

Chapter 1

Rosa Sungrove, the well-known animal lover, was going out for the evening, so she needed someone brave and kind to feed all her pets. Tim, who lived next door, agreed to help her.

"Are you brave?" she asked him.

"Very brave," said Tim. "I'm not afraid of spiders or sharks or alligators. But I'm very kind, too."



"Good," said Rosa. "You sound just the one to look after my pets. Now, let me explain. The cat likes cat-snacks and the cat-snack pack is in the tall cupboard. The tall cupboard is beside the fridge and the fridge is over there, on the other side of the sink. Right?"

"Right!" said Tim.



"However, when the vulture sees the cat being fed, he often gets a little peckish and I don't want a peckish vulture around the place. The vulture-chunks are inside the fridge (over there on the other side of the sink). They are in the blue bowl. Right?"

"Right," said Tim, cheerfully.



The vulture looked down from its perch and clacked its beak. Tim smiled at it. He was not afraid of vultures.



"The wolfhound is outside under the camellia," Rosa went on. "When she smells the vulture-chunks, she gets very hungry. Her doggie-crunch is in the little cupboard this side of the sink, but her dish is on the bottom shelf of the tea-trolley beside the fridge over there on the other side of the sink. She must have her dish or she gets nasty. It's not her fault. She just does. Right?"

"Right!" Tim agreed.



"When the giant chinchilla rabbit hears the rattle of the doggie-crunch being poured into the dog bowl, it often thinks it's hearing rabbit-nibble being poured into the rabbit dish and comes rushing inside. Chinchilla rabbits are mostly gentle, but this is a giant chinchilla rabbit," Rosa warned Tim.

"If you don't feed her she will try to bounce on you and she is dangerously heavy. The rabbit dish is the red one on the top shelf of the tea-trolley, there beside the fridge on the other side of the sink. And the actual rabbit-nibbles are in the large economy-sized purple packet on top of the fridge.



"And, when you have finished feeding the animals you might like a little refreshment yourself. The tea is in the yellow jar at the end of the shelf on the other side of the sink. The bread tin is next to the yellow jar. The butter and cheese are in the fridge and the biscuits are in the green box. Good luck! And now, I must go."



But at the door, Rosa stopped. "Oh, by the way," she called, "the gorilla is in the cupboard under the sink."

The gorilla! In the cupboard, under the sink.





1 Don't tell anyone about Dad!

"Annie," I whispered to my sister, "don't say anything about Dad. None of your stories. Right?"



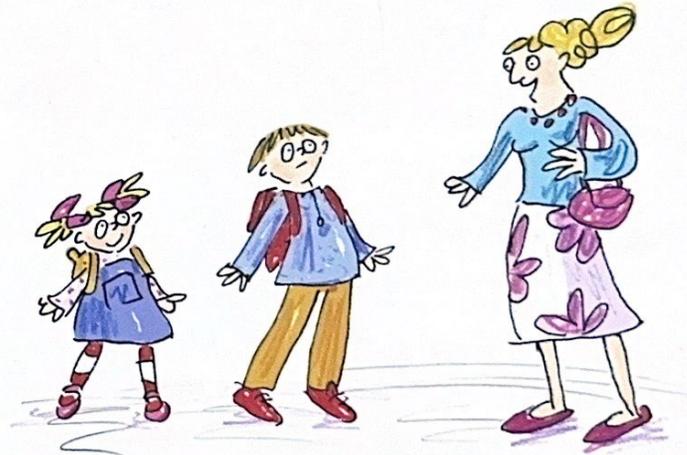
I'm Cal, by the way, short for Calvin.

It was our first day at a new school. I wasn't scared exactly. But I was nervous. I'd got a fluttery feeling inside. I was nervous about all sorts of things - whether I'd like the teacher, whether I'd find the toilets. But, most of all, I was worried about making friends. I'd had lots of friends at my old school. But then we'd moved away. What if nobody at this school liked me?

Mum parked near the school and walked with us to the gates. She said, "Shall I come into school with you?"

I said, "No thanks." I don't want the kids here to think I need my mum around all the time, holding my hand.

"Give me a hug and a kiss then," she said.



"No, Mum!" I said, backing away, in case she did. That would be a really good start, wouldn't it? The whole playground would see my mum giving me a big sloppy kiss!



"You'll be fine, Cal," she said, as she started the car.
"Don't look so worried! Give me a smile! And look after Annie!"

I gave her a wobbly smile as she drove away.
"Bye, Mum."

But I was still feeling worried. I couldn't help it.
First days are important. I wanted to make a good impression, and I knew Annie, my little sister, could spoil it with her silly stories about our dad.

"Don't hold my hand!" I hissed at her. She was only little, so she was going into the baby class.

I told her again. "Annie! Don't tell *anyone* about Dad! It's our secret. OK?"

"OK, Cal," she said. She put a finger to her lips and said, "*Shush!* It's our secret!"

But I didn't know if she'd really understood.
Mostly, my little sister is a mystery to me.



Annie went toddling off towards the other kids in her pink, sparkly shoes, with her teddy bear backpack on. It wasn't fair. She was only four and a half and I was nine. She should have been twice as scared as me! But she wasn't scared at all, not about bullies, or about finding the toilets, or anything.

I was standing there on my own, but she'd made a friend already! It was a little boy with hair like a toilet brush. It wasn't even raining, in fact, it was quite sunny, but he'd got green wellies on, with big, goggly, froggy eyes.

They were talking away together about whatever little kids talk about.



"Oh, no," I whispered to myself. "Please, please, don't let Annie say anything about Dad."

My little sister's a terrible chatterbox. She just can't keep quiet. Sooner or later, she was going to talk about Dad to someone.

