

A ROBOT GIRL RUINED *my* SLEEPOVER



WRITTEN and illustrated by
REBECCA PATTERSON



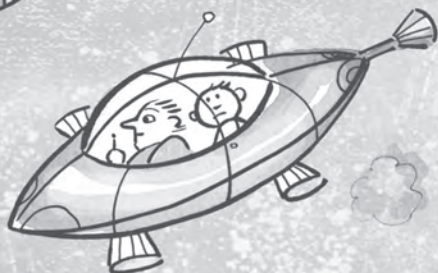


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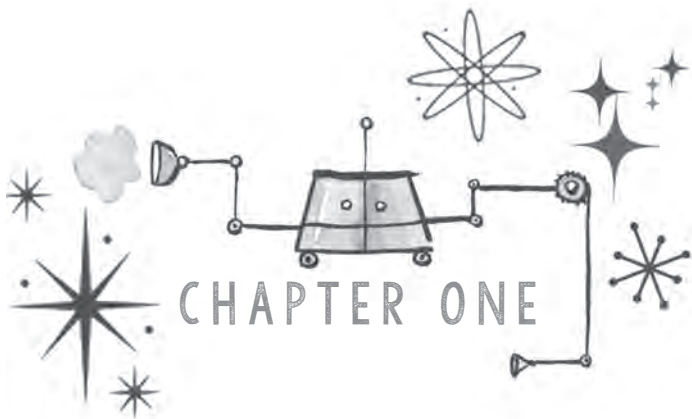


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For Susanna





‘HURRY UP, GUS!’ I yelled from the car, ‘I do NOT want to be late!’

My little brother Gus had spent the last five minutes rolling about on the launch pad having a massive strop about not being allowed to take Sparks, our cyborg cat, in for Show and Tell.

‘Whyyy not?’ he was yelling, ‘I don’t see whyyyyy NOT!’

‘Because he’s worth a fortune and he’s not a toy!’ said Mum, getting into the car.

Gus stopped rolling, but he was still just lying there, looking up at all the cars in the sky.

‘I’m counting to three and then I’m flying off!’ said

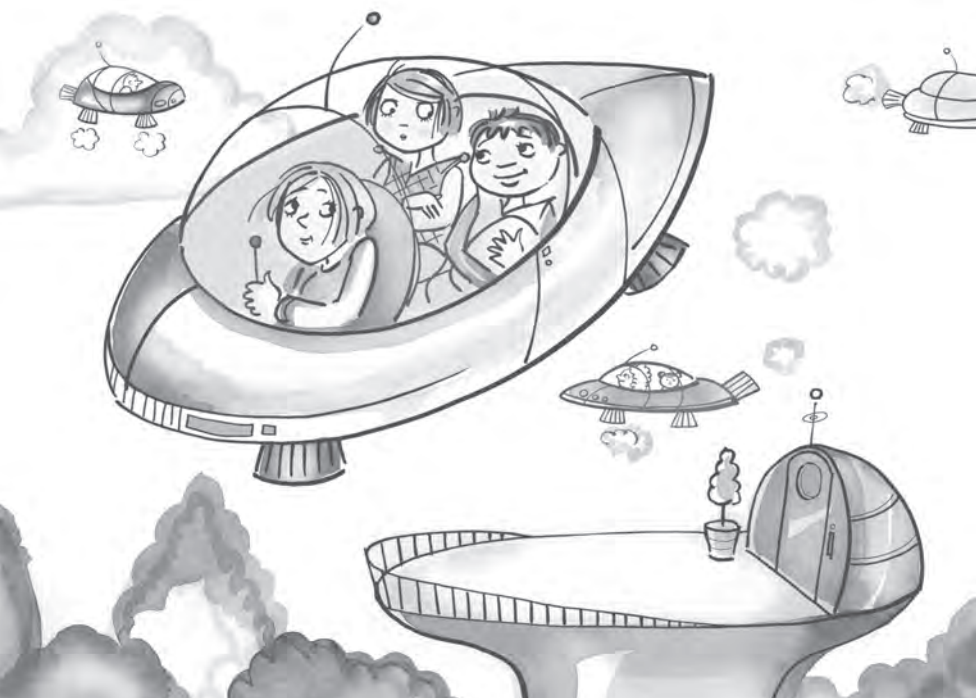
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Mum, firing up the jets. Gus turned his head to look at us and scratched his ear.

I sighed and folded my arms and said to no one, 'I cannot tell you how much I'd prefer a big sister called Tamara!'

Mum started counting, 'One . . . two . . .' and placed her finger dramatically over the lift-off button. Gus got to his feet, dragged his bag across the floor and clambered in next to me, 'Shove up, Boggle McScruff Pants!!' he said.

'Gus!' said Mum, smiling a little as she flew up to join the other cars in the Fly Zone.





Gus admired the reflection of his chubby face in the curved glass of the windows, ‘Your best friend Bianca said I’m the cutest kid in Year One!’

I ignored him and carried on looking out of the window, down at the buildings and trees.

Gus carried on, ‘Eight and a half people in my class want to marry me already! No one wants to marry you, Lyla!’ he said, prodding me.

‘Good, ’cause I don’t want to get married!’ I snapped back.

‘How can half a person want to marry you?’ laughed Mum, as we landed on the Lime Grove Edu Hub launch pad.

‘Evan is the half because he’s in love with me and Laura!’ explained Gus breezily, as he jumped out. Mum did her *Isn’t-he-just-adorable* face at me.

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I ran down the launch-pad steps. In the distance my best friend Bianca waved. She ran towards me as I charged across the playground, 'Hi, Lyla!' she yelled.

'Hi! Hey, I made you this,' I said, 'at the weekend.'

I gave Bianca the tiny model of her I'd made out of my Clay 'n' Move set. I'm quite good at making models and this stuff is good, once the model is dried it can shuffle about a few steps by itself. She looked at the little figure walking about in her palm, 'Aww, it's cute!' she laughed. 'But I'm not that lumpy! How big did you make my ears?! And look at my nose!'

'Oh it's pretty accurate!' I laughed and ran on towards the portals.

Bianca chased behind me laughing, saying she'd do one of me and include my big bug eyes.

We sat down on the wall giggling and calling each other Bug Eyes and Lumpy in stupid voices.

Mercedes turned to us, 'Gonna be interesting today!'

'What is?' I said

'The visitors!'

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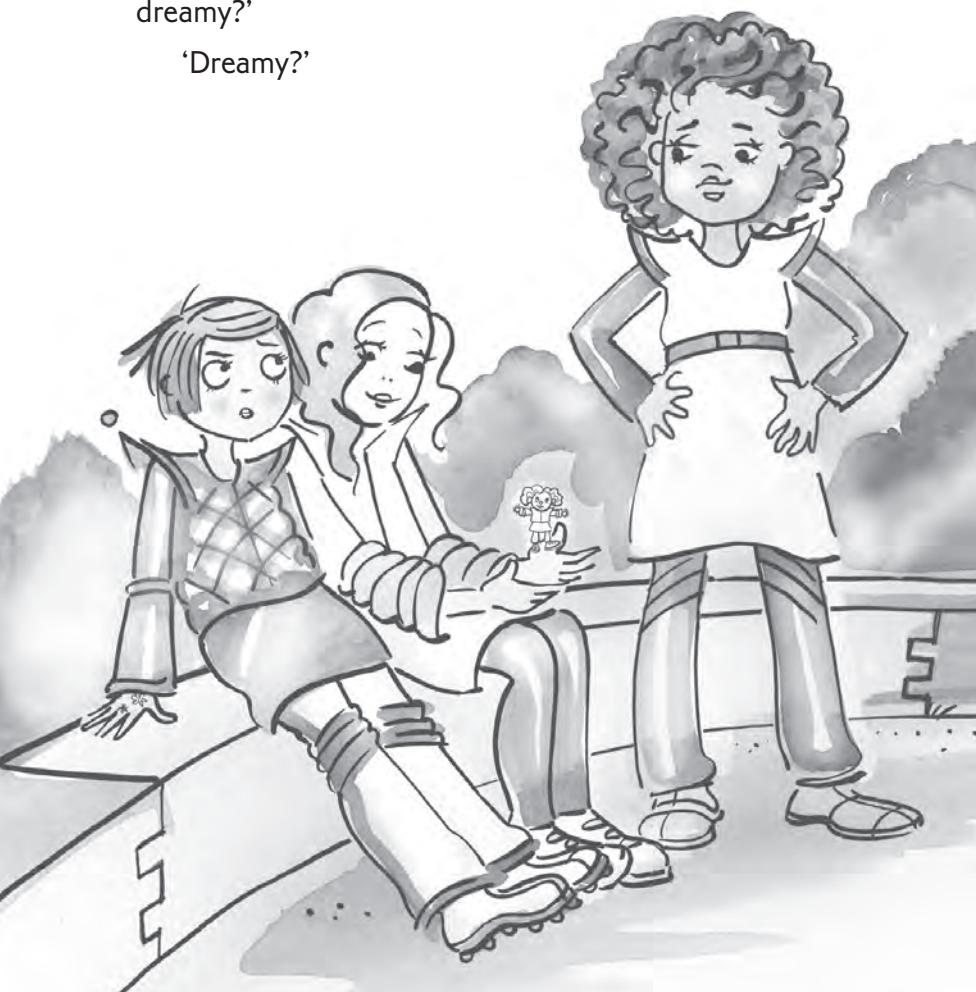
I looked puzzled.

Mercedes stood in front of me, hands on hips, 'Duh! Lyla! How can you forget? I know you're a bit slow but Mr Caldwell's only been going on about this for like ever!'

'I'm not slow!' I said.

Mercedes shrugged, 'OK, well you're not slow . . . dreamy?'

'Dreamy?'



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'I mean you spend a lot of time in class drawing on your hands,' said Mercedes, looking down at all the little white flowers and stars I'd doodled on the back of my fingers and hadn't washed off.

Bianca showed Mercedes the little clay figure I'd made, 'But look what she did for me! It's a tiny me in clay! It can walk!'

Mercedes didn't look too impressed, 'Girlfriend, Clay 'n' Move is for little kids!'



I looked up and across the playground and saw two boys from our class, James and Burak, strutting about with their arms straight out in front. They were putting on silly robot voices, 'I AM A BA-BY RO-BOT! BEEP! BEEP! I WILL DO YOUR MATHS? ALLOW ME TO DO YOUR SPEL-LING TEST!'

And then I remembered, 'Oh yeah! The cyborg robot kids come today!'

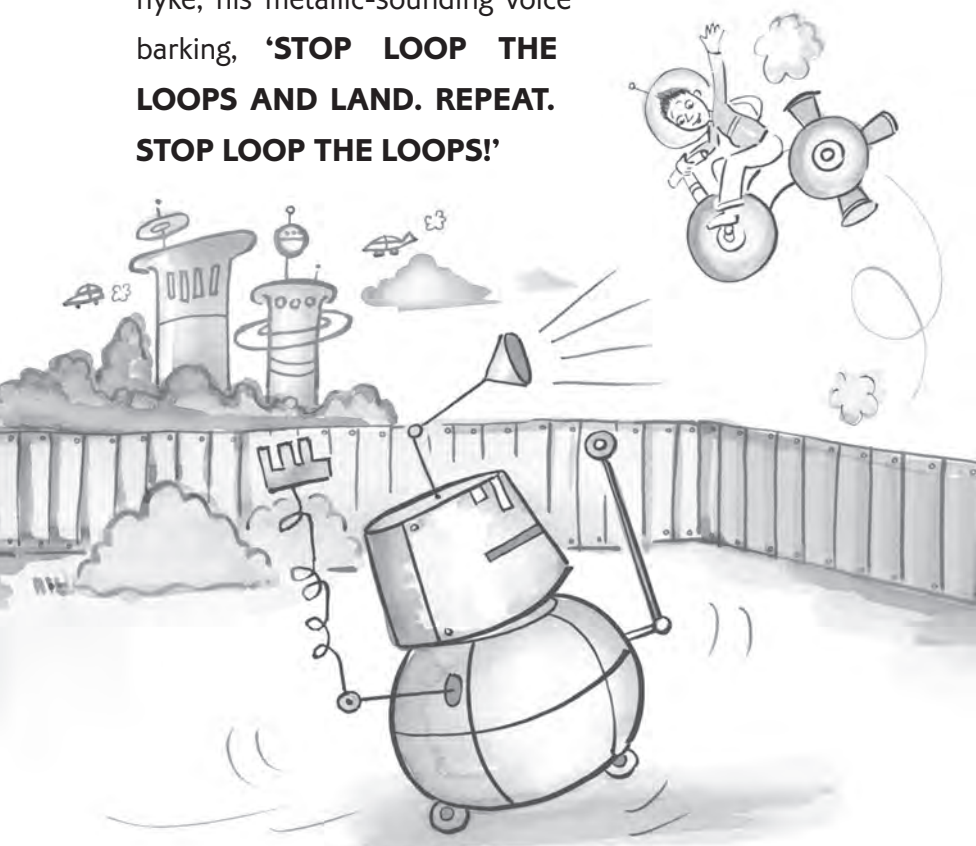
The two boys came over. James pushed his cool moonshades up his nose, 'Robot day is here! This is gonna be so funny!'

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'I know! Maybe we'll have to get them out of their boxes when they arrive,' said Mercedes, 'like massive dolls!'

Burak shook his head, 'Nah, I've seen the adverts for these. They look good, realistic. Way better than Old Junky Smelly!' He nodded towards the other side of the playground where Mr Martinelli, our ancient electronic school caretaker, was telling Louis MacAvoy to land his flye, his metallic-sounding voice

barking, **'STOP LOOP THE LOOPS AND LAND. REPEAT. STOP LOOP THE LOOPS!'**



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‘Mr Martinelli is so old!’ said Bianca. ‘Look how he rolls now!’

Mr Martinelli is really just a big metal bucket thing with a few lights. Everyone calls him Mr Junky Smelly. You can say it to his face because he is such a primitive robot with really basic hearing and he can’t tell the difference. We used to have an electronic playground assistant called Miss Fritz, but she got upgraded with a new motherboard and was so much better at everything that she left our school last December and became an estate agent on Mars.

Louis landed his flyke, ‘There you go, Mr Junky Smelly! I’m down on the ground.’

Mr Martinelli flashed a green light, which is his low energy way of saying ‘OK’, and rolled away.

‘Hope these electric kids are better than that old can!’ laughed James.

Louis sat down next to us on the little wall and put on a serious face, ‘Yeah, but the trouble is, these latest electric kids – they’re not safe! That’s what my uncle Dan says, lots of glitches. I’m keeping well away from them! Well away!’

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James nudged him and said, 'Louis you're not going to be allowed near one, mate!'

'What do you mean?'

'Come on, Louis, you're not exactly reliable. Who tried to set fire to the school skybus?'

'When I was seven!' said Louis, folding his arms. 'That's ages ago!'



It's true, Louis MacAvoy is officially the naughtiest boy in our class, and in the last few weeks he's been even worse, but he's actually quite nice. He's as short as me. Maybe even shorter. At break he hangs out in the little kids' playground showing off to them. I've heard him tell them his real dad is a trillionaire and has a Chrysler Comet Intergalactic with a gold tint windscreen. He sits next to me now in class. I used to sit next to Bianca but two weeks ago Louis was messing about so much at the back on his floaty seat going, 'I'm Mr Wobble! All hail The Wobbleman!!' Mr Caldwell told him to swap places with Bianca at the front.

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Bianca put the little clay model away in her pocket. 'Thanks for this, Lyla. It is really sweet,' she said quietly. Then Mr Caldwell opened the classroom portal and we all went in. The boys shoved their coats into the suction hatches discussing all the terrible ways an electric child could kill you. Louis had heard they can pass on a strange electrical disease that makes your own eyes glow like car headlights for the rest of your life. Felicity rolled her eyes and said to Franka and Mercedes, 'They're totally safe. I'm just worried they're gonna be really super pretty! The ones I saw on the adverts are like models!'

'But you ARE really pretty!' squealed Franka.

Felicity shrugged, 'Yeah, I guess we're all quite attractive in this class in our own different ways.'

'Yeah!' agreed Amia, tossing her hair. 'And the people who aren't so super pretty make up for it by having . . . great . . .' she paused and glanced at me, 'personalities!'

Bianca nudged me, 'That's right, Bug Eyes. You have a great personality!'

'Just like you, Lumpy,' I laughed back.



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I walked into the classroom and sat next to Louis.

‘Oi, keep your elbows on your side of the desk, Pie Face!’ said Louis, helping himself to my stylus, my memory cube and two of my highglowers.

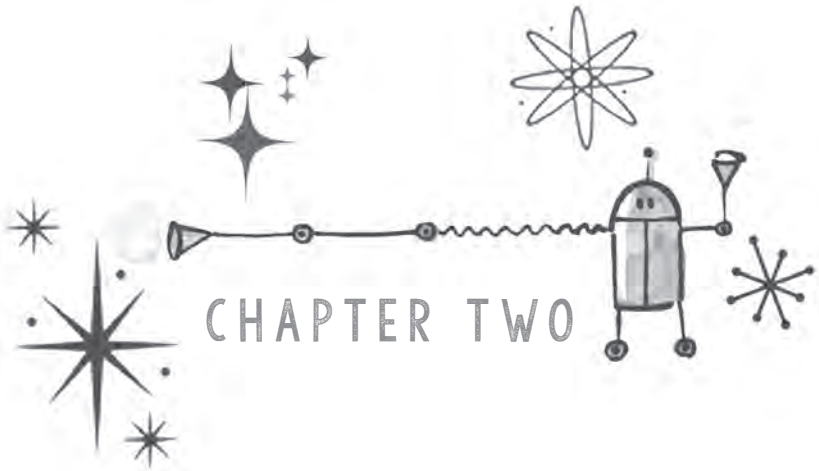
I wouldn’t mind him borrowing my stuff if he didn’t give it back to me half chewed and all spitty!

Mr Caldwell said we had just a few minutes before our amazing visitors arrived, ‘This is a first!’ he said excitedly. ‘Cyborg children about to take part in mainstream education alongside normal organic ones like you lot. You can tell your grandkids you were part of history!’

‘Yeah, well, my uncle Dan says they’re not safe,’ said Louis.

‘Yeah,’ said Mercedes, ‘what if they go rogue and try to kill us?!’

Mr Caldwell tutted and rolled his eyes to the ceiling, ‘Nonsense, the Luna Livewires Corporation has been perfecting these children for years . . . And here they are now!’



A very elegant woman came into our classroom with really smooth skin and glossy hair. She had a smart little sash across her suit which said, 'LUNA LIVEWIRES CORPORATION – Building better children for a better universe!' She gave a little wave back to whoever was still out in the corridor and said softly, 'Just wait outside for now,' then she turned to face us. 'Hello, children. My name is Sophia System 4002 and I'm from the Luna Livewires Corporation based on the Cassini Crater region of the Moon where we create real cyborg children! Some of you may be surprised to learn that I am a cyborg myself!'

Everyone made 'Wow!' faces at each other and

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Louis whispered to me, ‘Better than old rust bucket Junky Smelly. No visible wires. She’s a babe!’

Sophia System 4002 went on, ‘Well, if you think I’m impressive for a cyborg, wait till you see our new range of children cyborgs. They’re wonderful! So totally human that the government has decided that soon they will be allowed to enter normal, mainstream Edu Hubs, just like yours.’

Louis muttered in my ear, ‘Here we go, more Battery Brains driving us all crazy. Like we need any more robots.’

Sophia System 4002 heard. She looked straight at Louis with such a focused stare that

Louis slid down a little in his chair,

‘Young man, I can assure you the children you are about

to meet can be every bit as human, thoughtful, and

charming as you are

if . . .’ she tilted her head on one side and

looked super caring, ‘. . . they are loved.’



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‘Oh my darling!’ said James, kissing his memory cube. Which got big laughs and Mr Caldwell stomped to the back of the class to have a little word with him. Sophia raised one perfectly arched eyebrow and went on, ‘You are all used to your cyborg pets at home and your wonderful electronic school assistants. But this is where our cyborg children differ, they actually grow more human the more you care for them. Show them kindness and love and they will thrive. We can’t program friendship up on the Moon in our factory, but here they can meet all of you and learn friendship from your kind, caring ways.’

‘Caring ways? Has she been to our school?!’ said Mercedes, shaking her head.

‘Well, I think you all look very caring.’ Sophia smiled and went on, ‘Now, what I want you to do is think about which three children in this class would make the best volunteers? I need three of you to look after my cyborg children during the days when we visit your school. I’m looking for kind, committed children who can help our young cyborgs. They don’t need help with things like maths or spelling, but they do need kindness.’

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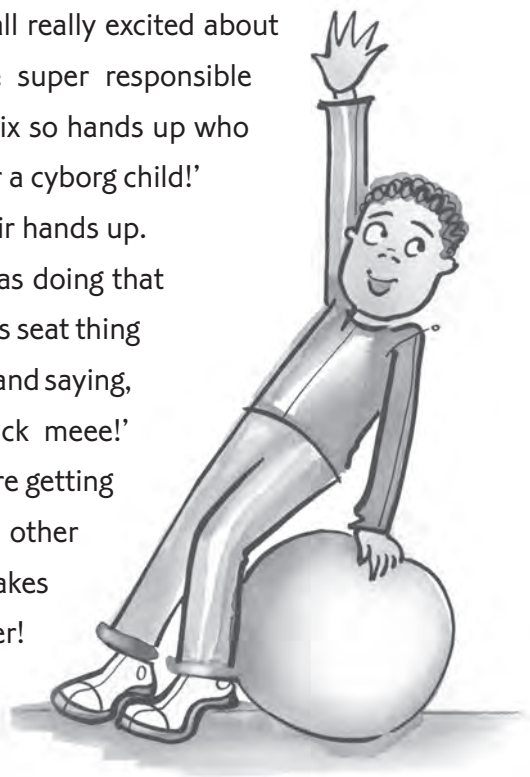
We will be coming into your Edu Hub every Monday, Wednesday and Friday this term. Remember a lot of things will seem strange to them, they've had a very protected life so far. I need the most reliable, gentle and helpful students in this class to work with these children.'



Mr Caldwell walked to the front and said, 'Thanks, Sophia, I know we're all really excited about this. We've got some super responsible children here in Year Six so hands up who would like to look after a cyborg child!'

Everyone stuck their hands up.

Everyone! Burak was doing that lifting his bottom off his seat thing so his hand was higher and saying, 'Please, Mr C! Me! Pick meee!' Franka and Felicity were getting one arm to hold the other hand up, like that makes their hand go up higher!



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And loads of people were making straining noises, like holding your arm up is as hard as weight lifting.

‘Well, I’m not picking any silly people who behave like they’re still in Reception! Lyla, how about you?’

‘Yes, Mr Caldwell,’ I said, ‘I’d love to!’

I heard Felicity whisper to someone, ‘Lyla? She draws on her hands!’

But I didn’t care! I was suddenly excited and nervous like you feel before you have to present your project to the class.

Mr Caldwell did his slow scanning round the class at all the straining arms, ‘James Defries, apart from your silly shouting out earlier I think you’d actually make quite a good mentor and now I need . . . one more . . .’

His eyes stopped at Louis who was, for once, sitting very quietly with his hand in the air like a model pupil.

‘Louis, really? You’ve been making some bad choices lately. Getting a bit silly. Do you really think you’d be a good mentor?’

‘Yes, sir! I would,’ Louis folded his arms across his chest and looked back at the class, ‘I can be OK . . . if I want to.’ Then he put his head down onto his folded

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arms and looked a little defeated, 'Plus I need something . . . better in my life right now. I'm having problems with . . .' His voice trailed away to a sigh. Sophia System 4002 turned towards Mr Caldwell and said really quietly, so only the people right at the front like me could hear, 'I sense sadness, why don't we give him a chance?'

'OK, Louis! You're our final volunteer!' said Mr Caldwell.

Burak muttered, 'Not fair!'

Louis went, 'Yess!' punched the air with his fist and shoved me lightly, 'Hey, Pie Face, we both got a cyborg!!'

'You said you wouldn't go near one 'cause of electrical diseases,' I whispered.

'Changed my mind,' shrugged Louis, 'These sound cool. They're from the Moon, gonna be high-spec.'

Then I whispered even more quietly, 'Are you sad?'

'Not now, I'm not!' Louis said, sitting up extra straight, looking all excited.

Sophia System 4002 smiled very brightly, 'Right, let's bring in our new friends!'



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A beautifully dressed girl walked in. She looked like an eleven-year-old girl only . . . better. Everything about her shimmered, her flawless skin, her glittery hair, her perfect shoes. The whole class went ‘Aaaah!’ softly like they’d just seen a firework. She stood there blinking her big eyes slowly and looking about at all of us.

‘Hello, everyone! My name is Clara 2.2.’



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Her voice wasn't anything like Mr Martinelli's robboty one. It was a calm, gentle voice. She didn't look nervous like I do when I have to stand up and talk in front of everyone. She didn't go, 'Um . . . er . . .' and she didn't go bright red and look down at her shoes. She just stood at the front looking all clean and said, 'I'm a second generation Clara, the first Claras were very good at maths but I am very good at maths and sport. I speak every Earth language and have two Moon dialects. I believe that friendship is the most valuable currency in the universe!'

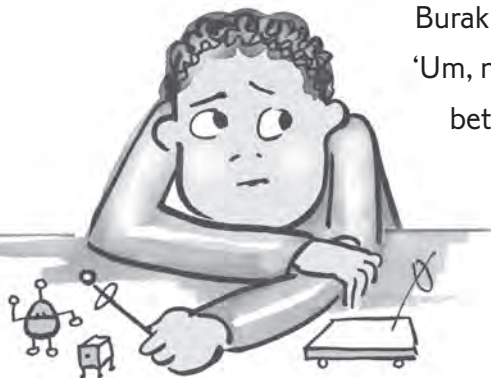
Felicity and Franka said, 'Ahh, so true!'

I heard Burak whisper to Mercedes, very quietly, 'Yuck. I'm going to be sick.'

It was way too quiet for Mr Caldwell, but Clara 2.2 turned her perfect head towards Burak and said, 'Are you unwell? May I assist you?'

Burak looked embarrassed, 'Um, no, I suddenly feel a bit better now, thanks!'

Clara 2.2 smiled at him, 'Oh good!'



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You organic children feel sick sometimes but cyborg children are never ill, we are here to understand your pain and help you. I am designed to bring you joy and laughter every day!’

‘Better if she brought us no maths tests and a five-day weekend!’ laughed Louis.

‘LOUIS!’ said Mr Caldwell.

Sophia System 4002 frowned at Louis and then called in the next cyborg, a boy with very neat black hair and a cheeky smile. He looked even more confident than Clara 2.2 and said, ‘Hi, guys! I’m Felix Tranquility X. I’m currently eleven point five years old and what is known as a peacekeeper. I’m diplomatic, calm and have been designed to be charming at all times. I am fully proficient in all subjects. I am what is known as a Universal Friend Model, meaning I can make friends with anybody!’



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‘Oh yeah! Try me,’ said Louis under his breath, ‘I’m the Universal Annoy Everyone Model.’

I smiled at him and whispered, ‘Only some of the time.’

But he’s right, he does do some stupid stuff, he’s been even more of an idiot this term wobbling about being Mr Wobbleman and he doesn’t really have a best friend. Felix Tranquility X looked straight at Louis from under his perfect eyebrows and said, ‘Just looking at you, human boy, I feel we have been friends forever. I feel we have shared secrets and played games in golden sun.’

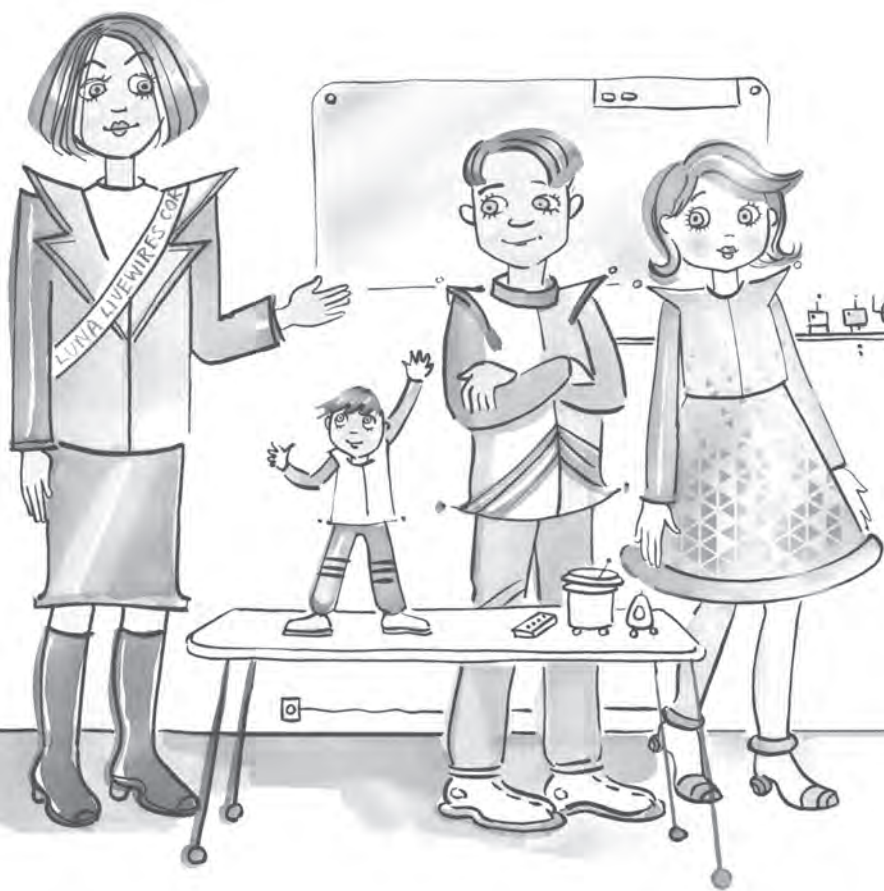
Louis just rolled his eyes and looked out of the window so Mr Caldwell came right over to his desk and hissed, ‘Louis, you have been given the opportunity to look after one of our cyborg friends today, but from the way you are currently behaving I am having doubts about letting you. Do I make myself quite clear?’

Louis nodded. Felix Tranquility X gave me a little friendly wink, but maybe it was just an electrical fault, anyway, I winked back. I was so excited – these children looked amazing! Especially compared to people like Louis!

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Then the last cyborg entered the classroom.

Except we didn't see him come in, we saw the door open but not him, because he was shorter than the desks! Sophia System 4002 picked him up so he could stand on the front desk while he introduced himself.



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He looked like a boy of about eleven but he was just very small. Felicity and some other girls went, 'Aaah, adorable!' and, 'Sooo cute!' but the little cyborg boy looked really cross and said, 'Excuse me! I am actually eleven! And I have a genius level IQ! I am proficient in all medicine and astrophysics and my name is Jasper Microrange Express. Yes, I am a compact product, but I am the future! In an overcrowded universe I function at a high level while taking up much less space. I also require fewer materials to produce. I am the way forward!'

'Wow!' said Louis, and then turned to me, 'I told you they'd be good. My real dad says stuff from the Moon Colonies is always top quality. That thing's amazing!'

'Thanks for your support,' said Jasper Microrange Express.

Louis shot his hand up, 'Mr Caldwell, can I be partners with that one, the little one!'

'Oh, all right, Louis can be with Jasper, and James you can be with Felix, and Lyla's with Clara 2.2.'

Clara 2.2 gave me this really friendly smile and did a tiny wave.

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Mr Caldwell went on, 'They are to stay with you all day, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, attend all lessons with you and understand what being at a normal Edu Hub with human children is like. Remember they are here to learn friendship so let's show them just how friendly we are at Lime Grove. If they get on well we might allow them to go to your homes for playdates at a later stage, to fully integrate them into our human world!'

Apart from Mercedes folding her arms across her chest and rolling her eyes at Mr Caldwell's babyish use of the word 'playdate', everyone else started chatting excitedly.



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Amia shouted, 'Mr C, can we take them swimming? Can they go in the Aquadome? Or will they like fuse or something?'

'What do they eat?' said Felicity. 'Are they gluten free? Vegan? Will we get the correct information concerning the cyborg diet?!'

Ridwan wanted to know if he might have an allergic reaction to cyborgs as he was pretty sensitive to some polymers and plastics and his mum might not be too keen to have one in the house.

Mr Caldwell waved his hands and said, 'OK! OK! Let's all calm down. Enough questions for now. I'm sure our new friends will be happy to explain all there is to know about being a cyborg child soon enough. Ah, look it's almost break. Outside everyone! Take your cyborgs!'

