A vibrant, stylized illustration of a pink piggy bank flying upside down. The piggy bank is the central focus, with its wings spread wide. The background is a deep blue, decorated with several white, fluffy clouds, each with a small teal leaf-like detail. In the bottom right corner, a bright yellow sun with rays is partially visible. The overall style is playful and energetic.

Sometimes your life
gets turned...

DOWNSIDE UP

Hayley Long

For The Barefoot Executive

*'I can't go back to yesterday because I was a
different person then.'*

– Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*



Ronni Runnacles @ronneee_r

I've got some seriously freaky things to tell you. #wheretostart?

Most stories start once upon a time, a long time ago. But not this one. This is a story about what happened yesterday.

Then again, it's about some other stuff too. And some of that other stuff happened in the days and weeks leading up to yesterday. So maybe I need to backtrack a bit more and begin one month ago. On the day that my dad left.

That was also the day I got into a fight.

I'm not just talking about a few shouty words and a shove. Or a scrap or a spat or a bust-up or a scuffle or anything like that. I'm talking about a proper, no-messing,

claws-out,

teeth-bared,

hackles rattled,

full-on,

battle for survival.

Sort of like *the Hunger Games* but in a food-technology classroom.

One moment I was stirring flour into my Victoria sponge cake mix, and the next I'd scooped up a huge handful of unbaked slop and hurled it as hard as I could at Sadie Slowgrove's head.

It's fair to say I wasn't having a good day.

Within half a second, everyone had rushed from their workstations and clotted together in a shrinking circle round us. Some people were waving wooden spoons and others were banging on saucepans and loads more were holding up their phones and taking photos and all of them were screaming and shrieking and laughing and cheering and chanting . . .

**'Fight!
Fight!
Fight!'**

And at the same time, they were pushing and shoving and bundling and moshing and crushing in as close as they could just to get the best view of me and Sadie Slowgrove as we tried our hardest to rip each other's hair out.

Afterwards, Stuart Bolan – who everyone fancies – put the whole thing on YouTube. YouTube took it straight off again.

But I wound up in a whole heap of grief anyway. For starters, I was made to sit outside the Headteacher's office and told to write down exactly what had happened. But I couldn't. I just kept stopping and starting and scrunching up endless pieces of paper and instead of thinking about Sadie Slowgrove and the food-tech fight, I kept on thinking about my mum and about how I'd found her, earlier that same morning, just sitting on our kitchen floor and crying. And then I started thinking about my dad and how I'd gone to bed the night before believing that everything in my life was okey-dokey and Diet-Cokey and how I now knew that – actually – it wasn't.

In the end I hardly wrote a word. I just sat there. Some things are really difficult to explain. Throwing cake mix

into somebody's face is one of them.

And then there was that lie I told in the lesson. How do I explain that? I know *why* I lied. I lied because I couldn't handle telling the truth. But why *that* lie? It was as random as the pepper I'd accidentally shaken into my beaten eggs, margarine and sugar.

It was supposed to have been my dad's birthday cake, by the way. Because the day he left us was his birthday.

My eyes were fixed on my wooden spoon and I was whirling it faster and faster through the pointless plop in my bowl. Dimly in the background somewhere, I heard Mrs Duncan – my food tech teacher – shouting, 'Make sure you're *folding* your flour and not beating it to death, please.' And then – much nearer and clearer – I heard my best friend, Flooky, say, 'Are you all right, Ronni? You seem well tense.'

And my other best friend, Kelly Bugg, said, 'Is something on your mind?'

And because I didn't want to say, 'Yes actually. My family is a complete car crash,' I shook my head and said something else instead. This:



Katy Perry is following me on Twitter.

It's weird because I hadn't been thinking about Katy Perry at all. I hadn't even been thinking about Twitter.

My friends stopped what they were doing and looked at me amazed. And then Flooky said, 'What? The actual Katy Perry? Or just some random Katy Perry who works in Argos?'

And straight away, I said, 'The verified Katy Perry.'

Flooky went quiet for a second. Then she snorted into her buttercream filling and said, 'Yeah, right! And pigs might fly!'

Kelly Bugg put down her whisk and said, 'No offence, yeah, but it is quite hard to believe. Last time I looked at Twitter, you only had seven followers. And two of them are us.'

And straight away, I replied, 'Yeah, but have you seen who the other five are? They're all celebrities. I'm being followed by the tweet elite.'

Flooky and Kelly Bugg looked at each other. Then they

burst out laughing.

And even though I wasn't in any kind of laughing mood, *I* started laughing too. Because I didn't know what else to do. So all three of us just stood there and split our sides over the fact that I was such a freaky random liar.

Sometimes you *have* to laugh or else you'd cry.

But then I looked over to the next workstation and I saw that Sadie Slowgrove was laughing too. And straightaway, I stopped laughing and *almost* did start crying. I didn't though. Instead, I put on this brand new tough face that I never knew I had, raised my chin up really high and said loudly, 'Er . . . Excuse me. What the heck d'you think you're laughing at, Sadie Slowgrove?'

There was so much noise from all the food-mixers and fan ovens and general chit-chat that Mrs Duncan didn't hear me.

But Sadie Slowgrove did. She looked at me, raised her eyebrows and said, 'Was I *actually* laughing at you? Was I *actually* even aware you were there?'

And, to be honest, there's a fair chance that the answer to her first question was actually **No**. But she *knew* I

was there all right. No doubt about it.

So I just kept on glaring and said, 'I flipping well saw you talking about me behind your hand.'

Sadie Slowgrove stared back at me. And then she said, 'Liar.'

And for some reason that was the thin end of the wedge. I threw down my wooden spoon and said, 'Why don't you just crawl back under your rock and disappear. And while you're about it, tell your mum to disappear as well.'

From the corner of me eye, I could tell that Flooky and Kelly Bugg were looking pretty stunned. I'm not surprised. This mouthy new me was probably a shock to everyone.

Sadie Slowgrove's face turned toxic and she stood up from her stool and said, 'It's not my flipping fault that your dad is a moron.'

And that was when I let her have it with the cake mix.

That all happened one month ago. Me and Sadie Slowgrove have kept right out of each other's way since then. Mostly, I've kept right out of everyone else's way too.

And I mean everyone.

It's been a bit like this.

I've been here.



Me.

And everyone else has been on an entirely different page.

My brothers.

My mum.

My nan.

Even my best friends,

Flooky
and **Kelly Bugg**, have been a little way off.

Not in terms of actual distance perhaps. But in terms of headspace I've been floating around in my own separate galaxy. And it's a galaxy where my dad doesn't walk with me along the seafront any more. And he doesn't give me all his 2ps for the 2p coin-shove machines. Or buy me chips that come in a cone of rolled-up newspaper. Or sit next to me on the seawall watching the waves. Or race me round and round the dodgem track until he's got no money left.

In fact, it's a galaxy where it's easier to pretend that he doesn't exist.

And, just lately, I've been pretending a load of other stuff too. While I've been wrapped up in my duvet or staring out of classroom windows or making my baby brother's tea, I've been pretending to be someone else.

But now – at last – I *am* someone else. At least, I'm definitely not the same person I was yesterday morning. I've changed. And it's all because of this very

very
weird
thing

that happened yesterday afternoon.

In fact, it was SO weird that I'm not sure you're even going to believe what I'm about to tell you. I wouldn't blame you if you didn't. I'm struggling to believe it all myself.

But what I do know is that something happened yesterday which made me see the world in a completely different way. And I'm going to take you right back to the start of that day. When I wasn't seeing *anything*. Because I hadn't even opened my eyes . . .

Under the cover of darkness, I switched off the real world and flicked to a channel that was way more interesting.

I was in a strange place. It was a place which had no noisy brothers and no red-eyed mum and no nagging nan. In this place, everyone was wearing a security pass and a T-shirt with my face on it. In this place, everyone was really cool.

‘Now *this* . . .’ I said to myself, ‘. . . is much more my scene!’

My heels twitched with excitement and I heard an unfamiliar clinking sound. Glancing down, I saw that I was standing on a metal disc plonked – like a stepping-stone – in a field of mud. I lifted my gaze again. Towers of scaffolding were everywhere. They reached up to a high ceiling that covered an area at least as large as a decent shopping centre. In this enormous, dark, muddy space, people were rushing about in every direction and shouting into headsets and handsets and loud hailers. The only people who weren’t rushing around was a group of dancers in black leotards. They were standing together on mud-splattered gym mats and doing some complicated stretching exercises.

I watched them for a second or two and then I called over, 'Hey, y'all better get your freak on, sisters!'

The dancers stopped stretching and their eyes widened with respect. Then the tallest and coolest of them nodded at me and said, 'You sure can count on us, girrrrr! You *know* that!'

And I nodded fiercely and said, 'I damn well DO know it, girlfriend.'

And I *did* as well. Because I was Miss Ronni Runaway and everyone wanted to be me.

Above us, music began to play. It was so loud that I could feel every single beat thump through my body. It was just like those prickly little shocks you sometimes get from your school jumper. I closed my eyes and took a couple of slow deep breaths to help me focus.

In . . . Out . . . In . . . Out . . .

And then I opened my eyes again and winked. But it wasn't just any old wink. It was the wink that meant I was ready to get this party started.

Someone shouted, 'Time to get a shift on!'

There was a clunk and a whirring noise below me. The metal disc beneath my feet trembled.

Someone shouted, 'Just stand real still!'

Slowly, I began to rise up and up – away from the mud and the dancers and the people with their headsets and handsets and loud hailers. And I kept on rising up and up and up until I was moving through a round hole cut into the ceiling.

And then I found myself on a massive stage.

A spotlight shone into my eyes and a strange noise filled the air. For a moment, I couldn't work out what it was. It was a bit like the sound of a plane taking off. Or the sound of a billion birds all perched in the exact same tree. Or the roar of a hurricane passing overhead.

But then I realized it was the sound of one hundred and thirty-five thousand different people starting to cheer.

And they were all cheering me.

I could see them in front of me. It was as if the entire world had turned into one great big sea of waving arms and floating flags and flashing camera lenses.

My heels twitched with excitement. Then I shook back my hair, wiggled my hips and began to sing. And the crowd erupted.

I felt fantastic.

I felt electric.

I felt totally and utterly amazing!

And then I stopped singing and shouted,
'Glastonbury . . . Are you ready?'

And I guess they were because the crowd in front of me just went

damn straight insane.

So I wiggled my hips again and fed them a line from my ground-breaking, award-winning, international Number One hit single.

‘Roll up your sleeves, pull up your socks -

Cos I’m still Ronni from the docks.’

And the crowd joined in and started singing along and it was clear that they were absolutely loving me. And, to be perfectly honest, *I* was absolutely loving me too – because I was wearing an amazing pair of gold high-heeled boots and a matching gold jacket and shorts so short that my nan would have choked on her chewy toffees.

Out of the main spotlight, I could feel the love coming at me from my

backing dancers. And in the VIP enclosure I could feel the love coming at me from Beyoncé and Jay-Z and that man from Coldplay. I could feel the love everywhere.

So I blew a kiss to the crowd and chanted,

‘What’s my name?

What’s my name?

What’s my name . . . ?’

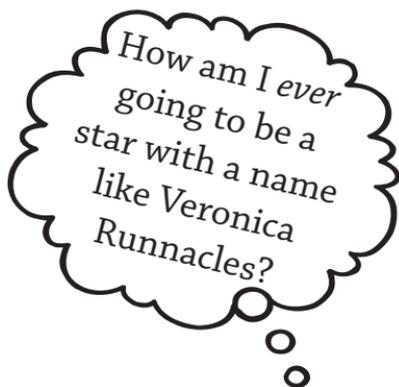
And, just like one single living breathing being, they all opened up their lungs and shouted . . .

**‘Veronica
Runnacles
– GET UP
NOW!’**

The TV screen inside my head went fuzzy with interference, froze for a moment and then went blank. And into this sudden emptiness popped my first proper thought of the day. It was this:



And close behind it was another thought:



It was a pretty bleak way to wake up. But then I remembered that Sadie Slowgrove isn't exactly a sexy name either. And neither is Kelly Bugg. And neither is Flooky – whose real name is actually Frida van der Flugt but nobody can pronounce it.

I groaned, rubbed the sleep out of my eyes and dragged my body into a sitting position. Then, stretching out an

arm, I tugged back the curtain next to my bed and looked outside.

Just like I do every morning.

And all I could see was a . . .



I wiped the window with my arm, yawned and had another look.

It was raining. In June. And it wasn't damp or drizzly or misty or spitting. This was proper actual bucketing rain and it was falling in poker-straight lines and bouncing off the big grey paving slabs in our backyard. Even the weather was harshing my mood.

'This is *so* not my scene,' I muttered. And then I looked at the world on the other side of our fence. Through the

hammering rain, I could see grey cars and grey lorries rushing along all four lanes of the grey dual carriageway that goes all the way to the grey North Sea and then stops.

'Whoop,' I muttered.

I looked across to the other side of the road. Looming out of the early-morning mist, I could make out the shapes of hundreds of office blocks and thousands of big metal boxes. I watched as one of the boxes was hoisted upward by a crane, swung slowly through the air and loaded on to a massive grey ship. It was a sight I'd woken up to a million times before. Some places are famous for having Empire State Buildings and Eiffel Towers and Grand Canyons and gondoliers. But the place I live in is famous for having a really massive dock.

'Whoop,' I said again.

Plonking my elbows on the window ledge, I propped my chin up with my hands, pushed my nose flat against the glass and searched the skyline until I spotted a small jet of orange flame flickering from the top of a tall metal pipe. And then – satisfied that it was still there – I let go of the curtain, flumped back down on my bed and closed

my eyes.

‘Ronni! Time to get a shift on. You’ll be late for school!’

It was my mum. She was calling me from downstairs. She sounded vexed. But I knew she wasn’t really that vexed. Otherwise she wouldn’t have binned the last three letters the school had sent her about my late detentions.

So I didn’t get moving. What was the point?

My mum’s voice screamed up the stairs again. **‘For God’s sake, GET UP!’**

I froze. And then I snuggled down further under my duvet. I know I shouldn’t have done, but it felt like the best place to be.

Sleepiness and snugness and warmth washed over me. In the dark space behind my eyelids, a few festival flags came into focus.

‘Mum says you’ve gotta get up!’

The flags vanished. I flipped back the top of my duvet and shouted, **‘Ryan, get the heck OUT of my bedroom!’**

Brother Number One – Ryan – is one of those kids

that everybody likes. He's got tufty black hair and a cute dimply face and he gets on well with everyone. My mum, my nan, my other brothers, other kids, teachers . . . they all love Ryan James Runnacles. The only person who ever seems to find him remotely annoying is me. He was leaning against my door frame with his arms folded. And instead of looking cute and dimply and lovable, he looked like a big fat irritating smugster.

There was a second of silence. And then he turned to the door and shouted, 'Muuuum – she won't budge!' And after that, he said, 'You're setting such a bad example.'

'Oh, act your age,' I snapped. 'You're eleven! Not a hundred and eleven. Go and pop your spots.'

Ryan glared at me for a moment. Then – his face screwed up with concentration – he tensed his entire body before relaxing again with a big satisfied, 'Ahhhh!' And then he smirked and said, 'I bet you won't want to stay in bed now. I've just guffed. And it was a real ripper.'

For a second, I was so disgusted I went into a state of total shock. Then I picked up my pillow, hurled it right across the room at him and screamed . . .

‘Get out!’

Ryan laughed. ‘Mmmm . . . smells sweeeeet in here.’ And then he slammed my door and ran off down the stairs.

I pulled the duvet back over my head and lay completely still. I was nearly crying. This is NOT how I like to wake up. It really isn’t. Feeling around in the darkness, my fingers skipped over a book, three socks, a tube of lip balm and an empty crisp packet. And then they found my phone. I pulled it up to my face, pressed a button to illuminate the screen and wrote



Ronni Runnacles @ronneee_r

Can my day get any worse???

I pressed Tweet. Straight away, a voice said, ‘C’mon, lady, shift your carcass!’

It wasn’t Ryan. It wasn’t my mum either. I groaned out loud. And then I said, ‘Oh, *Nan!* Can’t I just have five more minutes?’

‘No,’ replied my nan. As if to confirm this fact, my duvet disappeared.

‘Oh, *what?*’ I sat up so fast that my eyesight went funny. I rubbed my eyes, frowned at my nan and said, ‘What the **flipping heck** are you doing? Give me my duvet back!’

‘Oi, oi, oi! Watch your language,’ said my nan. ‘I don’t want to hear any of that effing and jeffing from you, lady. So wash your mouth out.’

My mouth fell open. For a second, I couldn’t speak and then I said, ‘How . . . how am I effing and jeffing? Since when has *flipping heck* been a swear word? I’m just expressing my valid opinion that this is **completely unfair!** You’ve got **no right** to barge in like this and steal my duvet. It’s a **total infringement of my basic human rights!**’

My nan looked at me. Her eyes and lips had gone very narrow. Finally, she said, ‘Is that so?’

‘Yes,’ I said. But I was already starting to feel a bit less sure.

My nan’s eyes and lips went **even** narrower. I groaned out loud again.

My nan put her head on one side and said, 'I see. So let me ask you something, lady.'

I sighed and wished I could press a button and switch my nan to MUTE.

My nan said, 'How about your mum's basic human rights? Doesn't she have the right to live in this house without the school sending her letters every other day just because you can't be bothered to get your bones out of bed in time? And what about your brothers' human rights? Don't they have the right to live in this house without pussyfooting around an older sister who's got a bigger attitude than Genghis Khan? And what about my human rights? Don't I have the—'

'OK, OK, I get the flipping picture,' I said. 'I'm getting up.' And then – because I probably *do* have a bigger attitude than Genghis Khan – I added, 'There was no need to steal my duvet though. That was just rude.'

My nan dumped my duvet back on to my bed and sat down next to me. 'Well, in that case, you tell me how I'm supposed to get you up? Seriously, Ronni, I'd love to know. You don't set your alarm clock. You ignore your mum. You ignore Ryan when he tries to help. What else

am I supposed to do? I'm sick of this, Ronni, I really am. It's not like you. You were as good as gold before your dad went. I know you're angry and I know you're upset, but the way you're behaving isn't making things any easier. Your poor mum is pulling her hair out.'

'Well, that's not my fault,' I said.

My nan frowned. 'Have you thought about what she's going through?'

'Yes,' I mumbled. And then I sighed very noisily and said, 'I can't exactly avoid it, can I?'

My nan didn't say anything to that.

I said, 'I'm sorry. Can you go now, please? I need to get up.'

My nan raised her eyebrows and smiled. 'No trouble at all.' And then she patted me on the arm and left my room.

And that pretty much sums up my nan. She's loud and tough and has spiky copper hair and big hoopy earrings. And she wears clothes that are slightly too tight with necklines that are slightly too low and she wears fancy tights and high-heeled shoes and she's so impossibly tricky and crafty and impossible to argue with that you always end up begging to do the one thing that you

were fighting against in the first place.

I sat on the side of my bed and psyched myself up for the day ahead. Downstairs, I heard Ryan shout, 'Bye,' and then the front door slam shut. Unlike me, Ryan is never late for school. Not ever. Not even with all the chaos that's been going on. He still manages to get himself up and out of the house on time. I suppose it wouldn't bother me if we went to different schools, but we don't. Now that he's old enough, we go to the same one. And all the teachers think that he's cute and lovely and perfect and that I'm just a douchebag.

Seconds later, a car horn honked. There were more voices downstairs and more shouts of 'Bye' and the front door slammed again.

Suddenly the house got a whole lot quieter.

I stood up, crossed my room and headed across the landing to the bathroom. It's my second favourite place in the house. Recently, I've acquired this habit of locking the door, filling the bath up to the top and spending absolutely ages in there and refusing point blank to come out.

To be honest, this was pretty much my plan for the entire morning.

But as I put my hand on the bathroom door my nan's voice floated back from the foot of the stairs.

‘And don't think you're going to sit and stew in that bath all morning. If you're not done in five minutes, lady, I'll come and fetch you out myself.’

I rolled my eyes. And then I shouted back, ‘Oh yeah? No offence, Nan, but how are you going to manage that exactly?’

‘Easy peasy,’ shouted my nan. ‘I've taken the lock off the bathroom door.’

And, without even needing to check, I straight away knew that she had. Because that's another perfect example of what my nan is like. She's the sort of person who'll go to any amount of trouble just to make my life difficult. There's no doubt about it – my nan is hardcore.

And I realize now that this is exactly why my mum asked her to come and live with us.

Shaking my head at the total unfairness of it all, I kicked open the lockless bathroom door and started the water running in the basin.