The Little Book of Big Heroes
Welcome to *The Little Book of Big Heroes*, a collection of short stories and poems written by some of our celebrity supporters in aid of Cancer Research UK Kids & Teens.

The book includes stories of heroism and bravery, from a young spy who saves his city from aliens, to a dinosaur who loses his roar, and a boy with a rather extraordinary nose, among many more.

Through the stories, we hope to show that heroes really do come in all shapes and sizes, and recognise and shine a light on the strength of each and every child who has been affected by cancer.

Each year, around 4,200 young people are diagnosed with cancer in the UK, and the bravery that they and their families show under very difficult circumstances is inspirational.
The good news is that today, more of them are surviving than ever before, and Cancer Research UK’s work has been at the heart of this progress. But cancer still claims the lives of around 540 young people each year, and research is the key to changing this.

Although we’re losing fewer young lives to cancer, a lot more needs to be done to find better and kinder treatments to help those who survive live a long and healthy life. Following a cancer diagnosis, many young patients have treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy. These treatments can have side effects that seriously affect patients’ health and quality of life in the future. This is not something that anyone should have to face, and why it’s vital we find and develop treatments that are not only better at destroying cancers but also have fewer side effects.
Continued investment into clinical trials is pivotal to ongoing research and the development of treatments that will offer new hope to children and their families.

We are in awe of the bravery and determination that these young people and their families show. They do not choose to be ill, but they amaze us with their strength every day.

That’s why it’s so important for us to fund more research and clinical trials, and keep on doing our very best, to beat children’s cancers sooner.

To us, they are true heroes.

With your help we will find cures and kinder treatments for young people facing cancer.

To find out about Cancer Research UK Kids & Teens and make a donation, please visit our website:

http://www.cruk.org/kidsandteens
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By Fay Ripley

There once lived a very ordinary little boy. He lived in a very ordinary house down a very ordinary street. He had rather ordinary parents but he was a bit of a loner, because there was one thing EXTRAordinary about him. His ordinary looking little nose produced litres and litres of snot each day. Not just ordinary snot, but long, stringy, never-ending, thick streams of greenish glue that ran off his lips, into his mouth, down his chin and cascaded over his ties, shirts, scarfs and overcoats – it trailed behind him wherever he went like a cruel, sticky shadow that earned him the nickname . . . Bogey Boy.
His parents had always tried to mop up after their son, but now their wiping years were behind them. Tissues were a thing of the past. They had tried a vacuum cleaner at one stage but the subsequent overload resulted in an explosion that almost drowned the cat and stuck the front door shut for three days. Dogs quite liked Bogey Boy because of the salty snot, but he became wary after an incident with a Great Dane who thought he was a chewy stick.

The truth is, Bogey Boy struggled to make friends, often because the other mothers would usher their kids away for fear of infection. Teachers slipped on his snotty residue and he was banned from football club because the ball always got stuck to his boot.

But on one ordinary day, Bogey Boy decided to take the long way to school, avoiding the usual jeers and taunts from
the naughty boys riding stolen bikes and wearing fake tattoos, who hung around at the end of his ordinary street. Instead, he slipped and slid his way through the back field, past his hippy neighbour’s shed that had a living roof and a porthole, and off down towards the reservoir.

It never made sense to him that this great expanse of water – with all its possibilities of boating and picnics and ducks and fishing and skimming stones – was harshly lifted high above ground. A fortress of grassy banks, railings and barbed wire kept people out just so those same people could flush their toilets and brush their teeth. It seemed an unnecessary price to pay for hygiene, especially as washing with water did little to help Bogey Boy with his syrupy nose slop, but instead made it flow more runny and
clear, drenching his socks and trainers.

Then, as he headed towards the back of his school grounds, he heard a voice—high and panicked, possibly that of a bird or a far-off siren. He was usually inclined to keep his head down and keep out of harm’s way, but when he heard the cry coming again from the forbidden lips of the reservoir he doubled back to see if an animal was trapped. As he got closer, the calls came faster. Now words: “HELP! . . . HELP ME! . . . PLEASE!”

By now his clothes were covered in their usual slime, allowing Bogey Boy to slip between the railings like floss through teeth. It gave him the power to move quickly, sliding over paving stones and ridges – then lizard-like, using his hands to pull himself up and over the edge of the lake.

There, flailing in the water, way beyond reach, was Lucky.
Lucky was the most popular-slash-useful lad in school, because his mum was the football coach and his dad ran the local sweet shop. His curly hair bobbed gently in and out of view. The surface of the water was barely breaking – a peaceful silence broken only by the boy’s strangled cries.

Bogey Boy could not swim as he had been banned at an early age from the nearby swimming baths, due to the water turning green after his visits. He quickly looked around for a stick or rope to help, but the lifesaving ring was on the far bank and time was clearly not on Lucky’s side. Bogey Boy rushed back towards the grassy hill where he had come from, searching for a feather, a flower – ANYTHING to make him sneeze.

And there on the side of the bank was a cluster of poppies waving their
floppy red heads, desperate to help, but only able to sway gently in the breeze. Bogey Boy threw himself at them, burying his head into the black, dusty middle of the floral army, sucking in the pollen so deeply he could taste the bees that had been there before him. Looking up and over the ridge, Bogey Boy could see that Lucky’s head was barely visible – and then, from the depths of Bogey Boy’s body, a rumbling came surging up like a volcano from the Earth’s core.

A sneeze was building.

Bogey Boy’s parents would have smothered it with car rugs and roof insulation, but this time he spun his head towards Lucky just as a huge string of snot shot out of both nostrils, lassoing the not-so-lucky Lucky around his neck. It entangled him in slop so sticky, he thought it was a wave about to take him
down to the depths of the dark waters. But the mucus tentacles clung to Lucky, and Bogey Boy dragged himself and his snot down over the ridge of the reservoir and back towards the railings, pulling his class mate with all the strength he could muster – until Lucky reached the safe arms of the shore and, with his last ounce of strength, grabbed a branch to haul himself out.

Both wet-through boys stood and looked at each other. The sun was shining. The reservoir was silent again. They knew what had just happened was theirs alone. They did not speak.

Bogey Boy slip-slopped back through the railings, but had to help Lucky over the top. They were late for school. They got detention, but they were together. They were friends. Lucky felt he deserved that name now . . . as he was Lucky to know Bogey Boy.

It was just an ordinary day . . . kind of.
“The Prime Minister’s on the phone for you, Toby!” called Mum.

“Can’t she wait?” sighed Toby wearily. “I want to practise on my new drum set.”

“She says it’s very urgent. Something about an alien invasion,” Mum replied.

“Is that all?” Toby grumbled, throwing down his drumsticks. “Tell her I’m on my way.”

Superspy Toby (codename: Genius) appeared to be just another average schoolboy. But he wasn’t. He was the country’s top spy and the government relied on him to keep everyone safe.
His secret lay in his cunning brain. He was a child genius!

A special underground car was waiting to take him to the city’s spy headquarters, and it travelled at the speed of light, transporting him there in only a couple of nanoseconds.

“Okay, what’s going on?” he asked as he pushed open the door of the control room, making the Prime Minister and all the army generals jump to their feet and salute him. The chief of staff, Major Huffandpuff, just pointed to a giant video screen on the wall. The picture showed a circular silver spaceship hovering above Birmingham’s Bullring shopping centre, with bright lights shining out of it in all directions and a wobbly voice repeating from a loudspeaker:

“You have twenty minutes to evacuate the city. Then everything will be destroyed.”
“Twenty minutes – no hurry, then,” said Toby, helping himself to a sandwich from the trolley. “Haven’t had my breakfast yet.”

“What are you talking about?” blustered Major Huffandpuff. “There’s no time to lose! We’ve already scrambled the jets.”

As he spoke, the giant video screen showed a young fighter pilot getting kitted-up to fly his combat jet, which was equipped with the latest state-of-the-art neutron ray that made an enemy disappear at the touch of a button. With a mighty scream of the jet’s supersonic engines he shot into the sky and headed for the aliens, waiting until he saw their green faces grinning at him out of the windows before opening fire.

But the flying saucer glowed with a protective red shield that caused his ray to bounce off. It headed down towards
the ground and hit Toby’s evacuated school, leaving just an empty space where it once had been. “Oh well, at least that’ll be good for my street-cred,” thought Toby.

The jet touched down again and the pilot hurried back to HQ for a de-briefing. That doesn’t mean he changed his pants. It means he reported back on what had happened.

“What will we do now?” asked the Prime Minister. “Time is rapidly running out!”

“I have another plan,” Toby answered calmly, sitting down on a revolving leather chair and tapping the ends of his fingers together. He asked to be connected to the aliens on an emergency hotline, then picked up the bright red telephone and whipped his fingers away, as if it had burnt them.
“You do that joke every time, Tobe,” sighed Major Huffandpuff wearily.

“It’s a good gag!” retorted Toby. “And don’t call me Tobe. That nickname’s reserved for my mum and the Queen.”

The eight-year-old secret agent had decided to be nice to the aliens. By making friends with them, he hoped they would go away and leave his home city alone. So he asked the team for some suitable questions – the sort of posh chit-chat they were all really good at – and then put them to the invaders. But it didn’t quite go as planned. The aliens always seemed to be one step ahead of him . . .

“What’s the . . . ?” he began, but before he’d properly got to the end of his sentence, the aliens began to answer.

“The-weather-in-outer-space-is-very-cold-except-for-the-solar-storms-which-are-very-hot,” said the funny voice.

“What about . . . ?”
“Yes-the-asteroids-and-comets-are-a-great-danger. They-don’t-look-where-they-are-going.”

“And what . . . ?

“We-are-having-cabbage-for-our-tea. It-keeps-us-green.”

For the first time in his young super-life, Toby was baffled.

“How on earth . . . or rather, in space . . . do they do that?” he muttered.

“We-have-superpower-hearing,” explained the alien voice. “It-is-so-sensitive-we-can-hear-the-slightest-sound-from-anywhere-in-the-universe-and-we-heard-everything-you-were-told-to-ask-us.”

“Is that so?” Toby chuckled. “Very interesting!”

Not caring if he was being rude, he slammed the phone down and marched round the brightly lit control room rubbing his chin. All eyes were on him as
the officials waited in silence, the clock ticking away on the wall.

“How long left?” asked Toby.

“Seven minutes and forty-two seconds,” answered the Prime Minister.

“Just enough time. Get me Radio 1.”

“What?” bellowed Major Huffandpuff, going bright red in the face and making his moustache go up and down like a see-saw. “This is no time to listen to music!”


“Is that all?” scoffed the Prime Minister.

“No it isn’t, actually,” Toby continued. “I also want BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5, plus Sky and all the other digital stations, and get them to bring their sound equipment round to
mine. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have aliens to repel.”

And with that he strolled over to his underground car and teleported himself back home.

Mum was making rock cakes when he got in and the house was filled with the delicious smell of baking. Rock cakes were his favourite.

“Ready in five minutes,” Mum called.

“Perfect timing,” muttered Toby, marching upstairs and opening all his bedroom windows. He smiled with satisfaction as he looked out and saw the street below becoming jam-packed with radio and television lorries and hundreds of sound engineers all holding microphones on long poles.

“Wonder if they’re called ‘booms’ because they explode?” Toby wondered and he sat down at his drum set and picked up his sticks.
“OOOPS! Mustn’t forget these,” he laughed, putting on a big pair of headphones to muffle his ears. Then, with no time to waste, the small superspy genius began making a HUGE noise:

BAM! BASH! CRASH! TINK-TINK! THUD! BOOMETY-BOOM! WHUMP! THUMP! SMASH! DDDRRRRUMP!

Up above in the sky, the aliens didn’t know what had hit them. Their amazing super-hearing magnified the terrible noise several thousand times over, and they staggered around in their spaceship clutching their domed heads, their eyes going round and round in circles like pinballs.

“WE-MUST-GET-AWAY-FROM-HERE!” they shouted above the din, and seconds later the spacecraft whooshed away, disappearing into the furthest reaches of outer space, never to return.

“HURRAY!” cheered Birmingham’s millions of citizens.
“Are those rock cakes ready yet, Mum?” called Toby.

A few days later, at Buckingham Palace, our superhero was presented to the Queen for saving the country.

“Put it here, Tobe?” asked Her Majesty, offering her fist to be bumped.

“No. I prefer a high-five please, Ma’am,” he replied.

“Awesome!” said the Queen, holding up her gloved hand. “Put it there, bud!”

Mum sat between the Prime Minister and Major Huffandpuff, smiling proudly, as everyone in the room clapped Toby until their hands ached. Then the Queen motioned for silence.

“We wish to reward you for your outstanding bravery,” she said. “Tell us what you’d really like and it shall be yours.”

“Don’t rebuild my school for at least a year, please,” said Toby.
THE DINOSAUR WHO LOST HIS ROAR

By Matthew Wolfenden

65 million years ago,
(Well, there or thereabouts!)
Lived a little T-rex called Henry,
Who was desperate to figure out . . .

Just how on earth those bigger kids,
The ones he looked up to at school,
Had such swagger around the playground,
And could be so very cool?

Now you have to remember that this was a time
Quite different from how we live now,
And there was only one way to be the best,
So let me explain to you how . . .
To be cool was not about clothes and style,  
Or your moves on the disco dance-floor.  
No, this was the Cretaceous Period in time,  
When it was purely about how loud you could ROAR!!

Triceratops had no use for a smart baseball cap,  
It quite frankly would not fit on his head.  
And imagine a ferocious T-rex in a dress –  
It simply would not be seen dead!

A velociraptor trying to breakdance,  
Would surely be set up for a fall.  
I mean, it really would look ridiculous –  
For a start both its arms are too small!

And what about a diplodocus,  
In pink ballet-shoes, tutu and socks?  
Performing a graceful \textit{pas de deux},  
It would tie its neck into knots!
No! This was an era to be loud and proud,
The more ferocious you were, the better.
So forget fashion, style and dance moves,
It was your ROAR that made you a dino trend-setter.

Now, let’s go back to the very beginning,
And I’ll tell you about Henry T-rex.
As a tot he became rather poorly,
And his diagnosis was somewhat complex.

Unfortunately for little Henry,
The one thing he had to do,
Was take the most disgusting medicine,
That looked (and smelt) like dinosaur poo.

Well, he had to take his medicine,
Of this he had no choice.
But it left little T-rex Henry,
Entirely without a voice.
It was a common side effect,
Explained Doctor Iguanodon.
His roar would come back eventually,
He assured him it wouldn’t be long.

So, each and every morning,
When Henry hopped out of his nest,
He’d open his jaws to check out his roar,
And he really would give it his best.

He’d lift his head into the air,
Desperately trying to speak.
But out of his mouth, there came nothing,
Not a roar, not even a squeak.

“A dinosaur who can’t roar,” he thought,
“Who’s ever heard of such a thing?
“I’ll never be terrifying,
“I’m supposed to be the tyrant lizard king!”

“I’m just an embarrassment to the T-rex name,”
Was all that poor Henry could think.
“By the time I can roar like the rest of my pack, “We’ll all be flipping extinct!”

Then one day at school in Roar Skills, Something miraculous came to pass. As a tired and fed-up Henry, Sat daydreaming at the back of class.

What happened next surprised just about everyone, None more so than Henry T-rex. He opened his mouth to let out a yawn, And guess what happened next?

It was totally unexpected, For everyone around. As Henry’s head tipped back and he opened his mouth, Out came the most terrifying and deafening sound!
Peter Pterodactyl leapt out of his chair,
And was now hanging by his feet from the light.
Dan Diplodocus, who was nervous by nature,
Shot for the door and out of sight.

Tina Triceratops had jumped right out of her skin,
And was trembling high up on a shelf,
And Ian the brave iguanodon,
Was so shocked that he’d wet himself!

From that day onwards Henry was a hero,
To everyone at dino school.
He’d even learnt to swagger,
And never again felt like a fool.

They’d gather round him in the playground,
And look in awe to hear him ROAR,
Everyone now said that little Henry,
Was the loudest and most fearsome dinosaur.
BAND WITH NO NAME

By The Vamps

Sara drove to Noah’s house in her battered yellow sports car, her short black hair blowing in the wind. She loved her old Spitfire, and had saved up for it after passing her test. But what she loved best of all was singing. She sang like a punky angel and fronted the group Noah had formed with two of their other friends from college, Mitch and Daisy. The first few gigs they’d played Sara had been the centre of attention (which she loved), especially when she’d performed her amazing dance moves.

Mitch arrived just as she’d parked up and slammed shut the car’s slightly dodgy door. He was on his bike, a tiny
BMX that the others teased him about, but he didn’t care. He was as scruffy as she was cool. He never seemed to brush his hair and wore the same tatty shirt and torn jeans all the time – even on stage. But nobody minded because he was such an awesome guitarist. His instrument did all his talking for him – it was usually pretty hard to get a word out of him, but Sara decided to have a go.

“Has anyone come up with a name for us yet?” she asked.

“Nah,” he replied, padlocking his bike to a lamppost and marching off towards Noah’s house, where they were meeting for band practice. Noah opened the door, but with a worried frown on his normally smiley face.

“What’s wrong?” asked Sara.

“Tell you when Daisy gets here,” he replied.
“She late again?” growled Mitch. Then he switched to an American accent. “OMG, sorry guys. Got kinda held up by stuff.”

Moments later, a slightly short girl ran round the corner and arrived panting beside the others.

“OMG, sorry guys,” Daisy puffed. “Got kinda held up by stuff.”

Everyone laughed out loud.

“What?” she snapped.

“Nothing,” said Noah, turning indoors. “Come and see this.”

Noah led his friends through the spotless house (his mum was a bit of a neat freak) and out into the back garden. The others gasped. All their instruments—Noah’s drums, Mitch’s guitar, Daisy’s saxophone—were spread out on the lawn, looking blackened and dented. Completely ruined, in other words.

“What . . . ?” was all Mitch asked.
“Well, you know how fussy my mum is?” said Noah. “She decided to do my room earlier, saying it was a health-hazard. She never does anything by halves, so she decided to dump all our stuff outside while she Hoovered. And what happened then? That storm! I tried to get all our stuff inside, but before I could, our instruments were struck by lightning!”

A stunned silence followed. Then Mitch bent down and picked up his guitar.

“Careful, it might still have electricity running through it,” warned Daisy.

“S’okay . . .” muttered Mitch, holding his beloved guitar close to him like a girlfriend (something else the others teased him about). The other instruments seemed all right too, and the gang were just taking them back inside when they heard an engine start.
“That’s my car!” Sara gasped. “I’d know that rusty sound anywhere!”

Rushing to the front door, they saw local baddie Charlie ‘Fingers’ Dawson pulling away in Sara’s car with a gleeful grin.

“There’s a policeman over there,” cried Noah. “Maybe if I hit my drums loudly, it’ll attract his attention and he can radio for help!”

Noah sprinted outside and started smacking the drums with his hand. But to his amazement, instead of just a loud drumbeat, the noise sounded like a hundred cannons being fired all at once. The thief yelled and threw his hands over his ears. He slammed on the brakes and jumped out, then ran off pursued by the policeman who knew he’d been up to no good.

The four teens stood looking at each other in utter amazement.
“Erm... so are we agreed that the lightning strike might have given our instruments special powers?” asked Noah.

“Yep,” said Mitch, not looking particularly bothered.

“This is amazing!” said Daisy, who most certainly was bothered. “So, like, we could do more stuff like that and... you know... maybe... fight crime as well as play music!”

“Yep,” Mitch agreed again.

“Then we’d all be superheroes!” yelled Noah.

“No,” said Sara, starting to cry. “You three might, but not me. I don’t play an instrument. I won’t have a superpower!”

Fingers Dawson sat in his house at the end of Noah’s street, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. He had escaped the policeman and was lying low for a while.
“There’s something funny goin’ on here,” he muttered to himself. “The only time I’ve ever heard a noise that loud before was when Concorde used to fly over and that doesn’t happen anymore. I reckon they’re up to some kinda trick . . . but I dunno what.” He got up and pulled aside his old grey curtains, peeping out of the window like a nosy neighbour. “Nothing’s gonna stop me finding out, though . . . ”

“Testing, testing!” Later that day, Noah’s rich voice echoed round the school hall where they were playing their next gig, immediately followed by a loud screeching that made everyone yell and grind their teeth.

“Turn it down!” yelled Mitch, his first words of the evening.

The band had agreed not to talk about their superpowers for now – it
upset Sara too much, and besides, they wanted to concentrate on their gig.

At nine o’clock, they swung into action. They weren’t really big enough yet for a proper audience, and the hall was only half full, something that really bothered Mitch.

“We need a better name,” he grumbled.
The others agreed.

“‘College Kids’ is pretty lame,” sighed Daisy, “but it’s not like any of us have managed to come up with anything better.”

“Well, let’s keep trying,” suggested Noah, bashing his drums as hard as he could for the opening chords of their next number. They’d worked out that the instruments only seemed to give them superpowers when they wanted them to – the rest of the time they appeared normal.

As the evening wore on, the gig started
to fill up. Word had spread on social media that the band were actually pretty great and soon the hall was packed with local kids, dancing and singing along. Looking out from the stage at all the happy faces below them, the band all grinned at each other, and felt for the first time that maybe they were going to make it big.

But they didn’t notice something else going on in the crowd – Bella Bates, one of the naughty girls at college, was moving silently amongst the crowd, picking pockets and feeling in handbags for phones, money and anything else she could get her hands on. And she was doing a good job by the look of it. As the end of the gig approached, the bag she carried was bulging fit to burst.

The only person who noticed was Fingers Dawson. He’d come to the gig to see whether anything else strange
would happen. But seeing Bella made him greedy. It would be a good laugh to let Bella do the dirty work, but then take it all for himself, so he squeezed through the sweating audience with the intention of snatching the bag. But he didn’t get the chance.

Daisy was just in the middle of her first solo when she heard an angry shout from the crowd: “My phone’s missing!” This was followed by a chorus of howls as all the other people realised their things had gone too. Fingers melted back into the shadows, but Bella panicked and started running towards the door. The band, realising that something was wrong, stopped playing and looked at each other. Mitch gave Daisy a wink.

Immediately, she jumped down from the stage and began running after Bella, the crowd parting to let her pass (though someone did yell to ask her for
an autograph). Outside, Daisy saw Bella running down the street. She knew what to do, so calmly put her sax to her lips and blew. Instead of emitting any of its usual notes, a roaring sound was heard and a huge wind swirled down the street like a hurricane. When it reached Bella, it lifted her up and swept her away. Daisy ran over to collect the bag, just as she saw Bella running for cover.

Back at the hall, the crowd went wild as everyone’s belongings were returned to their owners and the band finished their performance. It was definitely a night to remember – not least for Fingers Dawson, who’d seen everything that happened.

“I was right,” he laughed to himself. “I’m definitely on to something here – there’s something magical about those instruments.”

The following week the band decided to book the biggest venue in town for
another concert. It took every penny they had earned so far, but they all agreed it would be worth it. But they still couldn’t decide what to call themselves. All sorts of ideas were thrown about, but they could never all agree on one.

“What are we going to do?” asked Sara. “We can’t keep performing as ‘College Kids’ – it’s rubbish! And people are beginning to say such great things about us too . . .”

“I guess we’ll just have to keep trying,” sighed Noah.

There was more trouble too. The day before the concert, Mitch broke a guitar string and didn’t have a replacement.

“Need to go to the shop,” he called, hurrying away with his guitar. It could be really fiddly trying to replace an electric guitar string, but Eddie at the music shop was an expert at it. Mitch hurried through the town – and on the way,
noticed someone lurking in the shadows. But both of them stopped when they saw what was in front of them. Bella Bates was already at the shop, and looked as though she was about to run off with all the instruments.

Mitch felt a surge of anger and excitement rush through him. Noah and Daisy had already tried out their superpowers – now it was his turn! As Fingers (because of course it had been him following Mitch) ducked into a doorway to avoid being seen, Mitch raised his guitar and pointed it towards Bella. Then he plucked a note or two on the strings, and the instrument began to shudder like it was going to explode. FLASH! A sizzling bolt of blue light flew out of the guitar in the villain’s direction.

“ARRGH!” shrieked Bella, flipping backwards.
She dropped her bag and fled, leaving Mitch to untie Eddie and carry everything back into the shop.

“Don’t need any more evidence,” Fingers said happily as he hurried home. “Here’s my chance!”

The band were delighted that Mitch had managed to save the day again – they were really beginning to feel like superheroes! But Sara was still sad, and wished she had an instrument with powers too. “Oh well,” she thought. “At least I’ll get to be the star on stage tonight!”

Everyone was very nervous about their big performance. They decided to go to the venue early, but as Noah, Sara, Mitch and Daisy walked there, Fingers struck. He rushed out of a side-turning pushing an empty wheelbarrow, and deliberately sent Mitch flying. Poor
Mitch lay on the ground, holding his leg and groaning with pain. The others dropped everything – including their precious instruments – and bent down over their friend to see if he was all right. That was just what Fingers wanted. He quickly grabbed their instruments, shoved them into his barrow and ran off before the others realised.

“I don’t believe it!” wailed Daisy.

“Me neither,” said Noah. “What do we do?”

“Get him!” shouted Mitch.

“How, exactly?” asked Sara. “You three have lost your instruments, so you’ve lost your superpowers too. We’ll never catch him – he’s bound to have a van or something round the corner. He’ll drive off and . . .”

But as she was talking, something strange started to happen. She felt like she wanted to dance, though this wasn’t
exactly the time or the place! But her legs and arms started moving anyway – and as she began to dance, she started slowly rising into the air.

“I get it!” shouted Daisy. “Sara does have a superpower – the best one of all. Her dancing means she can FLY!”

By now, Fingers had reached his van and was putting the instruments into the back. Slamming the doors shut, he looked over his shoulder – and froze with fear. A girl with streaming black hair and a determined expression on her face was flying towards him. She landed on top of him, and pinned him to the ground.

As the others rushed up to help, two police officers passed by in their car. The group flagged them down and Noah explained everything, including the crimes committed by Bella. Then they had to go – they were late for their gig!
“You can’t rush off,” cried one of the police officers. “I need you all to make statements!”

“Sorry, mate!” Mitch called back. “We’re about to appear on stage!”

All four of them ran off laughing. As they ran, they all started talking at once.

“We’re all superheroes . . . we’re going to continue fighting crime . . . we’re also an up-and-coming band . . . so we should be called ‘Superheroes Together!’ . . . No, that doesn’t sound right . . . ‘Superheroes Incorporated’ . . . ? Too long . . . but how about . . . !”

“. . . Ladies and gentlemen!” boomed the gig’s host as the band ran onto stage, the crowd going wild. “Please put your hands together, and welcome to the stage the UK’s latest pop sensation – SUPERHEROES INC!”
DEAR SAM

By Charlotte Ritchie

Hi Sam, it’s me, Rudy.

It was so cool to meet you at the hospital today – I hope your first day wasn’t too tiring. Just a quick bit of advice: watch out for Dr Richards. She’s really nice but whenever she comes to the ward I swear she does about fifty farts! We have bets on to see how many we can count in a minute.

I wanted to write so I could pass along something that helped me out when I was poorly too. It might sound strange, but enclosed in this parcel is a very special cape. It is a superhero cape, for
superheroes like us. I’ve worn it every
day till now, tied around my neck. Not
everybody can see the cape – just people
who need it. After talking to you on the
ward, I think you might, even if it’s only
for a little while.

When you put it on, you will see that
it is made of suns and moons across
a dark sky – it looks like a beautiful
galaxy. And at the centre it gathers into
a constellation that spells out a big ‘S’
for Super.

I want to give you the cape and tell
you a little bit about how it helped me.

It came to me the day the doctor first
told me I was poorly. I was in bed early
and I’d missed dinner, even though it
was spaghetti bolognese (my favourite).
I didn’t have much appetite and my head
was so full of thoughts and feelings, it
felt like it might fall off. It had been a
really confusing day and I didn’t feel like
talking to my family about it. I didn’t want all of these horrible thoughts and feelings. I didn’t want to feel scared. I just wanted to feel normal.

I was lying in bed when suddenly there was a tap! tap! tap! on my window – and I looked up to see this cape outside, floating inches away from my window pane. It tapped on the glass with its corners curled up like little hands, then opened the window and flew into my room.

At first it wouldn’t let me tie it around my neck. Instead, it soared up above my bed, where it spread out across the ceiling. That night I fell asleep with a view of the galaxies above me. It took my mind off all the thoughts clouding my brain. The more time I spent bored in bed, at hospital or at home, the more I loved its changing shapes and colours to look up at.
On my first day at the doctors’ surgery, it came with me and let me wear it around my neck. At the surgery, the doctors and nurses talked to my mum, and I found it hard to keep up. The words they used were unfamiliar and I didn’t understand why no one was asking me what I thought. I felt more and more tongue tied and less and less able to make myself heard. I’m usually really chatty, but everything was so daunting. I thought I should stay quiet, and let the grown-ups talk – what if I said the wrong thing?

Suddenly, my cape lifted off from around my neck and began to roll itself into a cone shape. The corners became a handle at the bottom of the cone, and I grasped it: it was a megaphone! “I don’t understand!” I said. “And I’m a bit scared . . .” My voice came out loud and clear, booming around the office. The
doctors and the nurses stopped talking, and my Mum looked round at me. They said they were really sorry, and began to explain things more clearly. With the help of my cape, I had found the courage to make myself heard.

The next time the cape surprised me was a few weeks after that first doctors’ appointment. My mum and dad were downstairs, arguing loudly. I think they were finding it hard to juggle all my different appointments as well as looking after my brother when I needed someone with me at hospital. I knew it wasn’t my fault but it made me feel sad to hear them stressed. My friend Shauna was round my house too, and I didn’t want her to hear my mum and dad.

Just as I’d had that thought, the cape loosened from around my neck again, whizzed over to the stereo and used its corner-hands to switch it on – out
blared our favourite song! The cape then spread over the floor and began to flash different colours. The music was loud, and we began to dance all around the room. I hadn’t danced for ages and although I felt a bit tired and achy, it felt good to groove around and move my body. We were laughing so loudly my mum and dad came to see what was happening, and before I could explain, they had leapt onto the cape and were dancing too. My dad was dancing just like my granddad, which made us roar with laughter. I had forgotten how nice it was to be silly, and so had they. Laughing and joking just makes me feel a thousand times better, and I make sure I do it as much as possible now.

One day soon after, when I couldn’t dance much and when I had no choice but to be in bed, I was feeling lonely and missing my friends at school. I’d
been afraid to talk to them about feeling poorly; I didn’t want to make a fuss or single myself out. I didn’t want them to think I wasn’t brave, or that I needed any special treatment. Suddenly, the door opened and in walked all my best friends, each holding a tiny piece of material with a glowing star constellation on it in the shape of different letters. They said they had found them in their pigeon holes, and when they’d put them together it spelt out ‘Visit Rudy’! Apparently, they hadn’t been sure if I’d wanted to see them, and they hadn’t known if they were allowed to ask about my illness. But that afternoon we all talked about it for hours. It felt so good to share with my friends. It meant I didn’t have to feel so alone with my feelings.

Sometimes, though, I didn’t feel like seeing anyone. Sometimes I felt too tired or too strange to talk. Whenever that
happened, I didn’t really feel like being seen by anyone, and so the cape would wrap itself around me to hide me away underneath its dark sky. Inside the cape, lit by the stars, I would read my books. No one could see me, and it felt nice to have a den I could hide in. Sometimes I heard Mum and Dad come into my room, but they’d leave, knowing I was happy having some time by myself. The cape let me know it was OK not to always feel like talking to people.

The cape even helped the people around me. Sometimes my dad cried and he tried to hide it. On occasions like that, the cape would appear as a sparkly tissue in my hand, and when I gave it to my dad it made him smile. If my brother felt sad he never said so, but I knew when he was because I would find the cape shining stars on his ceiling instead of mine, and I would sneak into
his room and talk about everything with him under the starlight.

One day, a couple of months after the cape had first arrived, my mum and I were rushing to get to my appointment at the hospital. It wasn’t until I got there that I realised, in the chaos of leaving the house, I had left the cape behind! At first I was panicked, I didn’t know if I could manage without it – but then I breathed, and thought about what the cape had taught me. I thought of the way it had helped me reach out to my friends and my family. Without speaking, the cape had reassured me that it was okay to feel anything, to ask for anything, and had showed me how helpful it was to share the things I felt with the people around me. I went through the appointment feeling calmer, knowing I’d had everything I needed inside me all along. I just had to listen to myself the
way the cape had listened to me.

So, I wanted to send it to you because I think it will help you out too. I don’t think I need it anymore. I used to be scared to say how I felt, but now I’m not. And whenever I close my eyes in bed, I can see the whole universe – now it’s time for you to enjoy that view.

Let me know how you get on with it, and feel better soon,

Rudy.
The ‘For Sale’ board wobbled in the wind, making Alex and Mia Johnson feel sick with worry. The twin girls loved where they’d grown up for the last nine years, in their grey stone house in the Yorkshire village of Ingleton. From their bedroom window they could see Whernside, the highest mountain in the Dales, with its long cap of snow that sparkled in the sunshine. Dad had promised they’d climb up there one day.

Mum and Dad had both worked at the same factory for many years, but it had closed down now, and they couldn’t afford to stay in their lovely house. They were having to move to Leeds where
Mum and Dad said there were more jobs. But the house hadn’t sold yet, and every day the two girls remained in it felt precious. They both wished they were older and could earn money. Maybe then they could stay in the friendly old house with their toys in the garden and the real fire in the sitting room that made shadows dance on the wall like a magic cave.

The one thing that was annoying about their house was that their bedroom was always freezing cold, especially at this time of year. It was April and outside it looked like summer but felt like winter, as the wind howled down from the moors, but the sun kept on shining. Mia and Alex didn’t mind. They had piles of duvets on their beds and liked nothing better than to snuggle down underneath them, warm and cosy, while Dad read them a bedtime story.
“Are you sure you want this one again?” he asked.
“You know we do!” Mia answered.
“So do you, Dad!” Alex added.
It was true. Mr Johnson and his two daughters all loved this book about the monsters that lived in Yorkshire. There were lots of them, more than anywhere else in the country, and they came in all different shapes and sizes. The only thing these creatures had in common was that they were scary – really, really scary. And there was nothing Alex and Mia liked better than to hear about their terrible goings-on when they were safely tucked up in bed.
“How you can fall asleep after all that . . .” began Dad, closing the book – but he stopped himself when he heard the twins’ gentle snoring. He tiptoed to the door and turned out the light.
Some twins argue and fight all the time, but not the Johnson sisters. They were well known for being like two halves of the same whole. They went everywhere together, thought the same way and looked after each other all the time. Nobody had ever taken Mia’s toys at playgroup because Alex was always there to snatch them back. Nobody had ever bullied Alex at school, because they knew Mia would have come down on them like a ton of bricks. They were a team. So it was no surprise to their mum and dad when they both reacted with dread after the estate agent rang one morning to say someone was coming to view the house. This was followed later by shouts of joy when the agent rang back to say the person wasn’t coming anymore because of the weather. April showers were sweeping across Ingleton. One minute there was dazzling sunshine,
next it was pouring torrents of rain – typical British weather!

One shower in particular was really fierce. It arrived in the middle of a lovely sunny spell and it made a perfect rainbow. All seven colours – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet – could be seen clearly and looked as if they’d been painted on the sky.

“Hey, look at this!” called Alex, shuffling up so her twin could kneel at the window beside her.

“That’s amazing!” Mia whispered. “Where does it end?”

“Looks like it’s just at the top of the Whernside mountain. Why?”

“People say there’s a crock of gold at the rainbow’s end.”

“What’s a crock?”

“It’s an old-fashioned word for a pot, isn’t it? I’m sure I read about it in our monster book – something to do with leprechauns.”
The two girls stopped and looked at each other, the same idea occurring to them at exactly the same time.

“A pot full of gold,” Mia murmured.

“Gold’s worth a fortune nowadays,” added Alex. “We could keep our house!”

“We’ve got to find it!” they both said together.

The twins were just like each other in every way except one – Mia had inherited their mum’s love of action, while Alex was like their dad and always liked to think things through. So Mia charged straight off outside on their mission – only to find at the end of their road that her sister wasn’t with her. She ran back, feeling cross.

“Come on, sis, get a wiggle on!” she said. “It’s five miles to Whernside.”

“Exactly! We need proper transport,” Alex explained. “If we walk, we’ll be worn out before we get there, and
then we’ll never manage to climb the mountain. We’ll also need to wear warm clothes, strong shoes and carry rucksacks with food and drink in.”

Although she was keen to get going, Mia had to agree with her sister on this one. She hurried back inside and helped to get everything ready. Then she remembered the first item on the list – transport.

“How do you think we can get there? Drive Dad’s car?”

A tinkling noise in the distance answered her question. It was the mobile shop that drove round the area delivering groceries. Its owner, Archie, was their uncle, and they had often been out with him on his rounds.

“Ooh, I remember now – he stops off at that shop at the foot of the mountain after he calls here. We’ll hitch a ride,” said Alex.
“He won’t let us do that!” Mia protested.

“Who said anything about asking him?” laughed Alex with a mischievous grin.

Half an hour later, and squashed together among tins of beans and boxes of cornflakes, the girls heard Uncle Archie saying goodbye to Mum, and felt the van pull away. It was a long, boring and very bumpy ride, but at last they came to a halt and Uncle Archie slammed his door shut.

“Now!” whispered Mia. “Quick!”

The two stowaways jumped out and sneaked away like shadows, leaving the rear doors of the van open.

“That’s funny,” said Uncle Archie as he came round to collect some more bits of shopping. “I don’t remember leaving these open . . . ” He shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, well. They say strange
things happen in these parts, especially around this mountain.”

He grabbed his next delivery and, completely unaware of his naughty nieces running up the hillside, carried it over to the shop.

The going didn’t get tough until the girls were about half way up the steep slopes. They’d thought it looked easy enough at the bottom, but the mountain was really steep, and their bags were very heavy.

“Let’s take five,” puffed Alex, flopping down onto a big rock and fanning herself with her hat. She felt boiling, even with the cold wind gusting round them.

“That’s all, mind,” Mia warned. “We have to keep going. Once you stop, it’s much harder to get started again.”

And then that’s when they heard it – a high-pitched noise that sounded like a scream, and grew louder and louder as it
came closer. They looked at each other, their eyes wide. They both knew what it was. They had read all about them in their book of monsters.

“A ghost!” they gasped together.

A wave of terror swept through them both. Alex jumped up and ran back down the track, but Mia didn’t move. She stood and waited as it floated towards her.

Mia bravely ran right up to the ghost and started to scream herself, even louder and longer. She went on and on, confusing the horrible ghost and eventually driving it away.

Alex had been watching the whole thing from behind a rock, and ran over to hug her twin. “You saved me!” she cried.

“You’d have done the same for me,” Mia replied. “Now, come on. That ghost has wasted enough of our time already!”
The girls carried on, pleased that they’d managed to defeat a real live monster! They’d got another good way up the mountain when they suddenly realised they weren’t alone on the mountain again. They saw footprints – big ones – in the mud and melting snow. And whatever was making them wasn’t wearing shoes . . .

“Do you think it’s a yeti?”
“They live on Mount Everest!”
“Bigfoot?”
“That’s America!”
“What is it then?” wondered Mia, searching all around.

The mystery was solved a few seconds later when a huge, furry creature with long fangs leapt out at them from behind a rock. It growled hungrily and stepped closer towards them, licking its lips. This was too much, even for brave Mia. She dropped to her knees, crying – and then
to both of their surprises, Alex stepped in front of her, taking off her backpack.

“If you’re hungry, Mister Werewolf,” she said boldly, “you can have this for your dinner.”

And she threw the sandwiches and fruit they had taken from home onto the ground. The monster didn’t know what to do, but in the end, threw himself down and started gobbling it up.

This was their chance! Alex yanked Mia to her feet and they raced off up the path, leaving the werewolf searching around in the mud for scraps.

“How did you know what it was?” gasped Mia.

“It’s the spitting image of a picture in our book,” panted Alex in reply. “Look, there’s the top of the mountain. There can’t be any more monsters in our way now!”

But they were wrong. The girls finally
reached the summit, and were amazed to see the end of the rainbow.

“This is incredible!” yelled Mia. “I can’t believe we made it.”

“I know!” laughed Alex. “And look— not a leprechaun in sight!”

But Mia had noticed something move out of the corner of her eye. Something was hiding just behind a rock in front of them.

“Erm . . . okay, if we’re not about to meet leprechauns . . . what on earth is THAT?”

To their astonishment, a small golden crocodile came waddling out from behind the rock, carrying a very old-looking iron pot in its jaws. Whernside mountain was so high the summit was above the clouds, and the sun shone down, making the golden crocodile sparkle and flash when it moved.

Mia and Alex felt like they were
dreaming. Their battle with the other two monsters had been hard enough, but at least they had known what they were. This was something else. A golden crocodile guarding an empty iron pot! What on earth was going on?

“Oh! I get it!” Mia suddenly exclaimed. “The old legend was wrong. There isn’t a crock of gold at the end of the rainbow – it’s a croc of gold!”

“Which means there’s no gold in the pot,” Alex said miserably.

The two of them suddenly felt tired and defeated. They had come so far, only to lose out at the very last minute. They burst into tears – until something blocked out the sun, and they looked up to see a glittering shape towering over them.

“Don’t cry,” said the crocodile in a gentle voice. “I’m not going to hurt you. In fact, I’m going to help you. I’m going
to make your wish come true.”

The mysterious animal then explained it was his job to guard the gold at the end of the rainbow, but that he had the power to give some to anyone he thought really deserved it. Lots of people came looking for the rainbow’s gold, but they were almost always greedy and selfish, and just wanted to use it to make more money. But the croc knew that wasn’t the case with Mia and Alex.

“So you can have it,” he said, “because of your love for one another. I saw you defending each other from those cruel monsters below and it made my heart sing. You deserve to be rewarded.”

Alex and Mia were speechless. The crocodile laughed, and was starting to fade in and out of view like a television signal going off.

“Just make sure you use it wisely – and do come and visit me again one day!”
And with that, the crocodile turned into shimmering golden smoke, and flew over to the pot before disappearing into it tail-first. \textit{CHINK, CHINK, CHINK!} Suddenly the pot was filled with gold coins, so many of them that they began to overflow.

“Do you think that’s enough money to buy our house?” asked Alex.

“I reckon it’s enough money to buy every house in Ingleton!” Mia replied. \textit{THAKKA-THAKKA-THAKKA!}

A big search and rescue helicopter suddenly rose above the mountaintop, tipping its nose and swooping down towards them. Mum and Dad had obviously been worried – but the girls were pretty sure their prize might make them feel better!

Alex pointed at the chopper and grinned. “Come on, sis,” she said. “Let’s go home . . . and stay there!”
NOT NOW, OPHelia!

By Hermione Norris

Ophelia padded in from the garden, her head aching. It was too hot outside. She needed to lie down on the cold stone floor of the kitchen.

“And I need a cuddle,” thought the Great Dane.

Her owner, Jennifer, was sitting at the table staring at her laptop. Ophelia nuzzled up to her with a hopeful whimper. Usually she would get her head stroked and, on special occasions, she was allowed to sit on her owner’s lap – something that always made Jennifer helpless with laughter. But today there was no response, not even getting her ears tickled.
“Not now, Ophelia,” said Jennifer, still gazing at the screen. “I’m sending a very important email.”

The beautiful black and white dog gave a loud sigh and wandered round the little thatched cottage where she lived. She was almost too big for it now that she was fully grown. She could easily look out of the front windows and she had to be careful not to bang her head on the beams.

“I’ll have a snooze,” Ophelia decided, heading back to the kitchen, where her giant bed took up an entire corner. She flopped down and closed her eyes. She was just drifting off to sleep, enjoying the cool shade, when a rumbling in the far distance made her sit up with a start. Thunder! There must be a storm coming. Ophelia didn’t like storms. They frightened her. She always tried to hide under the bed whenever the lightning
flashed and those deafening bangs shook the house, but there was never quite enough room for her . . .

Jennifer had heard the thunder too. She snapped her laptop shut and hurried to the front door with her shopping basket. “I’m off to the village shop before it rains,” she called. “You stay here and be a good girl!”

“Still no chance of a cuddle then,” Ophelia sighed.

With nothing to do and nowhere to go, it seemed like it would be a lonely afternoon ahead – until she heard the sound of children playing next door. They had just moved in – twins called Abigail and Billy – and they’d come to Somerset from London. Ophelia loved children . . . and they always loved her! She was gentle and fun to play with. So with her tail wagging excitedly, she nosed open the back door and trotted
down the path to the low bit of the fence where she could see into their garden.

“Hello, big dog,” Billy called.

“We’re hungry,” Abigail added.

The family was still waiting for their cooker to be connected, so the children had to eat cold food all the time, like cereal or sandwiches. Their tummies felt empty even when they were full.

“We want something hot!” they said together.

Ophelia felt sorry for her new neighbours, but didn’t know how to help them . . . until a whiff of chicken reached her powerful nose. The scent was very faint and coming from far away, but the Great Dane decided to follow it to see where it led. She nosed open the garden gate, and headed off. The trail took her through the village and, just as she was passing the village shop, she saw her mistress coming out with her groceries.
“She mustn’t see me,” thought Ophelia. “I’m not supposed to be here.”
With one mighty leap, she jumped over the gate into a field and stood with her back to the road, pretending to eat the grass.

“That’s funny,” Jennifer murmured to herself, “I don’t remember seeing a pony in that field before.” Then, with a shrug of her shoulders, she hurried on back to the cottage with an anxious look at the dark clouds gathering on the horizon.

“Phew, that was close,” thought Ophelia, lolloping away in the opposite direction.

The scent of chicken led her to the seaside, which was only a short distance from their village. Sometimes, in winter, she came here for walks and enjoyed running along the empty sand in the wind and rain, but this was the middle of summer and the beach was packed with
holidaymakers. One big family with lots of children had lit a barbeque, and that’s where the smell was coming from. There were still chicken breasts sizzling on the grill and more on a paper plate beside it, but nobody was eating them. They had cooked too many and there were lots left over.

“The seagulls can have them,” said the mother as she started to pack up their picnic.

“Oh no they can’t!” murmured Ophelia, hiding behind a nearby rock.

The birds were already beginning to circle as the family left, but a few loud barks from the dog’s deep voice sent them flapping away, cawing and shrieking. The food was there for the taking – but how? When she tried to pick up the paper plate in her mouth, the chicken started to roll off and she was forced to put it down again.
But then she noticed a small red bucket with a yellow handle lying on its side in the sand. One of the children must have left it behind after making a sandcastle. It had been washed out with sea water and looked perfect for carrying food. So, very slowly, Ophelia carried the floppy plate over to the bucket and tipped the chicken into it. Only one piece fell out.

“I’ll treat myself to that,” she chuckled, eating it all up and licking her lips. Then she picked up the bucket by the handle and trotted back to the village with her tasty treats.

The twins could not believe their eyes when they found the chicken waiting for them in their back garden.

“Where has this come from?” asked Abigail.

“Who cares?” said Billy, taking a big bite of one piece and handing his sister another. “Yum! They taste scrummy!”
Peeping round the broken fence at the smiling children, the Great Dane felt really pleased she’d made them so happy.

“I think it was magic,” she heard Abigail say. “A kind fairy must have granted our wish.”

“I’m a bit big for a fairy,” Ophelia woofed, scampering back indoors.

Jennifer was on her mobile, standing with her back to the door, as Ophelia pushed it open with one giant paw and sneaked inside. The dog knew to wait until her mistress had stopped talking before asking for a cuddle, but again she was disappointed.

“Not now, Ophelia,” Jennifer said, snatching up her handbag. “Sadie needs me. She thinks she’s having her baby.”

Sadie was Jennifer’s best friend, who lived at the other end of the village. She
was expecting a baby any day now and, with her husband away on business, Jennifer was helping her. Ophelia did get a very brief pat on the head, but that was all. Her mistress rushed out and slammed the door behind her.

“You’ll be all right on your own for a while, won’t you poppet?” she shouted.

As she often did, Ophelia looked out of the front window and watched her owner depart. Then she noticed Mrs Wilson from number 32 sitting in the bus shelter, looking very unhappy. Without a second thought, the Great Dane nosed open the back door again and trotted over to the elderly lady.

“I’m so glad to see you, Ophelia,” Mrs Wilson said. “I’ve got myself in a bit of a pickle. It was bright sunshine when I went to visit my sister, but now the sky’s black and I’m freezing cold. Worse than that, I’ve left my glasses at her house and
I can’t see a thing without them. I just don’t know how I’m going to get home.”

Ophelia jumped up onto the seat beside the shivering woman and pressed her warm body against her. Mrs Wilson was very grateful and put her arms round the dog’s furry body for extra warmth.

“At least I’m getting some sort of hug!” thought Ophelia.

Afterwards, when the grateful old lady felt ready to move, Ophelia led her slowly and gently down the road to her house. With the storm about to break there was a strange silence and an eerie yellow light over the village, but they made it just in time to Mrs Wilson’s front door.

“I can’t thank you enough, Ophelia…” she began, but her helper was already gone. The first giant raindrops were splashing all around and the dog wanted to get home to safety before it got really
heavy. She crashed in through the back
door, jumped up to slam it shut and
bounded up the stairs as the first flash of
lightning lit up the village like a floodlight
and a massive thunderclap rattled all the
windows. “OUCH!” yelped Ophelia as
she banged her head on a beam on the
landing. “GRRR!” she growled as she
failed to squeeze underneath Jennifer’s
bed. Feeling worried and alone, she
crept downstairs again and curled up
on her bed in the kitchen, where she felt
safe. The storm went on for hours – the
scariest she had ever known – but with
her eyes closed and her paws over her
ears she was able to keep out the worst
of it.

She must have fallen asleep because,
when she woke up, it was the following
morning. The sky was bright blue again
and the birds were singing, but there
was a strange whooshing noise outside the door. Struggling to her feet and loosening her limbs with a good long shake, Ophelia padded to the front window and looked out. Water was swirling down the street like a river. The storm had flooded the village!

Ophelia didn’t know what to do. She raced around the room two or three times and went back to looking out of the window. She saw a fire engine arrive and a fireman in a yellow helmet carrying Mrs Wilson over his shoulder out of her house. Then she saw Doctor Jennings and Lucy the midwife being pulled along in a dingy by Tom the postman. Suddenly, Tom tripped over and sprained his ankle. He cried out in pain and accidentally let go of the dinghy, causing it to float out into the middle of the street.

“I must help them!” Ophelia woofed.
The dog knew Doctor Jennings and Lucy well and they always made a fuss of her. So she pressed down the window’s smooth white handle with her paw, pushed it open with her nose and squeezed herself out. It was quite a struggle. Compared to her vast size the window was very small, but after a lot of grunting and wriggling she managed to get through and splashed down into the swirling floodwater below.

“Ooh, it’s cold!” she whined.

Lucy saw her coming and waved excitedly as the doctor held out the rope attached to the front of the dingy. Wading up, almost swimming now, Ophelia gripped the rope in her mouth and started to pull. With two people in it, the rubber boat was heavy but she swam as hard as she could and started to get it moving. Ophelia guided her passengers down the whole length of the street,
tugging firmly on the rope whenever the surging water carried them sideways. It wasn’t long before they reached Sadie’s house.

“Great work, Ophelia,” shouted Doctor Jennings, jumping out with her bag.

“You deserve a medal!” added Lucy, gasping as she followed and the freezing water went down her boots.

Ophelia knew she shouldn’t go in with them, so she climbed onto the rockery in Sadie’s garden and shook herself dry. Then she waited . . . and waited . . . and waited. The floodwater had almost drained away by the time the shrill cry of a newborn baby echoed down the empty street.

“Time to go home,” she barked happily.

The following day, when the quaint
The village was starting to return to normal, there was a knock on Jennifer’s door. She opened it to find Billy and Abigail holding out a card they had made. It said ‘THANK YOU’ in big colourful letters.

“This is for Ophelia,” said Billy.

“What for?” asked Jennifer.

“Feeding us,” answered Abigail. “We’ve worked out it must have been her.”

Next moment Mrs Wilson arrived with a big bone she had bought from the butcher.

“Ophelia was so kind to me yesterday,” she explained.

Jennifer was looking even more puzzled when the phone rang. It was Sadie from the hospital, saying she wanted to Skype. Soon everyone was looking at the laptop screen as Sadie sat up in bed holding a tiny bundle with a screwed-up red face.
“Guess what, Jenny,” she said. “I’m going to call her Chloe Ophelia Brown after your amazing dog!”

When the visitors had gone, having explained what Ophelia had done to help them all, Jennifer sat down on the sofa and called her dog over.

“Everyone says you’re the biggest, friendliest dog in the whole of Somerset, and I’m very proud of you,” she chuckled. “Come here and have a cuddle.”

The Great Dane bounded over and closed her eyes with bliss as she felt her head being stroked, her ears fondled and her chin scratched. Next, Jennifer tickled her tummy, making her dog roll on her back, kicking her legs in the air like a gigantic puppy. Finally, her smiling owner patted her own knees, inviting Ophelia to jump onto her lap.

“Oh, you great lump,” gasped Jennifer, falling backwards on the sofa.
“Don’t you lick my face now . . . please sit still . . . ho, ho, ho . . . HA, HA, HA, HA, HA . . .”
“You’re such a brave boy!” they say with a grin.

_Brave_? I’m not brave.

Batman’s brave,
I’m not him.

What’s brave about me, eating hospital lunches?

_Brave_ looks like Iron Man, throwing powerful punches.

_Brave_ looks like Superman, flying higher and higher, not sitting all day, hooked up to a wire.
Brave looks like Spiderman,  
scaling buildings and towers.  
‘I’m not brave!’ I say,  
‘I don’t have any powers!’

But Mum said that’s nonsense,  
and Dad said I’m wrong.  
They said there’s a power,  
that’s keeping me strong.

A real superpower!  
That’s much cooler, surely?  
A force of my own,  
at its peak when I’m poorly.

I’m just like Superman,  
and instead of kryptonite,  
my nemesis makes me weaker,  
and doctors help me fight.
Wonder Woman’s cool,
she’s fearless and she’s bold.
But I fight bad in real life,
a harder job to hold.

And although I love my heroes,
as they’re taking flight,
their lives are always make-believe,
so I think my mum was right.

I’m a real-life caped crusader,
and now I’ve thought it through,
it’s true – I’m pretty super,
I’m braver than I knew.