



## Tattoos, Telltales and Terrible, Terrible Twins

“What’s wrong, darling?” Auntie Pauline dropped to her knees beside a wailing Charlie.

“He hates London. He wants to go home,” Carli replied flatly.

It was spooky – while her nine-year-old brother was doing an excellent impression of a temperamental toddler, Carli had the detached, bored look of a middle-aged woman (only in miniature).

“Listen, is it OK if I phone my dad and see if he’s on his way?” Sandie whispered in my ear.

Great. If Sandie – the kindest girl in the world – was desperate to get out of here, the omens must be bad.

“Can I get a lift, Sandie?” Kyra asked bluntly, just as keen to make her escape.

And thanks to the knot of dread that had suddenly twisted itself up in my tummy, I was quite tempted to ask Sandie if there was space in her dad’s car for me too...

Available in this series:

The Past, the Present and the Loud, Loud Girl  
Dates, Double Dates and Big, Big Trouble  
Butterflies, Bullies and Bad, Bad Habits  
Friends, Freak-Outs and Very Secret Secrets  
Boys, Brothers and Jelly-Belly Dancing  
Sisters, Super-Creeps and Slushy, Gushy Love Songs  
Parties, Predicaments and Undercover Pets

And look out for:

Angels, Arguments and a Furry Merry Christmas  
Mates, Mysteries and Pretty Weird Weirdness  
Daisy, Dad and the Huge, Small Surprise

Find out more about Ally's World at  
[www.karenmccombie.com](http://www.karenmccombie.com)



TATTOOS,  
TELLTALES **AND**  
TERRIBLE,  
TERRIBLE  
TWINNS

KAREN M'COMBIE

FOR MY NEIGHBOURS COLIN (THE REAL COLIN,  
AND HIS REAL THREE LEGS) AND DEREK  
(THE REAL DEREK, AND A CAT THAT ISN'T COLIN)

Scholastic Children's Books,  
Commonwealth House, 1-19 New Oxford Street,  
London WC1A 1NU, UK  
A division of Scholastic Ltd  
London ~ New York ~ Toronto ~ Sydney ~ Auckland  
Mexico City ~ New Delhi ~ Hong Kong

First published in the UK by Scholastic Ltd, 2002

Copyright © Karen McCombie, 2002  
Cover illustration copyright © Spike Gerrell, 2002

ISBN 0 439 99371 7

Typeset by TW Typesetting, Midsomer Norton, Somerset  
Printed and bound in Denmark by Nørhaven Paperback, Viborg

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

All rights reserved

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

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,  
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or  
otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in  
any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is  
published and without a similar condition, including this  
condition, being imposed upon the subsequent purchaser.

# Contents



<b>PROLOGUE</b>	<i>1</i>
<b>1: <i>BONJOUR! HOLA! HELLO!</i></b>	<i>4</i>
<b>2: (NOT SO) MYSTERIOUS VISITORS...</b>	<i>14</i>
<b>3: LATE-NIGHT MUNCHIES AND MEMORIES</b>	<i>28</i>
<b>4: WELL, ALOHA!</b>	<i>36</i>
<b>5: THOSE FIRST (BAD) IMPRESSIONS...</b>	<i>49</i>
<b>6: MONDAY MORNING MOANING</b>	<i>59</i>
<b>7: MINE'S BETTER THAN <i>YOURS</i>...</b>	<i>65</i>
<b>8: A LAZY DAY AND A BIG, FAT FIB</b>	<i>74</i>
<b>9: THANK YOU, CARLI, THANK YOU <i>VERY</i> MUCH...</b>	<i>81</i>
<b>10: TIME OFF FOR GOOD BEHAVIOUR</b>	<i>93</i>
<b>11: CURSE OF THE COUSIN</b>	<i>100</i>
<b>12: THE STRANGE CASE OF THE TAPED-UP TORTOISE</b>	<i>108</i>
<b>13: EARWIGGING AND ARGUMENTS</b>	<i>116</i>
<b>14: KYRA AND THE SECRET CODE</b>	<i>134</i>

<b>15: ALIENS AND ICE CREAM</b>	<i>144</i>
<b>16: SECRETS AND BIG EARS</b>	<i>154</i>
<b>17: BISCUITS AND SYMPATHY</b>	<i>161</i>
<b>18: THINK OF DAD, THINK OF DAD, THINK OF DAD...</b>	<i>169</i>
<b>19: FIREWORKS AND FREAK-OUTS</b>	<i>177</i>
<b>20: PEACE, QUIET AND MACARONI...</b>	<i>191</i>

## PROLOGUE

Dear Mum,

Saw a scan of Sandie's (soon to be) little brother or sister today. She took it out in the middle of McDonald's, which wasn't a *great* idea since it ended up with greasy, salty fingerprint smears all over it once me and our other friends had passed it round the table, cooing.

Actually, not all of us were cooing. Everyone gave Chloe the evil eye when she snorted and said it looked like a fuzzy photo of a doughnut. I mean, yeah – the *first* scan Sandie showed us *did* look a bit like a doughnut, but the baby was only about five minutes old and the size of a ... well, a *doughnut* at the time. Now *this* fuzzy blob is definitely baby-shaped, with fingers and toes and a slightly startled expression on its face. (You can see the family resemblance already. Whisper "Boo!" from two streets away and Sandie jumps.)

But Sandie's doing pretty OK with the whole baby thing now (after a wobbly, slightly stroppy start). I

guess it was just weird at first; you know – being an only child for thirteen years and then this new person is about to come along and you’re automatically meant to love it and be all right about the fact that your parents seem to have forgotten your name – never mind your *existence* – they’re so excited.

That got us all talking about the pros and cons of being an only child vs having brothers and sisters. Kellie (only child) said she loved having her mum to herself, whereas Kyra (only child) said that was the worst thing about it. The best thing, according to Kyra, was that you’re in a better position to get more pocket money. What a surprising thing for Kyra to come out with – *not*. Jen (one older sister) and Chloe (two younger brothers) didn’t really have much to say about it, but that was ’cause they were both drooling over the cute guy on till number three. Salma (one older sister, tiny twin sisters, one practically live-in small niece) said she fantasized about being an only child and living in a house where you could put things down and they’d still be there ten minutes later. I think she was talking about the time she found Rosa, Julia and Laurel flushing the contents of her make-up bag down the toilet. Or maybe it was the time she found them posting her brand-new pack of Kotex pads into the video, one by one.

Me? I couldn't imagine life without Tor humming the theme tune to all his favourite animal shows, and how boring would mealtimes be without him constructing the Empire State Building out of peas? And Rowan – life's never dull when you live with someone who changes their hairstyle five times a day and is clinically addicted to glitter\*. Linn can be fun, too ... even if it is only for about ten minutes a month.

I know you're an only child, Mum, but after the last couple of weeks, I sometimes found myself wishing that Dad was too. I know that sounds mean, but I think you'll understand when you read this. Just be glad (oh, so glad) that you weren't around when...

Hey, I don't want to spoil my story. Turn the page and it'll all become (horribly) clear...

Love you lots,

Ally

(your Love child No. 3)

\* I wouldn't miss Rowan's cooking, though. We had cauliflower and cheese *chilli* tonight: I rest my case.

# Chapter 1

## **BONJOUR! HOLA! HELLO!**

“Do you like it?”

Tor and I tilted our heads and studied Rowan’s handiwork. On the wall in the kitchen – right next to the cork pinboard (which was so covered in clutter that you couldn’t actually *see* the pinboard) – was a poster, surrounded by a frame of plastic bananas, linked together with wire.

“Yeah, it’s quite good,” I told her.

“Well, how about when I do ... *this!*”

And with a flourish, Rowan flipped the switch and illuminated the bananas. (Fairy lights disguised as fruit...)

“Is that where bananas come from?” Tor asked, after he and I had broken into spontaneous applause.

“Croatia?” frowned Rowan, staring at the poster’s red-roofed houses and blue bay for clues. “Um, I don’t think so. Why?”

Rowan couldn’t really see what our little brother was getting at. To her, it was a nice image of an

ancient harbour town, and the fairy-light bananas just gave it that extra added something.

“Bet you don’t even know where Croatia is!” I grinned at her.

“I do! It’s the gateway to central Europe!”

“Ro – you just read that off the poster!”

“Didn’t!”

“Did! It’s printed right there under the word ‘Croatia’, hidden behind those bananas!”

“Never noticed that,” Rowan shrugged. “So where *is* Croatia, if you’re so clever, Ally Pally?”

It’s pretty dumb of Rowan to geographically challenge a girl who happens to sleep in the same room as a giant map of the world. And Ro seemed to have forgotten that Croatia was one of the places Mum sent us a letter from not so long ago. *I* remember, ’cause I’d put a red pin in some town called Zadar (the postmark on the front of the envelope) when the letter arrived earlier in the year.

“It’s in-between Slovenia and Serbia,” I told her.

Rowan’s eyes glazed over with confusion. Good grief, did she daydream her way through Geography and General Studies when they talked about Yugoslavia and the war there? Um, probably, knowing Ro.

“Or,” I tried again, “look at Northern Italy on

the map, then turn right. That's the general direction for Croatia."

"Uh-huh... OK, so who wants to blow up the donkey?" said Rowan, absently.

"Yeah, me!" shrieked Tor, tearing through into the hall (where there were giant fake sunflowers in the vase; party streamers dangling from the roof; plastic flowery garlands wrapped all around the bannisters and an old beach towel pinned down where the welcome mat used to be).

Rowan may score nil points for her knowledge of modern history, but she's a star pupil when it comes to cheering people up (me, in particular). I'm not normally the jealous type, but I *had* come over slightly miserable yesterday, thanks to the fact that Billy, Jen, Chloe and Kyra were all jammy enough to be jetting off abroad this summer, and even Sandie, Kellie and Salma were going to be visiting relatives in places that weren't very far but certainly weren't *here*. Which is where *I* was going to be, along with the rest of my skint family.

I hadn't moaned to Dad about it, of course – I knew he worked really hard and couldn't help it if his bike shop hadn't exactly made him a millionaire, or even rich enough to close the shop and schlep away with us and a tent for a couple of

weeks somewhere. (Although he *was* closing the shop for four days next week, to go to this big bike fair thing in Yorkshire somewhere. But still, that was yet *more* work and *no* play.)

Anyway I did find myself moaning a bit to Rowan – and next thing I know, she’s raiding the cupboards and wangling a little bit of cash out of Dad to transform the house into a holiday-haven-cum-carnival. This morning – instead of our usual Saturday morning jaunt to the pet shop – me and Tor joined Rowan in scouring every pound shop in Wood Green and ended up coming back here with mountains of summery tat, which we spent ages fixing up around the place.

Best of all was the holiday posters Rowan blagged for free from the travel agents on Crouch End Broadway. As well as the banana-customized poster of Croatia in the kitchen, we’d stuck a poster up on the door of each room to give it a theme, so now the living room was Spain (it had a drawing of a big yellow sun, the same colour as the living-room walls), Tor’s room was Australia (it had a koala on it), the loo was the Danube (nice water theme), Dad’s room was the Seychelles (figured he deserved some luxury), Rowan’s room was Nepal (not that she’d know where that was), mine was Hawaii (cool blue skies) and Linn’s was Iceland, which spoke for

itself, but wouldn't last long once she saw it, we didn't think.

"Fancy helping me hang up my sign, Ally?" Rowan asked, grabbing a bundle of stuff off the table, which was now covered in a multicoloured plastic tablecloth (£2.99) with an interesting design featuring surfboarders, stripy umbrellas and pineapples.

"Sure," I nodded, grabbing a chair for Rowan to stand on, and slowly following her to the front door. (The stupid torn ligaments in my ankle weren't quite up for speed-walking, stepladders or can-can dancing quite yet.)

Passing the living room, I could see Tor gently turning purple, as he panted air into the giant inflatable donkey-headed rubber ring (a bargainous £1.99 from Ahmed's *very* super Superstore) that was now going to take over from the beanbag as his TV-viewing seat for the summer. But from the way the dogs were bouncing around barking (Rolf) and growling (Winslet) at the rapidly expanding donkey, I wasn't sure if the thing would last too long without fangs spoiling the fun.

"Hold these," said Rowan, passing me a hammer and nails as she opened the door and clambered up on the chair she'd grabbed from me. "So, have you heard from that boy?"

That Boy ... that would be Feargal, who I'd been out with once (last Sunday) on a not-quite-date. Big success *that* was, since he'd not-quite-phoned me ever since. Yet *another* reason to get the summertime blues...

"Ro, is your hair darker?" I squinted up at her, ignoring her awkward question and passing her the hammer and a nail.

How weird; sunlight tends to make most people's hair lighter – even Joanne, the Chinese girl in my class, says the sun turns her black hair dark brown – but in Rowan's case, nature was playing tricks. Her longish wavy hair was normally brownish-brown, same as mine (and Dad's and Tor's), but out here in the daylight, I'd definitely describe it as...

"Deep Oak. That's what it said on the packet. Do you like it?" Rowan beamed down at me, as she fixed some windchimes to the door frame.

With that name, I was worried that my sister might have accidentally dyed her hair with floor varnish. But whether it was that or genuine, salon-tested hair gloop, the main problem was obvious.

"Ro!" I squeaked. "Grandma will *kill* you! You know she hates anything fake!"

Like hair dye, like tattoos, like piercings, like cosmetic surgery. Our gran is pretty laid-back in

many ways (temporary stuff like make-up and fashion she can live with, as long as she can get to tut at it) but not when it comes to any of the above.

“I know – but I really want to have black hair, like Von!”

Von: one of Ro’s two best buddies, who both have dyed hair, tattoos and piercings; who are both regarded with serious caution by Grandma.

“She’s definitely going to kill you!” I warned my sister.

“Ah, but not if I do it gradually, so she doesn’t notice! I mean, this colour – it’s only one shade up from what I am normally!”

Yeah, *right*.

*And* the rest. That was like saying it’s nearly Christmas in the middle of July...

But try telling Rowan something when she’s made up her style-wise mind.

“You’re squint,” I pointed out instead, watching Rowan’s handmade sign lurch to one side and clatter into the untinkly windchimes.

“Better?” she asked, pulling up one side of the green twine.

“*Bella, bella!*” came a voice, at the same time as the gate creaked open.

“Thank you, Stanley,” Rowan smiled at Grandma’s

boyfriend, as he stood to one side and gestured for our gran to go first. “Do you like it, Grandma?”

Poor Grandma – she pursed her lips and looked like she was struggling to say something positive. The most arty, messy thing in her flat is the photo of us lot (Linn excepted) on her window sill, and now here she was, faced with a set of windchimes constructed by Rowan from a pack of coloured, transparent picnic forks from Woollies, and a sign done up in looky-likey mosaic (painted, dried macaroni) that said “El Paradiso”. Our gran was obviously dumbstruck, and she hadn’t even *seen* the inside yet.

“Is your hair darker?” she frowned instead at Ro.

“No!” Rowan lied. “It just needs to be washed!”

“You need your *brain* washed!” Linn called out, walking down the pavement towards the house, still amazingly quick with a sarky comment, even after a hard day’s work at the clothes shop. “What exactly are you *doing* to our house?”

“Transforming it into a holiday haven! El Paradiso!” I butted in cheerfully, before Ro’s hackles rose and the two of them started hissing at each other. “You were there when Rowan asked Dad about it last night, remember, Linn?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t know she’d planned on making our home look like a Primary One art project!”

Hmm... Linn hadn't seen the inside of the house either. Seemed like so far it was three to two in favour of El Paradiso. (Stanley's opinion didn't count since, technically, he wasn't quite family.)

"Dad!" called out Tor, his spooky antennae making him leap to his feet and come running out of the house to meet our dad before any of the rest of us noticed him approaching.

"Hi," said Dad flatly.

"Are you OK?" I asked him, thinking he'd taken one look at the sign and wanted us to move before the neighbours called the style police.

He didn't say anything. He had the stunned look of someone who'd just realized they'd washed their jeans with a twenty pound note in the pocket. Either that or he'd seen a ghost.

"Martin?!" said Grandma loudly, in the tone of voice she uses when she catches us watching *The Weakest Link* instead of doing our homework.

"Um, sorry, sorry..." Dad shook his head, like he'd just woken up from a coma. "I've just had the strangest phone call..."

"Strange? *How* strange?" I asked him, feeling a small knot of panic twist in my stomach.

"Well, no – not *strange* exactly, just unexpected, I guess," Dad said quickly, spotting the alarm in my saucer-shaped eyes.

Unexpected...

Call me pessimistic, but I still didn't like the sound of that one little bit.

# Chapter 2

## (NOT SO) MYSTERIOUS VISITORS...

“This place looks nuts!”

I’m pretty sure Sandie meant that in a good way. She’s a huge fan of my family and our foibles (weird word, but then it’s a weird family).

“Wow!” she exclaimed, flopping down on the deckchair beside the sofa and gazing up at the huge stained-glass-style sun that was taking up most of the living-room window.

“Nice, isn’t it?” I grinned, pointing towards the sun (the fake one, not the real one, although that was out there somewhere beyond the windowpane). “Rowan made it out of these sheets of coloured plastic.”

The daylight pouring through the yellow plastic turned the room even *more* yellow than it already was, giving it a totally tropical feel. “Looks jaundiced,” Grandma mumbled when she checked it out ten minutes ago, just before Sandie turned up.

“Wish I could do stuff like this in *my* house,” Sandie sighed, kicking her shoes off and making