

# 1

**I'll begin at after-school club because that's where it all started to unravel.** It was a Thursday, half four-ish. Amy and I were trying to revise in the book corner. Mrs Rose, the supervisor, had done a great job of fencing us off from the rest of the kids, but she couldn't prevent Eve from slipping through the blockade of beanbags. "Come on, you guys," Eve had begged us. "I've got homework, too."

We wouldn't have minded but Eve's homework seemed to be to talk all the time. "Guess what? Frank Lampard called round to our house last night," she said.

"That's nice," Amy mumbled.

"Really nice," I added.

"He stayed for ages, drinking tea, eating Jaffa

Cakes, having a laugh. Mum asked him to go in the end because she wanted to watch *MasterChef*.”

“That’s nice,” Amy mumbled again.

“Really nice,” I added again.

“Yeah,” Eve replied. “It was. And guess what else? Before he left he gave me three tickets for the Chelsea–Liverpool game. He told me to bring my two closest friends.”

“Nice.”

“Really nice.”

“Pity that’s both of you out, then.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Amy asked, her voice rising several decibels.

Eve, head down, arms sprawled across the desk, let out a low groan. “It means I’m so fed up of you two ignoring me that I’m being forced into having imaginary conversations with myself!”

“No, I mean *that*,” Amy said and slid her revision sheet across to me. “‘Underline the compound words.’ What in the name of Gok Wan’s glasses is a ‘compound’ word?”

“Amy! Miss Sturgeon did compound words with us this morning!” I reminded her.

“You know I don’t hear anything Miss Sturgeon says. I get too distracted by her horrendous cardigans.”

“Miss Sturgeon? You’ve got a teacher called Miss *Sturgeon*?” Eve laughed.

Amy glowered. “Yes? So?”

“So it’s a funny name.”

“Not really.”

Eve turned to me. “Hey, Gemma. Has your dad ever caught a sturgeon on one of his fishing trips?”

I tensed at the unexpected mention of my dad.

“What? I don’t know. Maybe.”

“What’s the biggest fish he’s ever caught?”

“Erm...” I stalled, glancing at Amy for help.

It came immediately. “Eve, babes, no offence, but would you mind butting out so we can revise in peace? This *is* meant to be the quiet corner.”

Eve scraped her chair back and stood up. “Sure. No probs. I’ll go mingle with the other common

people not going to a posh school next year.”

“Thank you,” said Amy sweetly.

I raised my eyes to the ceiling. Sometimes Amy’s help didn’t help at all.

As Eve headed for the beanbags, I signalled to Amy to make amends. “Hang on, Akky,” she said, and I relaxed, thinking she was going to apologize. “I need to tell you something.”

“What?” Eve asked, one leg halfway over the beanbags.

“My mum can’t do the lifts to football on Saturday.”

Eve twisted back round, a scowl on her face. “Well, mine can’t either. She’s got to drive Claude and Sam to their match in Leicester or Loughborough or Lapland or somewhere in the total opposite direction of Cuddlethorpe.”

I felt just as put out as Eve. It was the first I’d heard of it, too, and I’d been at school with Amy all day. “What? How come?” I said.

Amy’s hand swept over her books. “Er ... hello ... revising!”

“But it’s only at Cuddlethorpe. We’ll be finished by lunchtime.”

“Exactly. That’s half a day lost.”

“But I need you,” I said.

“No you don’t. It’s football. You never need me at football.”

“I do!”

“You don’t. Parties, yes. Classrooms, yes. Football, no.”

“But, Amy...”

“She’s right; you don’t need her,” Eve agreed, suddenly at my side, her arm resting on my shoulder. “Not when you’ve got me around.”

I continued to look pleadingly at Amy. Amy was my faithful bodyguard, always on hand to step in and protect me. She’d been doing it since we were six and I saw no reason for her to stop now. I tried another tack. “But my mum’s really busy. She has to get to the showroom early. It’s the January sales...”

*“Hurst’s Modern Kitchens of Mowborough.*

*Today's modern kitchens made to yesterday's highest standards,"* Eve trilled.

I cringed. The jingle was bad enough when it was played on the local radio. Hearing it here made me want to dive under the table. "Please come, Amy."

"Gem, I'm not a brainiac like you. If I don't revise I won't pass the entrance exam, and if I don't pass the entrance exam you'll end up sitting with Portia Poohsbreath and that lot at St Agatha's. Is that what you want?"

I shuddered. Portia and her gang were dreadful. "No."

"Then stop hassling me."

I groaned. "Mum's going to be so cross."

"What about your dad? Can't he drop us off?"

Eve asked.

"He'll be fishing," Amy and I automatically chorused.

"Even in winter?"

"Especially in winter. It's an all-year-round sport."

"Couldn't he go later? Just for once?"

“It’s OK, it’s OK. Mum’ll do it,” I offered quickly, to prevent the bad feeling spreading. “She won’t mind.”

“Cool,” Eve said, heading back to the beanbags. “See you Saturday, partner.”

“And I’ll see you Monday,” Amy called.

“Whatever,” Eve replied. “Which, by the way, is a compound word.”