

Quiet
STORM

KIMBERLY WHITTAM



USBORNE

FOR THE SHY KIDS. DON'T BE
AFRAID TO SHINE.

CHAPTER 1

First published in the UK in 2023 by Usborne Publishing Limited,
Usborne House, 83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England, usborne.com

Usborne Verlag, Usborne Publishing Limited, Prüfeninger Str. 20,
93049 Regensburg, Deutschland VK Nr. 17560

The right of Kimberly Whittam to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted
by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Cover illustration by Bex Glendining © Usborne Publishing Limited, 2023.

Cover typography by Thy Bui © Usborne Publishing Limited, 2023.

The name Usborne and the Balloon logo are Trade Marks of
Usborne Publishing Limited.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the
prior permission of the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues are products
of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to
actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 9781803708065 8773/1 JFM MJJASOND/23

Printed and bound using 100% renewable energy at CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY.

“Just chill.”

That is what Isaiah is telling me to do. But I'm finding it hard because he's icing a mountain of cupcakes in the kitchen and the school bell will ring in fifteen minutes. It would be a lot easier to chill if I could walk to school by myself.

“Why couldn't you have just bought Asda cakes like a normal person?” I sigh, sitting down at the table. I hope sitting here with my school bag across my shoulder will make him ice quicker but it doesn't, of course. As usual, Isaiah goes at his own pace.

“Being normal never gets you anywhere,” he says, delicately adding golden stars to each cupcake. I watch in frustration, realizing that he has at least ten cupcakes lined up on the counter that haven't been touched yet.

I look at the time. We're going to be late, which means that I'll have to walk into my form room as Mr Adams reads out the morning notices. I'm not bothered about missing the notices though, they're always the same. Mr Adams, my form tutor, gives us a boring lecture about how the overuse of our mobile phones and the smartness of our school uniform will determine the rest of our lives.

What I'm worried about is that Mr Adams will stop mid-sentence for me to explain why I'm late, and this means that everyone will be listening. It's alright for Isaiah. He doesn't feel his cheeks burn and his palms go clammy when walking into a group of people, like I do, so he doesn't understand why I panic when we're late in the mornings.

I clutch the straps of my school bag and take deep breaths. Miss Scott, the teaching assistant in my form group, said that I should count to ten whenever I feel anxious – which happens to be all of the time when I have Isaiah as a big brother.

Isaiah is *far* from normal. If he's not winning science competitions or protesting social injustice, he's baking cakes for the school charity bake sale or playing the drums in the school band. He is the poster boy for everything you can accomplish if you follow the school's motto: ASPIRE, ACHIEVE, SUCCEED.

"Relax, no one is going to be staring at you," he says as I complain for the millionth time. He puts a lopsided iced cupcake in front of me as a way to calm my nerves.

"I don't need a cupcake; I need you to hurry up," I say pushing the iced chocolate cupcake away. He carries on creating iced swirls as I put my head down in defeat.

I was worried about this when I first found out that I was going to Daisy Mill Academy. Miss Cassidy, my Year Six teacher, made everyone in my class write down their worries about moving up to secondary school.

My list included:

- Being away from my friends.
- Having to meet new people.
- Isaiah.

Miss Cassidy told me that I didn't have to worry. Most of my friends were starting at Daisy Mill too. Only Yasmin Bhatti and Louis Harrow went to a different secondary school. She said that I wouldn't just have my friends from primary, including my best friend Zarrish, but I would also make new friends. As for Isaiah, she told me how lucky I was to have a big brother like him to show me the ropes of secondary school.

Well, Miss Cassidy, it turns out you were wrong. Big time. I'm the only person from my primary school in my new

form group. It's now March and I haven't made any friends since starting Year Seven last September. Meanwhile, Zarrish is in a different form group and hasn't found making friends hard at all. The only lesson that I actually like is PE, and that's just because the form groups are mixed and Zarrish and I are together. Besides PE, all of my other lessons are truly awful. During the first week of school, every single teacher had the exact same reaction when I answered my name on the lesson register.

"Who is Storm Williams?" my teachers asked scanning the classroom. Each time I raised my hand warily, knowing what was coming next.

"How wonderful it is to be teaching Isaiah's little sister," they beamed.

The sparkle in their eyes soon faded when they realized that I'm nothing like my big brother. Unlike Isaiah, I don't get the best grades and I definitely don't get involved in school activities. I'm not on the student council or the debate team, and I definitely don't play an instrument like Isaiah. I was worried about coming to secondary school and having so many teachers, but most of them have already given up on asking me to contribute to class discussions or share my work with everyone at the end of the lesson. Even when I've got the answer right, the awkwardness of me nervously

stumbling over my words makes me feel like I've got it all wrong.

My absolute worst lesson is maths. My form tutor, Mr Adams, teaches my maths class and I spend all lesson trying to keep up with him, which isn't easy because he speeds through questions like he's entering a competition for the most equations spoken in a minute.

I liked English at first, when we were writing, but now we're reading aloud and Mrs Osei makes everyone have a turn. I can't even follow the story because I'm too worried about speaking aloud, and then it gets to my turn and I have no idea where we're up to. Then I get flustered as I try to find my place on the page. It's awful. It's not that I can't read. I can. I just hate everyone listening to me read. Even though my eyes are glued to the page, I can feel everyone staring at me and it makes my voice shake and my mouth dry. When I eventually finish reading, I spend the rest of the lesson thinking about how terrible I was.

Then there is Isaiah. Isaiah is everywhere, yet never where I need him to be. Like right now, I need him to be out of the door so we're not late. I need him to stop talking to people for twenty minutes after school, so I'm not waiting in the dining hall on my own. I need him to stop being such a show-off, so that everyone stops calling me "Isaiah's little sister".

I look at my phone again.

“Isaiah, we have ten minutes!”

I don’t know why Mum insists that we have to walk to school together. It’s only across Princess Road and through Alexandra Park. Besides, if something did happen – like a lightning strike or we get kidnapped by aliens – I don’t know what Isaiah is going to do about it. He’s tall and scrawny just like me. Maybe he could bore our kidnappers to death with his knowledge of computer code or his rants about how we’re all going to kill the planet with our selfish consumption of plastic and fast fashion.

“Why are you two still here?” Mum says, coming into the kitchen through the back door. She has to sidestep into the doorway to avoid the buckets of cement that have taken over our garden. Mum is having her dream kitchen put in. She says that the new kitchen will be better than our current one because it will have an island, and that’s all Mum has talked about for ages. Her dream is currently a nightmare though. There are pipes and concrete and sawdust everywhere. She keeps the back door open for Minnie, our over-energetic boxer dog, who is too busy eyeing up squirrels on the bird feeder to come inside. I point to Isaiah with a scowl.

“Isaiah Jackson Williams! Could you have not done that

last night?” Mum tuts, reaching for a cake tin big enough to fit Isaiah’s cupcakes.

“I had to wait for the cakes to cool,” Isaiah says, reaching for more sprinkles.

“Careful man,” he shouts, taking the tin away from her. Mum gives him *the look* and he quickly goes back to icing.

“Can I not walk to school by myself?” I plead.

Mum shakes her head. “No. Your brother is ready now,” she says, turning back to him. “Isaiah, come on now, be fair to your sister please.”

Isaiah kisses his teeth. “I’m trying to save the planet here.”

“With cupcakes?” I laugh, fixing my unruly black curls into a bun. It doesn’t last very long, so I give up, allowing my curls to fall in whichever direction they choose.

“These cupcakes are going to help build a well in Zambia. I don’t see you doing anything to help.”

I put my bag on my shoulder and march out of the kitchen, shaking off the flour dust that has somehow managed to cover my school blazer. I dodge past Mum’s roller skates and the musical instruments that Dad has lined up to take to his next gig to reach the front door.

“I’m ready,” Isaiah declares, shoving past me without a single speck of flour or icing on his immaculate school uniform. Mum follows us out of the door and into the front garden.

“Straight home. It’s family night tonight. We’re going bowling like you asked for.”

“We’re going to have an after-school detention for being late!” I groan.

“Little sister, can you relax? How can they give me a detention? I’m Head Boy!” Isaiah smiles, opening the garden gate and heading across the road.

“I have a name, you know,” I say, shaking off the last of the icing dust from my blazer before running after him, trying to catch up.

Sometimes I wonder how Isaiah managed to become Head Boy. He’s always late and causes absolute chaos wherever he goes. I overtake him as he smiles at his phone that is constantly pinging. I get a stitch in my side as I pick up pace. As we reach the school gates, I see Mr Peterson, the Headteacher, closing the student entrance doors. I break into a run. Isaiah continues to stroll in his usual chilled-out fashion. Mr Peterson stands in the middle of the student entrance with his high-vis jacket on, shouting “Hoody off!” and “Pencil cases ready!” as he prepares to hand out detentions to the late arrivals. I think this is Mr Peterson’s favourite time of day, except for after-school detention of course.

“Ah, Isaiah Williams, just the man,” Mr Peterson grins as

we approach him. “I need you at lunchtime,” he continues as people slip past him. I creep past too, grateful that my brother’s popularity with teachers means that I’ve dodged Mr Peterson’s inspection.

“Hide me!”

I turn round to see Ryan Taylor crouched down behind me.

“Don’t look at me!” he whispers loudly, using my bag to sandwich himself between me and the wall to the Student Services office. He’s pretty small so it covers him completely.

“Act normal.”

My eyes move around frantically not knowing where to look. I see Ms Morrison walking past with her walkie-talkie in hand, her ultra-high heels limiting her speed. She’s holding a football that has *Property of Ryan Taylor* scrawled across it in big letters. Ms Morrison is my science teacher, who also happens to be the Deputy Head. She’s in charge of behaviour, so she’s stricter than most teachers. I used to like her because she has curly hair like me. Except her hair is much shorter and dyed red, which is totally against school rules. I guess teachers have their own rules. Her brown skin is just a shade darker than mine and I’m not too sure if her oval-framed glasses are for her eyesight or style, but she pulls them off. I stopped liking her when she made my entire class stay

behind after a total fool (Ryan) threw a water balloon out of the classroom window and splashed a group of Year-Nine girls, who rushed up to our lesson for a fight. I watch as she walks over to Mr Peterson. He shakes his head and they both walk away.

“She’s gone,” I whisper as people walk past us and stare at the partially hidden Ryan behind me.

“Phew, that was a close one,” he says, standing back up.

I carry on walking, hoping to get as far away from Ryan Taylor as possible. Ryan has caused nothing but trouble since the day we both started in September. If he’s not throwing water balloons out of classroom windows, he’s being chased by Year Tens for kicking their football up on the roof, or being told off for selling sweets in the schoolyard. Wherever Ryan is, a teacher is never far behind, ready to escort him to whatever punishment awaits. Unfortunately for me, Ryan is in my form and our surnames mean that we sit next to each other in most lessons, so his trouble is never far away from me.

“I was just playing footie against the wall. It’s not my fault the ball hit the staffroom window. It was an accident!” he protests.

“Why do you have to make everything so hard for yourself?” I mutter, continuing my hurried walk to class.

“Says you!”

I stare at him. I wonder what he means by that, but I don’t ask. Instead, I look at my phone again. I have two minutes to make it to form.

Ryan follows me up the stairs and down the corridor to our form room. I’m trying my best to walk as fast as I can, but I get stuck behind a group of Year-Ten girls, who aren’t in nearly as much of a hurry as me. I try to look for a way round them, but I’m stuck. They don’t seem to be able to walk and talk at the same time, and the way they keep stopping every time they burst into laughter makes me groan in frustration. I look at my phone. One minute before the bell goes. As I look around for an escape route, my eyes follow Ryan, who reaches up and taps one of the girls on the shoulder. As they turn round, they leave just enough space for Ryan to squeeze through without them noticing him.

“Yeah?” the scary-looking Year Ten snarls at me. I look towards Ryan, hoping to signal that it wasn’t me who tapped her, but he disappears down the corridor leaving me alone.

“Did you want something?” she huffs. I rest my hands on my legs to stop them from trembling nervously. I shake my head and she turns round, not before giving me a dirty look. I walk silently behind them before they head into their form room, to my relief. I carry on walking but the sound of squeals

getting closer with every footstep I take makes me slow down. I've managed to catch up with Ryan.

"Isn't Ms Morrison after you for kicking a football? You probably shouldn't be walking around with another one," I say, keeping one eye on the ball that is being thrown across the corridor.

"This isn't a football though, is it? It's a basketball," he grins.

"I don't think Ms Morrison cares what kind of—"

"Heads!"

Just as I'm trying to explain to Ryan that he doesn't make sense and is just going to get into more trouble, he hurls the basketball at Abdul – except it misses and hits the maths-office door. There's a pause. Everyone starts to scramble out of the corridor and I have no choice but to run too, as teachers poke their heads out of the maths-office looking for culprits.

I slow down at the sight of Mr Adams opening our form-room door.

"Got away with it," Ryan brags, dodging another teacher to make it safely into our form room.

I make it to my seat just in time as Mr Adams sits down at his untidy desk. He scratches the top of his wafer-thin brown hair, as he scurries round flicking through sheets

of paper and muttering to himself. He pauses for a minute, his green eyes squinting as if he's trying his best to remember something. I cross my fingers hoping that he doesn't.

"Right, it's quiz time," Mr Adams remembers. He starts rummaging through piles of paper, kept under scientific calculators and protractors, to find the weekly quiz folder. I slouch back in my chair, disappointed that he didn't forget. Ignoring the tower of compasses that he has just knocked off his desk, he sits back on his chair, adjusting his Manchester United football tie that he never seems to take off. Mr Adams is just as chaotic as his desk. The calendar on the wall next to him hasn't changed since October last year and he always forgets to do the register until he gets a phone call from the attendance officer. The only thing he remembers is the behaviour policy. Our form holds the Year Seven record for uniform points and late detentions.

A chorus of groans ripples through the room at the announcement of the weekly quiz. I look at the clock on the wall. Form time is only supposed to be twenty minutes, yet it feels like the longest part of the day.

"Sir, can we choose our own groups for once?" Asha asks from the seat opposite me.

Mr Adams pauses to think about it. My stomach lurches. *Please say no. Please say no. Please say no.*

“Fine, but any messing about and you’re back to working on your tables.”

I watch as everyone leaps out of their assigned seats to their friends, while I stay glued to my chair in a swirl of panic. What should I do? I skim the classroom quickly. My hair feels itchy as the sound of giggling and chatter grows louder. I don’t fit in anywhere. I always stick with Zarrish at social times and I don’t speak up in class, so I’ve never spoken to anyone enough to be friends with them. I prefer it when the teacher has a seating plan, so I don’t have to worry about who I sit next to.

“Storm,” Mr Adams points to me, interrupting my panic. “Come on, hurry up and sit with a friend.”

I put my hands on my face so nobody will notice that I’ve gone bright red. I look at Mr Adams hoping he’ll just let me stay here on my own, but he’s not noticing my panic. I’m not brave enough to tell him so my feet stay frozen as he looks at me with confusion.

“Just sit with Grace’s table. Come on, we haven’t got much time,” Mr Adams says forcing me to move to the middle table. I stand up and glance over to Grace and the rest of her table, who give each other funny looks as I make my way over. Everyone on this table went to the same primary school. I think this is totally unfair, since I wasn’t put in a

form with anyone from my old primary school. As they’ve known each other the longest, they’ve always stuck together and never let anyone into their group voluntarily. I pretend I don’t notice their disapproval of me joining their group and sit down, pulling my chair slightly away from them.

“Okay, first question,” Mr Adams says. “What is the capital of Australia?”

I know this one. It’s Canberra. I did a project about Australia when I was in Year Six.

“It’s Sydney,” Grace says, writing her answer down. She’s wrong. I look round the table hoping someone else will correct her. Sara and Iman are sat texting on their phones. Lucy is asleep with her head on the desk and Jenna is talking to the group behind her.

“Come on, don’t forget the winners will win a prize,” Mr Adams mutters trying his best to sound enthusiastic.

“Name the national dish of France,” Mr Adams continues. I know this one too, it’s *Pot-au-Feu*. I learned that in French last week.

“Is anyone going to help?” Grace huffs, slamming down her pen.

“It’s only a quiz,” Iman shrugs, continuing to scroll through her phone instead of taking part.

“Yeah and the prize is only a box of chocolates,” Lucy

yawns, using her school jumper as a pillow.

I look round the table as Grace grows impatient with her friends. I open my mouth to tell Grace the answer but she gets there before me. "Do you ever speak?" she asks looking at me, her eyes wide, as if she's expecting an answer. I do want to answer her. I want to ask her why she is singling me out when no one else on the table is helping with the quiz, but I can only manage a jittery shrug. Grace rolls her eyes as Mr Adams reads out the last few questions. I stay silent and flick through my planner so it doesn't make it obvious that I'm not joining in. I'm saved by the bell that rings out for period one. Once Mr Adams dismisses us, I rush out of the classroom, relieved that the form-time quiz is over for another week.

The doors to the PE department swing open, knocking me over as a group of Year-Eleven boys rush past. I manage to style it out by turning my tumble into a quick jump down the steps and see Zarrish waiting by our usual meeting place near the PE noticeboard.

"Hey!" I shout over to her, dropping my bag from my now throbbing shoulder and smiling as she walks over. Miss Scott is always telling me to put my PE kit in my locker, but it's on

the top floor of F-block. Not only is that on the other side of school, but it's also in the sixth-form building. The one time that I did try to go to my locker, a bunch of sixth formers were blocking it. I walked past them five times but I was too scared to interrupt their conversation and ask them to move. I haven't been back since.

"Storm – finally!" Zarrish smiles waving a purple Pankhurst House slip in her hand.

There are four houses at Daisy Mill Academy: Turing House, Lowry House, Gaskell House and Pankhurst House. There are two form groups from each year group in each house. Luckily, my best friend Zarrish is in Pankhurst House like me.

"I've been called to Mrs Osei," she beams. My English teacher, Mrs Osei, is also head of Pankhurst House and being sent to her is not like being sent to Mr Peterson or Ms Morrison. As well as being called to her for giving cheek in lessons or fighting in the schoolyard, you can be called to Mrs Osei for good reasons too. Zarrish is never bad so she must have been chosen to do a house duty like giving visitors a tour of the school.

"Wait, does that mean you won't be in PE?" I ask, feeling my heartbeat quicken. My hands already feel clammy at the thought.

“I don’t know, sorry,” Zarrish says seeing the panic scrawled across my face. She holds out her purple slip to me as she takes out a polka-dot scrunchie to redo her high ponytail. I glance down at it. Mrs Osei’s perfect handwriting makes it look more like a fancy wedding invitation than a note to go to the house office. It doesn’t say when Zarrish will be back in lesson.

“I could only be a few minutes, although I hope it’s longer so I don’t have to get changed for PE,” she says with a glint in her eye. “I’ll meet you at our usual place at break if I’m not back in time.

“Don’t worry, you’ll be fine,” she adds, although I’m not sure if she believes this herself.

I head towards the girls’ changing rooms as Zarrish leaves through the PE doors. I’ve never done PE without Zarrish. I really hope that we don’t have partners in today’s lesson. I see Asha and Koko’s things on the hook beside the front bench. They must have gone with Miss Scott, the teaching assistant for my class. The corridors become super crammed in between lessons; Asha leaves form early so her wheelchair doesn’t get knocked. Koko only leaves early for PE and at lunchtimes, because she needs to go to the medical room to check her sugar levels. She has diabetes, so when she’s high she drinks water and when she’s low she has a can of Coke

or a biscuit. Since Koko and Asha are the only girls from my form group in my PE class and Zarrish isn’t here, I get changed as fast as I can. I pull on my PE top and place my uniform on the hooks quickly. I get more flustered as I root through my PE bag. I was so busy trying to get Isaiah out of the door this morning that I totally forgot that I’d left my trainers drying by the front doorstep. I have no choice but to go out onto the field in my black school shoes.

“Koko, stop doing cartwheels and sit down please,” I hear Mr Harris, my PE teacher, bellow from the far end of the field. I walk past the football pitches and Astroturf to make my way to Mr Harris, who is over by the sandpit. I step on the white lines that have been painted on the grass to form track lines, looking for clues about what our new unit is going to be. “Come on, hurry up and sit down near the benches,” Mr Harris shouts at the rest of my class, who are dawdling over. Mr Harris is wearing the same Oldham Athletic Football Club jacket that he wears every day. I like Mr Harris, because even though he spends way too much time gleefully reminding us that Oldham Athletic made it to the fourth round of the FA cup, he never raises his voice and he pretends not to notice when everyone uses the vending machine in the gym – which is supposed to be strictly for sixth formers only. I sit down cautiously on the wet grass,

my hands on my shoes hoping no one will notice. Not caring how wet the grass is, Koko crashes down beside me. She takes a pen from her jumper pocket and begins doodling flowers on her hand.

“Today we will be starting athletics,” Mr Harris announces. “Can anyone share any athletics events with the rest of the class?” Mr Harris asks.

I’ve seen athletics on the TV. I know that there is a one-hundred-metre and a two-hundred-metre race. I know about hurdles and relay races. There is also javelin and long jump.

“Nobody?” Mr Harris asks scratching his mousy brown hair.

Asha, who is just behind Mr Harris near the benches, raises her hand. Her hand dances in the air as Mr Harris scans the crowd for other raised hands.

“Like running, sir?” she blurts out, not waiting for Mr Harris’s permission to speak.

“Yes, well done, Asha!”

Asha flicks her long shiny black hair behind her shoulders and sits up straight.

“I want everyone to line up on the beginning of the track,” Mr Harris instructs, gesturing for the class to move with him across the field.

I stand back up and brush my hands dry, ducking out of

Koko’s path as she keeps her eyes firmly on her doodling.

“Today we will be focusing on the four hundred metres, where you will run once around the track,” Mr Harris says from the sidelines. Asha is beside him with her stopwatch in hand. The track is almost the entire length of the field and Mr Harris wants us to run all the way round? I’ve never run that far before. I stand on the starting line, my school shoes touching the freshly painted white lines on the grass. “Come on, Year Seven, this is a race!” Mr Harris claps his hands. Everyone barges to the starting line as soon as they hear that it’s a competition. I’m elbowed a few times before I find myself at the back. So far in PE, we’ve only done badminton and orienteering. This is the first time we’ve had to go up against each other. As I look around at everyone else, my heart quickens and I wipe my clammy hands on my leggings.

“Is everyone ready?” Mr Harris asks, holding his whistle. I take a deep breath and try to shake off this morning. I try to forget about almost getting a detention for being late, because of Isaiah and his golden-sprinkled cupcakes. About Ryan Taylor and the scary Year Tens in the corridor. About Grace singling me out in the quiz, even though no one else was saying anything, and that Zarrish isn’t here beside me.

“On your marks. Get set. Go!”

My feet spring off the starting line at the sound of the

whistle. I almost tumble to the ground, but I lift my arms outwards quickly to steady myself. I manage to regain my balance and I find myself zooming down the track. I close my eyes and feel the wind whooshing behind me.

“Who is that?”

I open my eyes immediately. I forgot where I was for a moment but as I look around, I see that I’m in the lead. I don’t like the feeling of being out on my own with everyone watching, so I slow down gently to allow people to overtake me.

“Come on, Storm, keep going!” Mr Harris shouts. Some of my class turn round to see who Mr Harris is talking to before creating a clear path in the middle. I have no choice but to run between them, keeping my head down as I go. As I turn the bend of the corner, Teija Pritchard, from Zarrish’s form group, zooms past me. Unlike me, she doesn’t seem to care about the people around her – she shouts, “MOVE!” at the people who have decided to walk round the track.

She’s captain of every Year-Seven sports team, so it doesn’t surprise me that she sprints down the track at full speed. “Come on, Storm,” Miss Scott shouts from the sidelines. “Ignore everyone else, just go for it,” she calls, with an encouraging smile.

I think about it. Maybe I should follow her advice.

Just go for it.

I allow my feet to take over and sprint, fighting the urge to look back. I only look forward.