

The
EXPLODING
Life
of
Scarlett
Fife



MAZ EVANS

ILLUSTRATED BY CHRIS JEVONS

HODDER CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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For Veronique

Who regularly stops me from exploding.

Thank you for being my clay pot.

Xxx





Scarlett



Maisie



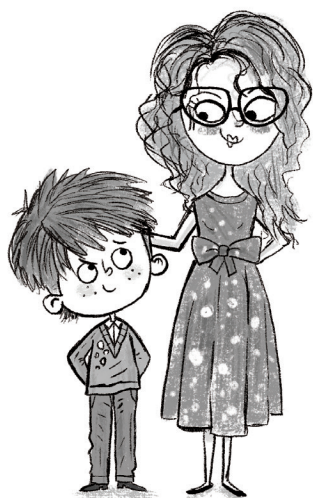
Polly



Ms Pitt-Bull



Aunty Amara Aunty Rosa



William U and his Mum



Emmeline

Jakub



Gran



Rita



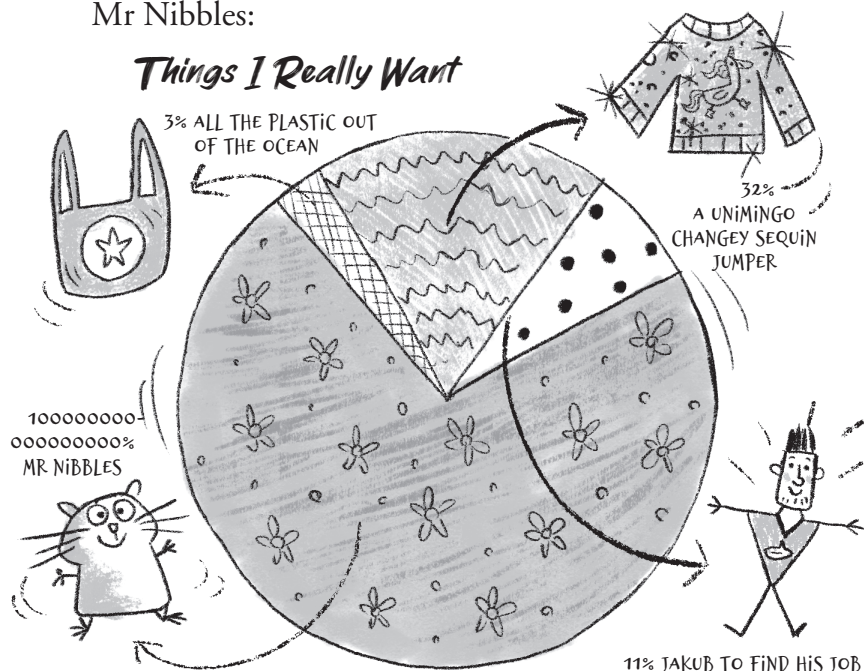
Bruce

CHAPTER 1

I AM SO ANGRY I THINK MY BUM MIGHT FALL OFF!!!!

Mr Nibbles was mine!!! Mine!!! Not stupid William U's!!!! Mine!!!!

Here is a pie chart that proves how much I want Mr Nibbles:



And I don't even care that this pie chart doesn't actually add up to a hundred per cent like pie charts actually should. (*Which I'd normally really care about, by the way, because that's how pie charts work and that's why I'm on The Purple Table in Maths, which we all know is the best one, but we have to pretend that all the Maths tables are the same, even though The Green Table still haven't learned their three times table and probably think a pie chart is a menu in a cafe.*) THAT'S how much I WANT MR NIBBLES!!

(*By the way, I really want Mr Nibbles.*)

Let me explain something:

Mr Nibbles is Rainbow Class's pet hamster and



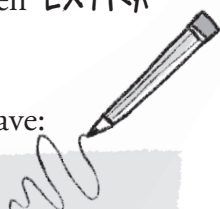
everyone at St Lidwina's Primary School loves him (*except for Vashti because she says it's important to be an individual, which is why she never brushes her hair.*)



Every week, everyone really wants to get the most Positivity Points so they can be Star of the Week and look after Mr Nibbles for the weekend.

I REALLY wanted Mr Nibbles to come home with me this weekend, so I have been **EXTRA SUPER MEGA GOOD**.

To get the most Positivity Points, I have:



★ Sharpened all the pencils at playtime (*even though Darcy had the new UniMingo hairbrush and she said it was my turn to try it at playtime after Milly and Roshin, but only if Milly didn't have nits any more like she did at Parva's hair-braiding party and we all got them and school had to send A Letter Home*).

★ Said thank you *all* the time (*even when I didn't mean it, like when the dinner ladies put broccoli on my plate, because the only place broccoli should EVER be put is in vegetable prison*).

★ Learned my eight times tables backwards



(although I wanted to do that because Maths is my favourite and I'm really good at it, which is why I'm on The Purple Table).

★ Helped to clean up the dinner hall after lunchtime *(even though it looked like the bottom of the monkey enclosure at a wildlife park after the monkeys had a party and then had to leave calmly and quietly for a fire alarm).*

This was what the top of the Positivity Chart looked like when I got to school this morning:

SCARLETT: 29

MATTHEW: 27

MAISIE: 25

WILLIAM U: 24

VASHTI: 23



(I was a bit worried when Vashti got four Positivity



Points for actually brushing her hair for the school photo, but she broke Darcy's UniMingo hairbrush doing it, so the points came right back off again.)

Mr Nibbles was mine. I was all ready for him and even made a special Mr Nibbles area in my bedroom with:

★ A bed.

★ A bath.

★ An obstacle course (*I don't want him to get bored*).

★ A book (*in case he wakes up in the night with bad dreams and can't sleep*).

★ A night light (*I don't want him to be scared and wake up with bad dreams*).

★ A teddy (*which I took out because it was bigger than him and I thought it might give him bad dreams despite the night light and then he might not like the book to get back to sleep*).

I was **SUPER EXCITED** because I've never

had Mr Nibbles before ...

And then this afternoon I went to the Positivity Chart to see:

WILLIAM U: 32

SCARLETT: 29

MATTHEW: 27

VASHTI: 26 *(She borrowed someone else's brush for the school photo.)*

MAISIE: 25



... and William U
standing smugly next to
Mr Nibbles's cage.

'WHAT?????!!!!'

I shouted. **'EIGHT
POSITIVITY POINTS?
HOW DID YOU
GET EIGHT**

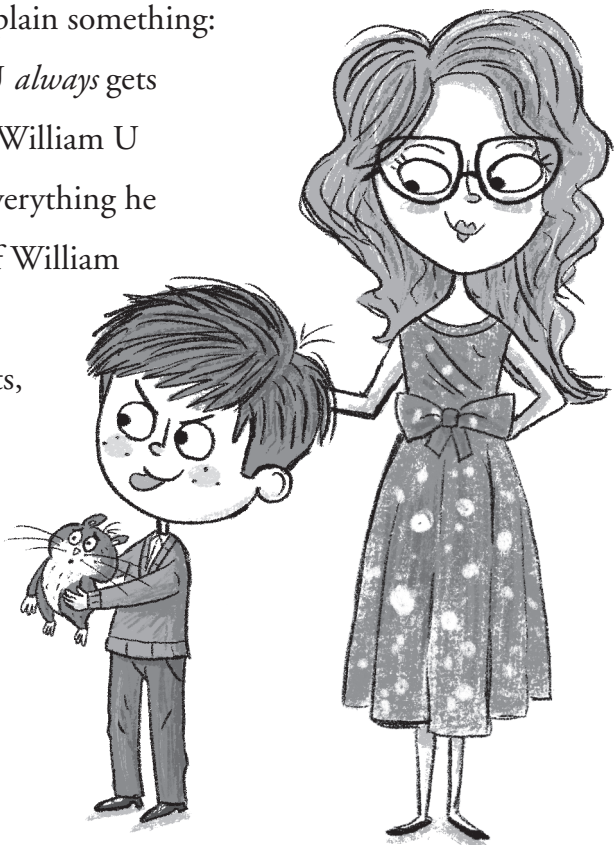
POSITIVITY POINTS? When the dinner ladies accidentally set the fish fingers on fire, the firefighters who saved the school didn't get **EIGHT POSITIVITY POINTS!** How did you ...?'

But then I followed his smug look in the direction of Mrs Underwood. Our teaching assistant.

And also William U's mum.

Let me explain something:

William U *always* gets Mr Nibbles. William U *always* gets everything he wants. And if William U doesn't get what he wants, William U's mum *always* gets it for him.



William U *always* gets loads of Positivity Points and has *never* been on The Cloud for making bad choices, even though he should live on The Cloud because he's super mean to everyone, but especially me because:

1) I'm much better than William U at Maths and he likes to be best at everything.

2) The one time William U came to my house for a playdate, he tried to pull the head off my UniMingo slippers and I told on him and my mum told his mum and although he never gets in trouble with his mum, he's never forgiven me for telling on him.

3) William U probably can't think of a third thing because I'm better than him at Maths.

(By the way, William U isn't to be confused with William D who can name all the dinosaurs and once ate a snail, even though William D WASN'T in France and the snail WAS in his garden.)



William U's mum used to work as a lawyer with my Aunt Rosa (*which is how bogie-head William U got invited to her engagement party, so I've got to see him tonight as WELL as all day at school*). Aunt Rosa told me that William U's mum used to get upset about people not getting paid enough, and people being treated unfairly, and people's human rights not being respected.

But then William U's mum gave up being a lawyer and had William U. So now William U's mum mainly gets upset about What Upset William.

On sports day, What Upset William was Felix beating him in the running race and getting a Special Sticker. William U's mum said that William U had Competition Aversion Syndrome so he should get a Special Sticker just for taking part. (*By the way, William U's mum says William U has lots of syndromes. Some of them are so new that the doctors don't even know about them. But William U's*

mum finds them on www.MyChildCentre.Universe and that makes them true.) But then What Upset William was that he only wanted Felix's gold Special Sticker, so William U's mum said that William U had Selective Sticker Syndrome and made Felix swap with him.

A few months ago, What Upset William was our old teaching assistant, Mr Chance, threatening to put William U on The Cloud for scribbling on Maisie's poem about worms. William U's mum (*who is also a school governor and head of the PTA, by the way*) told our old head teacher that not only was William U allergic to worm poems (*William U is allergic to everything, by the way, including green vegetables, homework, sitting next to Freddie and Spanish*), but that maybe it would be a good idea if William U's mum became Rainbow Class's teaching assistant instead of Mr Chance and also would the school like the PTA to buy every class a new laptop?



So this week, What Upset William was me getting Mr Nibbles. William U's mum said he had Hamster Co-Dependency Syndrome and gave him EIGHT POSITIVITY POINTS for sharpening the pencils, which was **TOTALLY** unfair because when I sharpened the pencils, she only gave me THREE POSITIVITY POINTS.

I went to ask my teacher Miss Hugg about it, but William U's mum came over and, although I couldn't hear exactly what they were talking about, William U's mum whispered something about Miss Hugg's application to the governors for a 'celery increase'. (*Which is weird, by the way – why would anyone want more celery? It should be in the cell next to broccoli in vegetable prison.*) Then Miss Hugg went very quiet and William U got Mr Nibbles and I got some **BIG FEELINGS** about it.

Let me explain something:

I am 135 cm and weigh 26 kg. Sometimes my



feelings must be at least 136 cm and weigh over 27 kg because they just don't fit inside me: these are my **BIG FEELINGS**. They bubble up inside me and before I can do anything about them, they come out of my mouth. The angry **BIG FEELINGS** get me in quite a lot of trouble, but I really can't help it. I have especially **BIG FEELINGS** about William U getting Mr Nibbles when it was my turn.

It's now playtime and I am SUPER ANGRY and I can feel the bubbles of angry in my tummy. But Maisie (*who, by the way, is my best forever friend in the whole wide world*) is telling me to 'Just Calm Down'. Telling someone to 'Just Calm Down' when they are angry is like telling someone to 'just hold it in' when they really need a wee. It's going to come out no matter what anyone says (*but at least with angry feelings you don't have to go home with your tights in a Special Bag like Milly did after the Year 2 Christmas disco*).



‘Scarlett,’ Maisie says calmly, ‘you need to get some perspective.’

Maisie talks a lot about perspective, which she says is about looking differently at something. Maisie always has a different perspective. Maybe it's because she doesn't have a mum and dad and she's grown up with lots of foster families. Or maybe it's because she wears red glasses.

‘You just have to accept it,’ Maisie says. ‘William U is Star of the Week. It’s *a feta company*.’

‘What does that mean?’ I ask her.

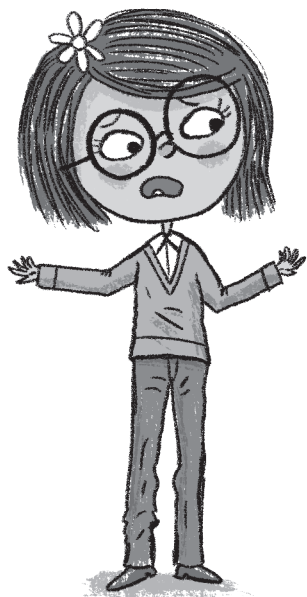
‘It’s French for “nothing you can do about it”,’ Maisie explains (*by the way, Maisie is super good at words, even in different languages*). ‘So you didn’t get Mr Nibbles? Think of all the children who don’t have enough to eat, or don’t have a home to live in.’

So I think about all the children who don't have enough to eat or a home to live in and now I feel really angry for them and I still don't have

Mr Nibbles this weekend, so I kick the climbing frame, which makes me fall over and now I have a sore foot and a sore bum, those children still don't have enough to eat or homes to live in, and I **STILL DON'T HAVE MR NIBBLES**, so I'm just going to shout a bit.

'I think your perspective needs a little more work,' Maisie says quietly as I yell on the playground floor.

Maybe I need to get red glasses too.





CHAPTER 1+1

It's my aunties' engagement party tonight and I'm still SUPER angry. I told my mum and Jakub about Mr Nibbles and the Positivity Points and William U's Hamster Co-Dependency Syndrome in the car on the way to Auntie Rosa's Big Posh House.

'So that's what William's got now,' sighed my mum, giving Jakub The Look that meant she didn't want to say Something Not Appropriate in front of me, like, 'Actually, I think William U has Stinky Bum-Head Syndrome,' which was what we were all thinking anyway, so she might as well have said it.

So I said it instead.

'I think William U has Stinky Bum-Head Syndrome,' I grumble.

‘Scarlett – that’s Not Appropriate,’ Mum said, giving Jakub the Look that meant she completely agreed with me.

‘It’s not fair!’ I shouted. ‘I had the most Positivity Points! I should be Star of the Week! Mr Nibbles should be at the engagement party with *me!*’

Mum and Jakub laughed.

‘Oh, pickle,’ Jakub said with a smile. ‘This would never happen! No parent in their right mind would let a child bring a hamster to an engagement party!’

An hour later, I am watching William U play with Mr Nibbles at the engagement party.

‘My William’s struggling with Parental Denial Discontentment Syndrome,’ William U’s mum whispers to mine as she looks proudly at William feeding Mr Nibbles some ham and cheese quiche straight from the buffet table (*William U’s mum always calls William U ‘my William’, by the way, which is weird because it’s not like anyone else would want him*).



‘I do not understand this?’ Jakub asks. English is Jakub’s second language as he was born in Poland. Sometimes he needs to ask about English words, because English words don’t always make sense to him. I *totally* understand that because English words don’t always make sense to me either and I wasn’t born in Poland. Numbers make sense:

$$1 + 1 = 2$$

$$18 - 3 = 15$$

$$8 \times 8 = 64$$



(I remember the last one, by the way, by saying, 'I ate and I ate until I was sick on the floor, eight times eight equals sixty-four.')

But words don't always make sense and too many words sound like too many other words. When Mum told me when I was six that 'Jakub's going to be your stepdaddy', I thought we were going to use him to get into the loft.



‘So what is this “Parental Denial Discontentment Syndrome”?’ Jakub asks William U’s mum.

‘Oh, it’s very new,’ says William U’s mum seriously. ‘There’s a whole thread about it on www.MyChildCentre.Universe. It’s when a child has an extremely negative response to not being allowed something.’

‘Ah yes – I had this same condition as a child,’ Jakub says, eating a huge piece of quiche. (*Jakub is always eating, by the way. He can fit two crumpets in his mouth at once – FACT.*) ‘I got very cross when my mother refused to allow me to watch television late on a school night.’

‘Really?’ says William U’s mum, looking actually surprised. ‘What did she do?’

‘Sent me to my room and told me not to come out until I’d stopped being such a spoiled baby,’ Jakub says. ‘It was very good medicine.’

Mum spits out some of her Bubbly Mummy



Juice. William U's mum looks as if she has some **BIG FEELINGS** about Jakub but then walks away to make sure Nothing Is Upsetting William.

‘Emi, darling,’ booms a voice behind Mum. Jakub jumps. My granny always makes Jakub jump. My granny makes a lot of people jump, but not me because she’s my granny and always gives me sweets. Mum says it’s because she’s ‘formidable’, which means someone who makes people jump.

‘Hi, Mum,’ says my mum, giving Granny a kiss.
‘How are you? How are you feeling?’

‘Pah!’ says Granny, giving me a big cuddle. ‘It was nothing. Doctors making a big fuss over a silly cold.’

'It was pneumonia,' says Mum quietly. 'You need to look after yourself, Mum.'

‘Poppycock,’ mutters Granny, drinking a big glass of red wine. (*My granny was born in the 1940s, so uses lots of words from the olden days, like ‘poppycock’, ‘balderdash’ and ‘video recorder’. It’s very cute.*)

Let me explain something:

Unlike William U, there is *never* anything wrong with my granny. Last year she was taken to hospital after she fell over. She told the doctors that all she needed was a couple of pills and a plaster. They told her that she'd had a heart attack. She was back at her job teaching at the university two weeks later.

'We'd better go through to the other room,' says Jakub. 'They are doing the speeches soon I think.'

'Sure,' hiccoughs my mum. 'I'm just going to pay a little visit.'

(By the way, that means she needs the toilet. You see? Words make no sense. Once Jakub asked her if 'paying a little visit' meant the same as 'going for a wee or a poo'. She said yes, it did – and could they please finish the conversation when we weren't in the middle of the cinema.)

The adults go through to the lounge (*Aunty*



Rosa's Big Posh House is so big and posh, by the way, she has a sitting room, a living room, a lounge and a 'snug', which all do exactly the same thing, but make it great for hide and seek), where Auntie Rosa's vicar, Reverend Wright, is going to make a speech about Auntie Rosa and her fiancée, Auntie Amara.

Aunty Amara is **SUPER** nice – she’s a creative therapist, which means she helps people to express their feelings through art. She met my Aunty Rosa (*who is my mum’s little sister, by the way*) when Aunty Rosa went on a stress management course. Aunty Amara suggested that Aunty Rosa make a clay pot to release her stress through pottery. Aunty Rosa hates pottery, so she released her stress by squishing her pot, which she said made her feel much less stressed. Then she and Aunty Amara fell in love, which made her loads less stressed, at least until she started planning a wedding.

‘Where is the band?’ Aunty Rosa huffs, coming

up behind Mum. 'They were supposed to be here at six. Hey, squidge.'

She gives me a quick hug, then goes back to looking around for anyone who looks as if they might be in a band.

'Calm down,' says Mum, who always acts like Auntie Rosa's big sister, even though they're both really old now and I'm not sure anyone knows the difference any more.

'*Calm down,*' says Auntie Rosa in a silly voice before poking my mum. She always acts like my mum's little sister and it's very funny. Mum says Auntie Rosa is 'immature', which is strange because even though Auntie Rosa is younger than my mum, she has a Big Posh House and lots more money. I once asked my mum if she minded that her younger sister had a Big Posh House and lots more money than her. Mum said that she didn't and we never needed to have that conversation again, so that was good.



‘Relax,’ says Auntie Amara, coming up behind Auntie Rosa and putting her arms around her. ‘They’ll be here. And if not, we’ll all just make instruments out of the crockery and dance to that. It’ll be fun!’

Auntie Rosa smiles at Auntie Amara. Auntie Amara is very good at calming Auntie Rosa down. She’s her clay pot.

‘Have you got my notes?’ Auntie Rosa asks her. ‘For my speech?’

Auntie Amara giggles. Auntie Amara is less good at remembering Auntie Rosa’s notes. Or anything else for that matter. She once spent two hours looking for her car keys. And then another four hours looking for her car.

‘Oooops,’ Auntie Amara giggles again. ‘Never mind, sweetheart. You don’t need notes. Speak from your heart. I’m going to make up a poem about you on the spot. It’ll be beautiful.’

All the adults pull a bit of a face.

Auntie Amara's last poem from her heart was on Granny's seventieth birthday, when she couldn't think of any rhymes for Granny's actual real name, Nancy. So the poem went something like:

Nancy, oh, Nancy ...

You smell like a French Fancy.



Fortunately Granny found it very funny and didn't get formidable about it at all, so that was good.

'If I may have your attention,' Reverend Wright announces. 'I would like to propose a toast to the happy couple.'

William U comes and stands next to me, holding Mr Nibbles to his ear, as if Mr Nibbles is talking to him.

'What's that, Mr Nibbles?' William U says. 'You're glad you didn't have to go home with stinky



Mr Nibbles, we'll just buy another stupid hamster and no one at St Lidwina's will know the difference.'

This is an awful thing to say. The angry bubbles are getting bigger.

'Everyone in Rainbow Class will know! Give him to me – NOW!' I say more loudly than I mean to, making the people nearest me turn around. Mum looks over from the other side of the room and gives me the be-quiet-the-grown-ups-are-talking look. William U just smiles back at her and starts to talk out of the side of his mouth.

'I don't care,' he says. 'I don't care about Rainbow Class. I don't care about Mr Nibbles. I just didn't want you to have him. And now you don't.'

He gives Mr Nibbles another little squeeze, making our hamster squeal again. I have to save Mr Nibbles.

'William U! Give him to me!' I demand, and lots of people turn around this time.



‘Make me,’ says William, still smiling at my mum, who is giving me Bad Looks. Uh-oh. She can hear. Mums can always hear when you’re doing something they don’t like. It’s one of the things they learn at Mum School, along with how to cure everything, magic kisses, some Maths (*my mum must have been ill the day they did long division, by the way*) and talking for hours even when they say it’s time to go home.



I reach for Mr Nibbles, but William U moves him out of the way. I try again, but I am too slow again. An idea hits me. If I am too slow to get Mr Nibbles out of William U's hand, perhaps I need William U to let Mr Nibbles go himself. I start to tickle William U's side.

'Don't!' he screams, squirming around. 'I'm allergic to tickling ...!'

But I'm not going to stop – I am going to save Mr Nibbles. And it's working. A few tickles later and William U yelps, opening his hand and releasing Mr Nibbles. I try to grab him, but Mr Nibbles is too fast and scuttles off around the feet of the party guests. I can't see him. But I can see my mum making her way towards us.

'You idiot!' hisses William U. 'What did you do that for?'

'You were hurting him,' I tell William U, crouching down to look between everyone's shoes.



‘Where is he?’

‘Don’t know, don’t care,’ sulks William U.
‘Stupid hamster ...’

‘I can’t see him,’ I say, just as Mum comes over.

‘What’s all this noise?’ she whispers not very quietly. ‘What’s going on?’

‘Scarlett wants Mr Nibbles, but he’s mine, so she lost her temper and hit me, so I dropped him,’ William U gasps, looking as if he’s about to cry.

‘Scarlett, is this true?’ Mum asks as William U’s mum comes over, realising that Something Is Upsetting William.

‘My William!’ she gasps, grabbing him to her.
‘You’re ... upset! What’s Upset William?’

‘Scarlett,’ sniffs William, giving me an evil grin when neither mum is looking.

But I don’t have time to worry about William U. I am too worried about Mr Nibbles. What if he’s lost? What if someone accidentally steps on him?

What if he ...?

‘And that is the joy of love,’ Reverend Wright declares with a smile. ‘It lifts everyone. It lifts us all highEEEEEE! EE! EEEEE! AAAAAHHH! AAAAAHHHHH! OOOOOOOOOOH!’

What if ... what if Mr Nibbles has gone up the vicar’s trousers?

‘Reverend, are you OK?’ Aunty Rosa asks as the vicar starts to dance around.



‘Wow – an expressive dance about the beauty of love!’ Aunty Amara cries, throwing off her shoes and joining in with the vicar’s jerky movements.

‘THERE’S SOMETHING IN MY TROUSERS!’ the vicar screeches. ‘I NEED TO GET IT OUT!’

‘The Gents is just over there,’ whispers Jakub, pointing the vicar towards the toilet, ‘if you need to “pay a little visit ...”.’

But the vicar is now completely out of control as Mr Nibbles tries to find his way out.

‘Yes, Reverend, yes!’ cries Auntie Amara, spinning around like a carousel. ‘I can feel something joyful dancing around your heart!’

‘WELL, I CAN FEEL SOMETHING FURRY RUNNING AROUND MY TROUSERS!’ screams the vicar, making one of the party guests choke on a chicken vol-au-vent. Reverend Wright knocks into waiters and vases, and tips over the whole buffet table, before Mr Nibbles escapes from his left trouser leg. I dive to the ground and pick our class hamster up.

‘It’s OK, Mr Nibbles,’ I reassure him. ‘You’re not in any trouble. It’s all going to be OK.’

I stroke him gently until he stops shaking. I get to my feet. My best party dress is covered in trifle and bits of quiche, but I wipe them down with something hanging up next to me. That’s better. No one’s going to notice a few crumbs on my dress. Or that lady’s coat.

But as I stand up, I see a room full of shocked adults staring at me, with William U grinning smugly in his mum’s arms.

‘SCARLETT!’ Mum shrieks.

Gulp.

Mr Nibbles might be OK.

But I am in big, big trouble.

