



CRABTREE
SCHOOL

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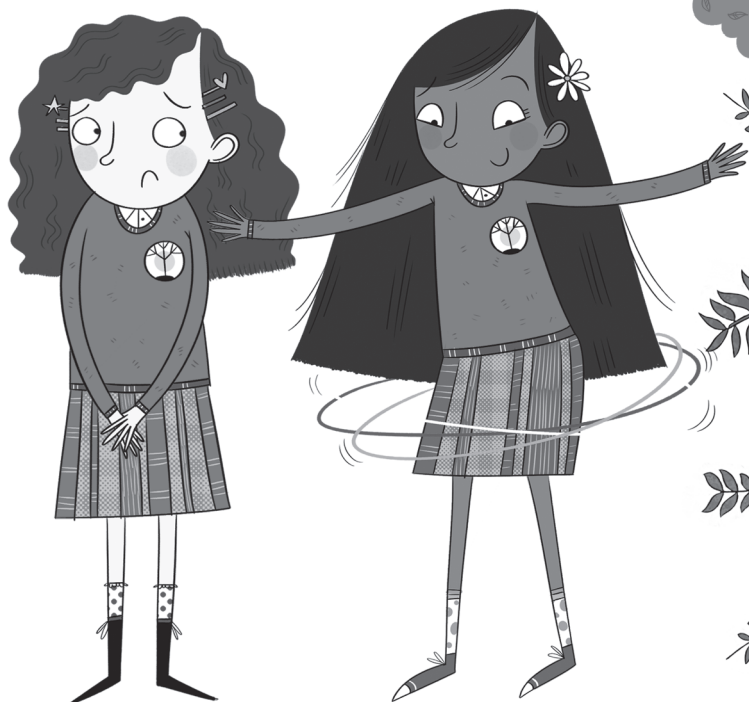
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CRABTREE SCHOOL

Best Friends
for Never




Lauren Pearson
Illustrated by Becca Moor

 SCHOLASTIC



For all the best friends: Mary Katherine
and Kelly and Jenny and Anne and Ashley
and Lisa and Jill and Erin and Carrie and
Christy and Jacqueline and Sarah and
Uma and Shirit and Zoe and Helen and Pri.
And especially for Susan Henry Quick, my
very own bestest of best friends forever





Chapter




1

Bubble Bubble, Here Comes Trouble

In a shady back garden somewhere on the edge of Crabtree Lane, two heads bent over a cauldron. Water from the pond in Crabtree Park simmered inside the huge pot, mixed with autumn leaves and shiny red crab apples. A tiny boat bobbed on the surface of this magical soup, and two necklaces – two halves of one heart – lay gently on a lacy pillow on the small ship’s deck.

“Now for your bit,” said Ava, brushing her wispy blonde hair back from her face and drying her hands on her jeans.





Zoe stepped forward, her wellies squelching in the mud of the soggy flower bed. She opened her rucksack.

“Here I give you my favourite things,” she said in her most serious voice. “Here is the maths test I got full marks on.” Taking care not to sink the boat, Zoe dropped the test paper into the cauldron and stirred it round until it sank to the bottom.

“And here is a star sticker from the ceiling of my bedroom, and a peacock feather I found at the zoo. Here is the ticket from when we went to see *Frozen*.” She stirred the mixture once again.

“My turn,” said Ava, as a fine mist crept over the garden. She stepped forward. “By all the mystical magical powers in the universe, I add this bit of hair from my hairbrush—”

“Ewww!” Zoe shrieked and they both giggled.

Ava continued solemnly. “Here is the last page of *Pippi Longstocking*, my most favourite book in the entire world.” Another sheet of paper vanished into the cauldron.

“And finally, here is my ticket from *Frozen*,” finished Ava. “Now we must recite the sacred poem.”

The two girls joined hands and began the chant:

“Eeeny, meeny, miney, mo,
No matter where we one day go,
Eeny, meeny, miney, mee,
The best of friends we’ll always be.”

The garden grew deathly silent. All those present – the dolls seated round the cauldron, the garden gnome, Ava’s cat and even the birds – were perfectly still, watching and waiting. Everything had to be just right.

Finally, at long last, Zoe was sure that she could see the two necklaces on the boat begin to glow: the spell was working!

“Ava, Zoe, pizza time!” Ava’s mum shouted from the kitchen door. She stepped outside. “Look at you two, you are covered in mud! And why on earth are you mucking about with that old paddling pool? The water is filthy!”

Zoe and Ava rescued their necklaces just as the spell faded.

“Remember,” said Zoe, “we must never take these off.” She held up her half of the friendship heart. It read:



“Never, for as long as we both shall live and happily ever after and all of those things,” agreed Ava. Her half read:



As they made their way towards the warm light of the kitchen, neither Zoe nor Ava noticed the slimy green frog that jumped out of the cauldron. If they had, they might have seen it as a bad omen. Best friend spells are the most difficult of all spells to cast properly, and even one extra ingredient can spoil the whole lot.



“But, Mummy,” cried Zoe that evening at bath time, “I CAN’T take my necklace off. I promised to wear it forever and ever and as long as—”

“I’m sure Ava will understand that you need to have a bath and you don’t want your necklace to get ruined,” said Zoe’s mum. “Ava will have to take hers off too, for her bath. Now get going, you’re a muddy mess.”

There was no arguing with Zoe’s mum, especially when it was nearly bedtime. Very carefully, Zoe put her half of the heart on a towel by the side of the tub and climbed into the bubbles.

It would probably be OK, Zoe decided. She and Ava loved a bit of magic, but even without it they were already the best of friends there could ever be. At school, Zoe and Ava were always together. They sat next to each other at

the lunch table and they played together at break time. They were always partners in PE, and they stood in every queue side-by-side. Last spring, they had become the youngest girls ever in the history of their school to win the wheelbarrow race during Sports Day. That had made them sort of famous. Everyone at Crabtree School for Girls knew that Ava and Zoe were best friends.

When they weren't at school, Zoe and Ava had play dates all the time, even sleepovers. They built forts out of sofa cushions. They dressed up in Ava's mummy's old clothes and borrowed Zoe's daddy's telescope to look at the stars. Last summer, they'd seen each other every day for thirteen days in a row. By the thirteenth day, they were finishing each other's sentences in a made-up language that only the two of them could understand.

“Mofnwoh,” Zoe would say. “Zmmbob—”

“Zmmbob maywee gllloople,” Ava would agree.

Zoe knew that even without spells she and Ava would be best friends forever.

All the same, as soon as she stepped out of the bath, Zoe wasted no time putting her half of the Best Friends heart safely back around her neck.



Chapter



2

The Most Horrible Maths Lesson in the World

Zoe liked numbers. Ava always said that Zoe wanted to marry numbers. If she *were* going to marry a number, Zoe would choose seven. Seven was her favourite number and also her age.

Because of this love of numbers, Zoe was always counting things. On the first day of Year Three at Crabtree School for Girls, Zoe had counted the desks in their new classroom. There were three rows of desks, and there were seven desks in each row.

The sum could look like this:


$$7 \text{ desks} + 7 \text{ desks} + 7 \text{ desks} = 21 \text{ desks}$$

There were twenty-one girls in their class, so Zoe had known right from the beginning of Year Three that each girl would have her very own desk. This was different from Year Two, when they had sat at four big tables. Year Three was much more grown-up.

One thing numbers *couldn't* tell you about the desks in Year Three was that on the first day of school, you got to choose your own place. You could sit wherever you wanted, even next to your best friend. By the time they had cast the magic friendship spell, Ava and Zoe had been sitting next to each other in the Year Three classroom for seventeen days.

That morning, on the eighteenth day, Zoe had come racing into Year Three to tell Ava about the fox she'd seen on the way to school, the fox that was walking straight down the middle of the road as if it were going to the bus

stop. But Ava wasn't in her seat in the second row near the window, because something terrible had happened.

Year Three was all in a jumble. There was one row of seven desks at the back. Then there was another row of six desks, then one of five and then one final row of four desks in the front by the teacher.

Now the sum looked like this:

$$7 \text{ desks} + 6 \text{ desks} + 5 \text{ desks} + 4 \text{ desks} = 22 \text{ desks}$$

There were twenty-two desks in the Year Three classroom, which meant that there was one more desk today than there had been last week.

Zoe hardly had time to think about this, because her own desk had been moved as well. She could tell from the names written on the tops that her desk was an *entire row* away from Ava's desk and across the whole room. She was

miles away from her best friend.

This did not make sense. It did not add up.

Zoe saw that Ava was unhappy too, and not just because she and Zoe were so far apart. Ava was no longer near a window. Zoe knew that Ava liked to stare out at the park and the clouds. She liked to daydream nearly all the time, and that would be a lot harder from her new seat in the middle of Year Three. Zoe felt sorry for her best friend.

Zoe = miserable, Ava = miserable, and for what? None of this added up.

Zoe and Ava were not the only ones having a disaster. Their friend Lottie had also lost her seat near the window. Now Lottie was in a middle row towards the front. Lottie was the nosiest girl at Crabtree School for Girls. She liked to know everything about everyone. From her new place, Lottie couldn't see out of the window to watch people coming and going

with her huge brown eyes. She couldn't see the classroom door or the hallway properly either, and she would miss out on everything that was going on behind her. Worst of all, now Lottie was close to the teacher's desk, which meant that Miss Moody might catch her spying, or writing in her purple notebook.

Zoe = miserable, Ava = miserable, Lottie = miserable.

Why would Miss Moody do this to them? Why would she let them choose their seats for the beginning of Year Three and then go and ruin everything?

Their friend Isabel was luckier. Isabel was the best-behaved, most helpful, kindest girl in their class, and she always sat in the front row. This morning was like every other morning for Isabel; she was right there in her same seat, sitting with her hands folded, her desk tidy, waiting for school to begin. Her plaits seemed especially

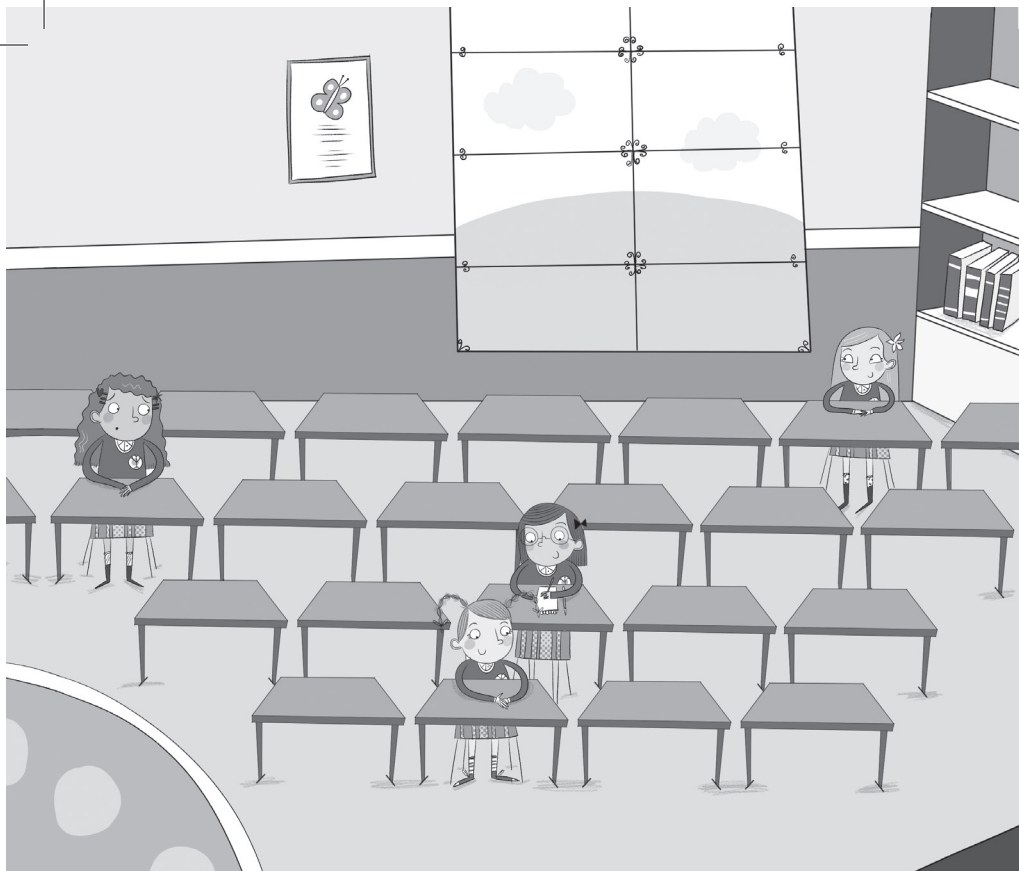
straight and even her freckles looked organized. Plus, now Isabel was even closer to Lottie, who was *her* best friend.

The four of them, Isabel, Lottie, Ava and Zoe, stuck together like chocolate buttons on a warm day. They were friends and they always had been, ever since Reception. Ava and Zoe were *the bestest of best* friends, and Lottie and Isabel were *the bestest of best* friends, but it could safely be said that all four of them were very, very good friends.

2 bestest friends + 2 bestest friends = 4 very, very good friends.


It was perfect maths, really, because it all came out evenly.

Except, right then, Zoe secretly wanted to pinch Isabel a little bit. Because it really wasn't fair that she got to stay in her same seat while everyone else moved. *Maybe*, Zoe thought hopefully, *Isabel would be sat next to someone*



that she didn't like. That would even things out.

The trouble with that was that their Year Three class was really quite special. Everyone at Crabtree School said so. They all got on and, for the most part, everybody liked everybody else. *Still*, Zoe thought, looking around Year Three, *there had to be someone that Isabel might not want to sit next to.* Margot talked a lot, even



when she wasn't supposed to, and Louisa never sat still. Maybe Isabel, who was very keen on following the rules, would be sat next to a chatterbox or a wiggler. Then Isabel would be cross, and that would make it fair.

But the name on the desk next to Isabel did not say Margot. It did not say Louisa. It said Rani.

This was very strange because there was no one in the class of twenty-one girls called Rani.

But as you know:

$7 \text{ desks} + 6 \text{ desks} + 5 \text{ desks} + 4 \text{ desks} =$
 22 desks.

Not twenty-one.