

Karen McCombie

The Mystery of Me




With illustrations by Cathy Brett



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A collection of approximately 15 small, light gray butterflies is scattered across the top half of the cover, some appearing to fly towards the left and others towards the right.

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A small cluster of three light gray butterflies is positioned to the left of the title.

With illustrations by
Cathy Brett

A small cluster of three light gray butterflies is positioned below the author's name.

*For Daisy Weston (and her fairy godmother,
Margaret Sawkins, who made this happen!)*



First published in 2017 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library upon request

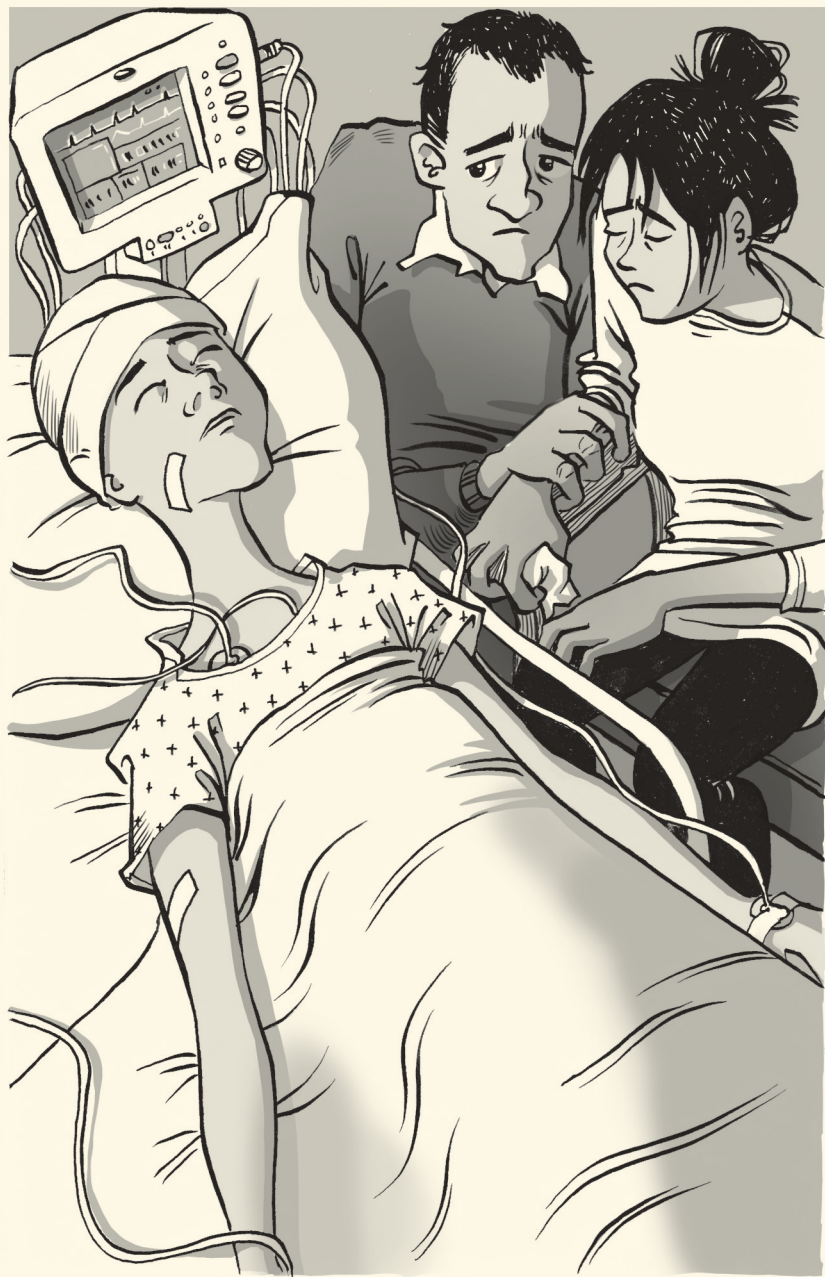
ISBN: 978-1-78112-720-9




Printed in China by Leo

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Chapter 1

The same old Ketty?

I can't remember dying.

But it was only for two minutes, 39 seconds. Then the paramedics got my heart started again.

I can't remember the crash, or anything about the two weeks after it. That's no surprise, since I was in a coma.

I lay lost in some strange, deep sleep, letting my bruised brain heal, while my poor parents sat beside me. Mum said they stayed by my hospital bed for hour after hour, day after day, holding hands and hoping. Just hoping I'd wake up and be me, their sweet little Ketty.

The doctor tried to warn them that people can seem different after a head injury. A fun-loving person may turn serious. A shy, easy-going person may turn loud and short-tempered. Or maybe – after plenty of rest – there'd be no change at all. It's like the flip of a coin ... and my parents didn't know how that coin would land for me.

Thankfully, I ended up the same old Ketty, they say.

Not that I'm sure who the old Ketty is ... That's pretty hazy for me too, same as the crash.

I've been off school the last couple of months, and my memory is creeping back in scraps and wisps. Faces, places, people – they pop into my mind at odd times. I was having a bowl of tomato soup at the kitchen table when a sudden image came to me. It was a big, noisy room, packed with teenagers, talking and eating.

“The school canteen!” Mum said when I described it.

The first time Mum and Dad took me for a walk in the park, I looked at the children’s playground and I remembered sitting on the swings. The sway of them, the thick, cold links of metal in my hands, the giggles of girls beside me.

“That must have been Adele and Urmi! Your best friends!” Dad said.

I’ve only seen Adele and Urmi one time since the crash, but it felt like it was the first time I’d *ever* met them. When they came to the house we were all a bit shy, and I went stiff when they hugged me. I smiled and nodded as they spoke about teachers and kids at school who sent their love, but the names they said didn’t mean anything to me. I couldn’t match the names with faces – or even with feelings – at all.

But perhaps today it will happen at last, cos today is my first day back at Heartfield Academy.



“You’ll only be here for the morning, Ketty, so you won’t get *too* tired,” Mum reminds me now, as we walk in the front door of the school.

“OK,” I say with a nod, as I stare around me.

I’m pleased to see that I *do* know this place.

The corridor with the grey floor tiles, the blue sofa for visitors, the office with the smiley lady behind the sliding glass window. There are no crowds of kids in here – my parents and the school decided it was best for me to come in after the mad crush at the start of the day at 8.30 a.m.

“Hello, Ketty! How nice to see you!” the smiley lady says. She gets up and comes out of a door and into the corridor.

Her name flutters around in my mind like a moth, but I can’t seem to catch hold of it. That happens a lot. Even the simplest words are there one second, and gone the next. My doctor says this will get better bit by bit. He says I have to try not to get frustrated when the words fly away out of my grasp.

That’s easy for *him* to say.

“Stella!” I shout out too loudly, as the memory moth wafts to the front of my mind.

“Yes, well done!” Stella the receptionist says. She and Mum smile at each other, as if I’m a toddler who has learned a new word.

I was pleased when I remembered, but that look they share makes me feel a bit stupid.

“Now don’t worry at all today, Ketty,” Stella says. “As you know, everyone has been told you need to take it slow. And everyone knows not to talk about ...”

Stella goes red.

She was about to say “... the crash ...” but she stopped herself.

I suppose she’s worried that it’ll be too upsetting for me to think about – and awkward for her too.

But, like I say, it’s all blank to me.

“Good luck, darling,” Mum says, and she gives my arm a little rub. “It’ll be fine.”

As soon as she waves and leaves, I turn to Stella, who will take me to my first class.

And then I see two girls further up the corridor. Their school shoes have stopped



pitta-patting on the shiny floor and they're staring at me as if I have two heads and three noses. They're whispering madly, hands not quite covering their mouths.

Uh-oh.

Is Mum right? Will I be fine?

I'm not so sure.