

GIRL

(in real life)



If I ever got abducted by aliens, my parents would make a YouTube video about it before they called the police.

I know they love me. I mean, they tell practically the entire world on a twice-weekly basis. Along with sharing everything else about me too. It's not easy when the two people who love you the most are also the ones ruining your life...

For Felix

First published in the UK in 2021 by Usborne Publishing Ltd., Usborne House,
83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England. www.usborne.com

Usborne Verlag, Usborne Publishing Ltd., Prüfeninger Str. 20, 93049 Regensburg,
Deutschland, VK Nr. 17560

Text copyright © Tamsin Winter, 2021

Author photo © Andrew Winter, 2017

Cover illustration by Charly Clements © Usborne Publishing, 2021

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

The name Usborne and the Balloon logo are Trade Marks of Usborne Publishing Ltd.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy-
ing, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the
author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual
events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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

JFMA JJASOND/21 ISBN 9781474978484 05787/1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY.



TAMSIN WINTER

GIRL

(in real life)



WELCOME TO OUR CHANNEL

The first thing you should know about me is that I'm not extraordinary. Not even in the slightest. When people find out I'm *that* Eva – Eva Andersen, the one with the YouTube channel – they expect someone special. Only, I'm not. Sorry if you find that disappointing. But I've got kind of used to disappointing people lately.

I know there are probably a lot of people out there who would like to swap places with me. My life looks pretty good – from the outside anyway. And I get a lot of free stuff. Like, way more than I can ever use. There are boxes of new products in the garage that we haven't even opened yet. Last November, we got free tickets to the Alton Towers Ultimate Fireworks display, and all the big rides were open. The vertical drop on Oblivion in the

dark was pretty amazing, even if I did feel kind of sick afterwards. Last summer, we got to stay in this luxury treehouse in Portugal that had parts of the tree growing inside. I have my own iPhone, tablet, Xbox, laptop and even a custom-made charging station with my name on it. I have stacks of wellness journals, bullet journals and monogram journals (I don't even know what they are). And every kind of fairy light you can imagine, from panda bears to pineapples. Last week, I was sent lollipops with real edible gold inside them. Sometimes, all that stuff can be exciting.

But sometimes it can feel like it's crushing me. Maybe that sounds weird, and maybe if there wasn't a camera pointed at me the whole time it would feel more fun. But the camera is always there. Staring, like a giant eye that never blinks, recording everything that I do. And then there are all the other eyes – hundreds of thousands of them. Every single one of them watching me.

It would be so much easier if I was an outgoing person. That's what my friend Hallie says and she knows everything (apart from when she ties her braids in an extra-high bun and claims she's taller than me). But she's right about that – everything is easier if you're an outgoing person. When I was younger, I would sing and make up dumb dance routines and show off in front of the camera.

Being the star of a YouTube channel was a lot easier when I didn't care about what people thought. Or maybe before I *realized* what they thought. But now, I feel like a snail who wants to curl back inside its shell, only someone's smashed it off.

I should be used to it. My parents started posting stuff about my life before I even existed, on this blog called *Everything But the Baby*. They had ten thousand subscribers by the time I showed up. They'd shared everything they did in the five years it took to have me – even the gross stuff. That's longer than I waited for my hair to grow all the way down my back. Mum keeps the scan photo next to her bed in a picture frame that says *Our Miracle*. Only, to me, it looks more like a floating alien. Showing everyone that picture was their first ever YouTube video. Nine minutes of my parents crying and hugging each other, along with millions of love-heart-eyes emojis popping up. I can't watch it without cringing. I doubt anyone can. Dad always says, "Eva went viral before she even came out of the womb!" Like that's an accolade anyone would want.

Anyway, the video where I star as a floating alien was only the beginning. My parents called their new channel *All About Eva*, and I guess the name is pretty accurate. There's something from almost every day of my life. Only

somehow, the Eva in their videos doesn't feel that much like me any more.

It's probably because recently, I've spent most of my time wishing it *wasn't* me. Like the first day back at school after the summer, when Alfie Stevens in my class found the clip of me going down the X-Treme Blaster slide at Tropical Islands Water Park. As I drop six metres into the plunge pool, my swimsuit wedgie is visible for exactly 1.8 seconds. My friend Spud told me not to worry about it. He said, *swimsuit + high velocity = wedgie*. Apparently it's simple physics. Although physics has never felt very simple to me. I'm still not sure which was harder to survive: the X-Treme Blaster or the first day of Year Eight.

When I got home that day, I begged Dad to edit my wedgie out of the water park video, but he said it was the only footage they had of me going down that famous slide. "And besides," he said, "no one in their right mind would even notice the wedgie with your gawky belly flop!" Which was not exactly reassuring. So, my swimsuit-wedgied belly flop is still on YouTube, along with ten thousand other embarrassing moments of my life. But all the stuff that *my parents* don't want anyone to see? That never goes on the channel. Like the flapping chicken-arms thing Mum does to get her deodorant to dry, or Dad

using his electric nose-hair trimmer.

In case you've never watched an *All About Eva* video, let me give you the highlights reel:

Age 0 – *Introducing Eva*. 325k likes.

A stump of umbilical cord is still attached to my stomach. It's blackish-yellow, like a too-ripe banana, and that's not even the most disgusting thing. The video includes Mum doing my first nappy change.

Age 1 – *Eva's First Steps!* 293k likes.

This is supposed to be a secret, but these weren't even my first steps. Mum had been filming me non-stop for days because she was certain I was about to walk. Then the one time she put the camera down, I tottered across the living room. Accidentally doing important milestones off-camera really annoys my parents. My first steps happened twelve years ago and Mum still goes on about it.

Age 4 – *Eva's Cutest Tantrums!* 441k likes.

A compilation video of me crying that's over fifteen minutes long. The first comment says, *Spoiler Alert: she's spoiled*. In the last section, I'm at the dinner table pushing my plate away and shouting, "I DON'T WANT A PEA!" Alfie Stevens had that as his message tone for the whole of Year Seven.

Age 6 – *Christmas Day – Eva Complaining to Santa!*

2.8m likes.

No one ever hears my side of this story, so here goes. The Ultimate Hamster Grooming Salon was literally the only Christmas present I wanted. It was for grooming my hamster, Coco, after Mum had banned me from giving him baths in the sink. When I met Santa in his grotto, that was the only thing I asked for. Anyway, I got the entire collection of Rebel Dolls instead. The video of me shouting my complaint to Santa up the chimney has been shared over a million times. The camera's shaking because Dad was laughing so much. They call it *All About Eva's* first big success. I mean, technically Dad refers to it as the moment "*Vi skød papegøjen!*" which means *We shot the parrot!* But like anyone can understand Danish sayings apart from him and my grandmother. It was the most views their channel ever had and they got thousands of new subscribers. It's kind of depressing when your likes peaked at six years old.

A few weeks after *Eva Complaining to Santa!* went viral, the company that made the Ultimate Hamster Grooming Salon sent me one for free. There were five different kinds of fur brushes and this special powder to sprinkle inside the cage that hamsters like to roll in. It was too late for Coco though. He died a few days after Christmas. Dad said he died of old age. I said he died from a lack of

grooming. His funeral is probably still on YouTube.

Mum said Coco wasn't very popular anyway, so they got me a kitten instead. I was allowed to keep the grooming salon though. And Miss Fizzy got used to the hair combing eventually. I was six when I chose her name, by the way. Now it's kind of embarrassing. But still, her unboxing video is the only one I like watching. Mum tries to tie a pink bow around her neck and she hisses at her. Thinking about it, I guess me and Miss Fizzy were destined to get along.

Age 9 – *The Letter on Instagram*. 36k likes.

I guess this was what started to change everything. It was just this dumb letter I wrote one night before I went to bed. I'd been sent this stationery kit from some company my parents were promoting on Instagram, and I decided to write a letter to myself. I'd got this really low score in a spelling test and Mr Eliot had announced the results in front of the whole class. I wanted to make myself feel better. I used some of these motivational phrases I'd read in one of Mum's magazines. I didn't even understand what half of them meant: *Impossible is just an opinion. The journey is the destination. You are the CEO of your life!* I stupidly left the letter out on my desk. After school the next day Mum said it was the sweetest thing she'd ever seen. And told me it already had ten thousand likes on Instagram. It was like Mr Eliot reading out my test results

all over again. Only in front of the whole world.

The entire thirteen-and-a-quarter years of my life is all there online if you want to take a look. Every moment preserved, like the jars of pickled red cabbage my Danish grandmother, Farmor, kept in her larder for years. Everything from my first breath to the patch of pimples that appeared on my chin yesterday. You can read comments from over a decade ago if you really want to. But I don't recommend doing that. Maybe there's something up with my brain, because it seems to delete all the nice comments I read and save all the bad ones. Farmor says *All About Eva* is "just one tiny stitch in the intricate tapestry" of who I am. And that I shouldn't take it too seriously. She also says it's a pineapple in its own juice. But I've never been able to figure out what that means.

Mum wouldn't delete the *You are the CEO of your life!* letter, no matter how upset I got. She said I was overreacting and that I'd get over it. It's what she says about everything. Even Dad agreed. He said #selfcare was trending and they were getting a spike in new followers. That's the kind of thing that's important in my family: Views and Shares and Likes and Dislikes and Subscriber Growth and Engagement Stats. Not feelings or visible swimsuit wedgies. That's why sometimes it feels like *that* Eva – the

one on the channel – is more important than the real me. If I ever got abducted by aliens, my parents would make a YouTube video about it before they called the police.

I know my parents love me. I mean, they tell practically the entire world on a twice-weekly basis. Along with sharing everything else about me too. It's not easy when the two people who love you the most are also the ones ruining your life.