirk.

'Thank you, Captain Obvious,' I mutter under my breath.

'Newshound meeting at lunch?' I suggest to Simone and Ash, and they say YES.



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Me and Ash have school dinners and Simone brings a packed lunch, but we always sit together. The dinner lady I like best is serving today, and gives me extra beans. We call all the people who serve us our lunch 'dinner ladies', not by their names, even Milly's dad who I know for a fact is called Phil.

We rush to finish eating, then I brush away the crumbs with my sleeve and get out my notebook. 'So,' I say, looking at my notes from the night before, 'the Wafer story... where should we start?'

'We go to the corner shop where you first saw him,' says Ash, 'and do a thorough search of the area.'

'I'll bring my sketchbook and drawing things,' says Simone, checking her pencil case.

'Yes!' I agree. 'And we can ask the shopkeeper too, find out if he saw anything.'

Rule Number One when you're chasing a story: retrace your steps and start at the very beginning.

There's a few minutes of lunchbreak left, so we just have time to look at our skateboard sticker collections. We have quite a few already so we can share and swap. We are all *desperate* for the rare 3D golden dragon, and the special glasses to see it with, but no luck so far.

We don't have skateboards yet but hey, we're saving up.

After school, we put on our press passes that Simone made us and head to the corner shop. We search everywhere - around the bunches of flowers in buckets, behind the bubblegum vending machine, under the empty crates... but find nothing.

We go into the shop. Me and Ash usually do the talking, Simone is a bit more shy and prefers to be the one who writes everything down.

‘Do you know anything about a dog that’s been hanging around outside?’ Ash asks.

‘A small, scruffy, grey dog?’ I add.

But the shopkeeper shakes his head. ‘There’s so many people coming in and out, so many dogs waiting at the door. I didn’t see anything.’

‘A dead end,’ says Simone, as we walk away.

‘We need to plan our next move,’ says Ash determinedly.

‘Yes,’ I agree, ‘we keep digging!’

The minute I get home I hurry to my bedroom. Wafer is still here, dozing in his blanket bed. So Mum hasn’t sent him away - at least not yet. I’m SO glad to see him. He opens one eye, gets to his feet and follows me into the kitchen.

Mum has just got in from work. She is looking at a letter with lots of red writing on it, but she puts it in her pocket when she sees me. There’s one more packet of dog food on the kitchen table, again the smallest size.

‘I was rushed off my feet today and didn’t get a chance to call the shelter,’ she says. She watches me carefully spooning food into Wafer’s bowl. ‘Don’t let him feel *too* at home, though,’ she adds.

### Chapter three

It happens so fast. Wes puts his ham sandwich on the worktop and turns away for just a moment... Wafer jumps up, takes the ham right out of the bread, disappears under the kitchen table and devours it in seconds.

PHEW - Wes hasn't noticed as he packs the sandwich into his bag for college, but he will do later.

Wafer seems mainly to want to eat and sleep. I reckon he is *obsessed* by food. As if he thinks he must eat everything he can, worried there will be no more ever again.

'Drop by at the Diner after school, Eva,' Mum is telling me as we get ready to leave. 'I'm working late today.'

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In class, we are meant to be doing *quiet reading*, but Mr Fuller has popped out for a minute so the entire room erupts into loud chatting. Amy, Sumaya and Scarlett at the next table to ours are talking about the birthday party, and planning to go dress-shopping together at the weekend.

This is *not* our idea of a good day out. Simone rolls her eyes. 'When I went to my cousin's wedding last summer,' she tells us, 'me and my two sisters had to wear identical frilly party dresses in three different sizes, with the same matching hairbands and lacy socks.' She pulls a face. 'I *hated* it!'

Looking down at Simone's black leggings and scuffed baseball boots I just can't imagine her in a frilly dress, and although I try not to, I burst out laughing. This sets Ash off chuckling. Simone pretends to be offended but joins in too. The girls at the next table look over at us, which only makes us laugh more.

We don't worry about what other people think, or want to be the same as everybody else. Besides, it's useful for our reporting... outsiders can see things without being noticed.

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Ash and Simone come with me to the Diner. Outside, the paint is flaky and the sign is missing some of its letters, but inside it's warm and cosy and smells *so good*.

We slide into one of the booths, and Mum puts a plate of waffle scraps – the offcuts and misshapes – down onto the faded check tablecloth in front of us, and a bowl of cinnamon sugar to dip them into.

We look about at the other customers.

'This could be a good place to ask around, see if anyone knows Wafer,' says Ash, and we agree.

'Have you heard anything about a missing dog,' I ask the man in the booth next to ours, 'small, grey, worried expression?' He is mopping up a toddler who has squeezed purée-ed broccoli through her clenched fists.

'Fraid not!' he says.

'Do you know anyone who has lost a dog?' Ash asks a woman sipping a mint tea and working on her laptop. She smiles, but says 'sorry, no I don't.'

An older lady is paying her bill at the counter. 'And one for the jar, please,' she says to Mum. I've never understood this because there isn't actually a jar at all. What it means is that you give a little extra, to pay for a coffee or a sandwich for someone else who doesn't have enough money at the moment.

'A lost dog, you say?' she asks, turning to us. 'Yes, there was one once...' she frowns to herself with concentration. We gather around her, all ears.

'There was an old man called Mr Brent who lived up the road, he had a little dog. One night there was a huge storm, took the electricity out. It was dark

and the poor old chap fell, broke his ankle, couldn't move. The little dog curled up next to him like a hot water bottle and kept him alive all night, never left his side except to fetch a couple of biscuits for him. A neighbour found them the next morning and called an ambulance.'

I get a funny feeling in my stomach that tells me we might be onto something.

'What happened to Mr Brent in the end - and the dog?' I ask.

'Oh, I don't remember...' she answers, shaking her head.

'This could be important!' says Ash, as we pack up to leave.

'Is it Wafer?' asks Simone.

'I don't know,' I reply. 'But it's a lead!'

## Chapter four

At morning break we hurry to the school library. Our librarian (Miss Kassam, but she says we can call her Aisha) lets us spend as much time in here as we like. She is *The Newshound's* BIGGEST fan, and helps us to print it out.

Also, she often has cake. Today she takes a tupperware box out from her desk and gives us each a square of rose and pistachio shortbread.

'AMAZING,' says Ash indistinctly, mouth very full.

Then we log on to the internet, and begin our search. It's a needle in a haystack - there are SO MANY heroic dogs...

Laika the Soviet space dog, the first animal to orbit the earth...

Balto the Siberian husky, who carried vital medicines through snow and ice for hundreds of miles to save a town from a deadly epidemic...

I put my hair up into a topknot and absentmindedly stick a pencil through it, which is something I do when I am *really* concentrating.

And then...

*A SMALL DOG WITH BIG COURAGE!*

We find it.

*Lionel Brent, who is 82, owes his life to his little dog Lucky. After falling and injuring himself during a power cut last month, Mr Brent was kept warm and safe by his trusty canine companion until the paramedics arrived.*

*Lucky was not allowed to go in the ambulance with Mr Brent, but tried to follow on foot. Unfortunately the brave little dog was unable to keep up, and got lost. Lucky was last seen near Birch Hill Park, and has been missing since. Mr Brent has now moved into a care home where he is being well looked after.*

There's a photo of Lucky, head tilted to one side, sitting on the sofa with Mr Brent.

Our hearts sink. It's not Wafer.

This little dog is short-haired and white, not grey and scruffy like Wafer, and wearing a collar and tag. On the tag I can just make out a tiny four-leaf clover – the symbol for good luck.

'This is SO disappointing,' says Simone.

'Yup,' Ash sighs.

I ask Aisha to print out the newspaper article and photo for us anyway. I fold them up and put them into my notebook.

Rule Number Two: keep track of every detail, however small. You never know what might be important.

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On my way home from school, to cheer myself up, I buy a packet of dog chews for Wafer from the corner shop, *sizzling steak* flavour. When I get in, I find him with Mum in the kitchen. Mum is doing her accounts, frowning over a pile of bills and receipts. Wafer has dragged his blanket in and settled down, gazing intently at the oven. I suspect he *thinks* he's watching TV. There is a roast chicken inside, it probably distracted him.

I give him a couple of chews, and his tail is a blur of waggy joy.

After tea, I decide that Wafer needs a BATH.

I'm not sure if Wafer loves or hates this idea, but as soon as he's in the water he goes crazy with excitement. He knocks over a bottle of shampoo which drips steadily into the bath. By now I'm wrestling with a REALLY soapy dog. I let go of the shower attachment which has a life of its own and is wriggling like a snake, a fountain of water making a huge puddle on the floor. Wafer takes a big lick of the soap, so every time he opens his mouth, bubbles come out.

I hurry him out of the bathroom, and quickly mop up before Mum sees.

I gently dry Wafer and wrap him up in his blanket on the sofa like a burrito. Mum come in with a bowl of popcorn and sits down with us, and we start watching a film together. We often have a movie night on Fridays, although

she almost always falls asleep a few minutes in, and wakes up at the end saying ‘that was *lovely!*’

I notice Mum absent-mindedly giving Wafer a couple of pieces of popcorn, and a little pat on the top of his tufty head. I think she’s warming to him. I snuggle up to Wafer and Mum. This is the life.

But it’s never, EVER peaceful for long in this place. Here comes Macy, way past her bedtime, loudly and proudly announcing her new project: a mobile nail salon. She has been rummaging in the bathroom cupboard and filled a carrier bag with Mum’s nearly empty bottles of nail varnish and some cotton wool balls.

‘I’m too tired to argue,’ says Mum, lying back on the sofa and closing her eyes. By the time she opens them again her entire toes are a mess of sticky, glittery colour. ‘That will be 50p!’ Macy tells her.

‘Well, I admire your business spirit,’ Mum replies, reaching for her bag and handing over the money. ‘Keep it up and I can quit my job.’

She says that, but I know she would *never* give up the Diner.

I manage to get out of having my nails done, but Macy persuades Wes to be her next customer.

‘Three pounds!’ she tells him brightly. He gives her 20p.

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At bedtime, I’m standing at the little bathroom window doing my teeth. It’s dark, and the streets below are quiet and deserted. By the side of the railway, I feel sure I catch sight of a small dark shape moving about in the scrubby undergrowth. I strain my eyes in the dim light to see more clearly, but it’s gone. I must have imagined it.



## Chapter five

Saturday morning, I wake with a start. I can hear the landlord's voice in the kitchen. 'I've come over to sort out that leaking tap,' he is saying to Mum.

I look at Wafer's bed. It's empty. With my stomach turning over in panic I tear down the hallway and burst into the kitchen. The landlord looks up from his toolbox, startled.

'Don't mind Eva,' says Mum airily. 'She just wants to see what you're doing - she's very keen to be a plumber when she grows up!' She gives me a meaningful look.

I switch on *reporter mode*, and scan the room. No sign of Wafer. His bowl isn't on the floor - it must be in the dishwasher. GOOD. Mum is standing with her back to the roof garden window. This could be important. I look over her shoulder and see, poking out from behind the generator, a snout, a paw, a closed eye: it's Wafer, snoozing in the sunshine.

The landlord is tinkering with the tap for what feels like a hundred years. I see Wafer begin to stir... then he gets up and starts walking towards us. I hurry over to stand squashed shoulder to shoulder with Mum, blocking the view. We must look very strange. I put on my best 'fascinated by plumbing' face.

AT LAST, just as Wafer is pressing his nose up against the glass behind us, the landlord finishes his work, packs away his tools, and leaves.

‘That was a narrow escape,’ says Mum, as I let Wafer in. And although she sounds a little sad about it, she adds ‘He really can’t stay here, Eva. We *must* sort something out, and SOON.’

I don’t say anything about our investigations. Rule Number Three: keep your story under your hat until you have ALL THE FACTS. But it’s getting urgent. If the landlord had seen him, he’d be sent away *immediately*.

I kneel down and look into Wafer’s trusting little face. We *must* keep trying. He needs our help.

I want to spring into action RIGHT NOW, but the phone rings. It’s Mum’s assistant Harry from the Diner, who does the weekend shifts.

‘Can’t you put a bucket under the leak?’ Mum is saying. Then she hangs up with a sigh. ‘I’ve got to go out for a bit,’ she tells me. ‘Will you entertain Macy while I’m gone?’

Macy wants to play schools. She is the teacher, and me and her imaginary friends are the pupils. We are each given paper and pens. ‘Write down what I am thinking!’ she commands. I give it a go, but it’s practically impossible. At the end of the lesson she collects the papers, saying ‘No, no - that wasn’t it at all.’ She shakes her head sorrowfully. ‘I’m not cross, just VERY DISAPPOINTED.’ We all get a really low mark.

I jump to my feet the second Mum gets back.

‘I’m going out to see Simone and Ash,’ I tell her.

‘Okay, just as long as you’re home before dark,’ she says.

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‘Eva!’ says Ash’s dad cheerfully, opening the front door. ‘Come in, come in!’ I follow him into the kitchen. Frank is there, tucking into an enormous plate of tuna chunks. So much for his diet. Ash shrugs with an apologetic smile. ‘What can we do?’ they say. ‘He’s a big hungry boy!’ ‘Will you stay for tea?’ their dad asks. ‘I’ve made far too much for just us two.’ ‘Not today I’m afraid!’ I say. Turning to Ash, I whisper urgently, ‘We need to talk.’ They grab their coat.

We pick up Simone from her house and walk together, up the high street, across the railway footbridge and over to the park. It’s our favourite place for a private meeting of The Newshound when we don’t want to be interrupted.

‘I’m not sure I can keep Wafer hidden for much longer,’ I tell them, as we sit down in the long grass next to the flower beds. ‘He was *very* nearly discovered today. We might not be so lucky next time.’

The park-keeper is pulling up weeds nearby, grumbling to himself. He is always grumpy. I don’t know whether he’s a park-keeper because he likes parks, or because he hates people and likes telling them off.

‘What do we do next?’ asks Simone.

We sit in silence for a while. I have to admit, we’re stumped.

It’s already dusk. Families are drifting away, and the playground is empty now. The park-keeper is loading up his cart and getting ready to close up and leave. ‘Hey! Time to go, you lot!’ he shouts over to us.

We get to our feet and dawdle back towards the gate, past the abandoned Snack Shack, long since boarded up and closed. And again, for a split second, I see a little shape disappearing into the bushes. This time I’m sure of it.

On a sudden impulse, I say, ‘I think we should stay, have a look around.’

So when the park-keeper's back is turned, we dodge out of sight behind the shack.

'Let's look inside,' says Ash, opening the door ajar and peering in.

'We're not meant to be here,' Simone says nervously, looking at a sign nailed up on the wall: PRIVATE PROPERTY NO TRESPASSING. 'I think we should go home now.'

If I'm really honest I'm a bit scared too, but Ash doesn't hesitate. They push open the door, and go in. We follow.

Inside, there are stacks of empty boxes with faded pictures of ice creams and cold drinks, and a sun umbrella covered in cobwebs. There's a musty, stuffy smell. On a pile of newspapers in the corner something catches my eye. A dog collar, with a tiny four-leaf clover on the tag.

I take out my notebook and look again at the printed-out newspaper article.

'It's Lucky's collar,' I say. We all look at each other.

'Is it possible that there's a connection between Lucky and Wafer?' says Ash.

'We don't know - *yet*,' I reply.

Rule Number Four: NEVER GIVE UP. We're going to find out the truth.

By now it's getting dark, even darker inside the shack. 'We really should go back,' Simone says again, and this time we agree.

But as we turn to go and I try the door handle, it won't open. I try again - I rattle and pull it, then Simone tries, then Ash, but it's no use. It must be locked. We are trapped inside.