



# Birdsong

KATYA BALEN

Illustrated by  
Richard Johnson

First published in 2022 in Great Britain by  
Barrington Stoke Ltd  
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP  
[www.barringtonstoke.co.uk](http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk)

Text © 2022 Katya Balen  
Illustrations © 2022 Richard Johnson

The moral right of Katya Balen and Richard Johnson to be  
identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been  
asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and  
Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
reproduced in whole or in any part in any form without the  
written permission of the publisher

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

ISBN: 978-1-80090-098-1

Printed by Hussar Books, Poland

*For the Aberbachs*





## Chapter 1

There is music everywhere – if you know how to listen.

I'm walking home and I hear notes in the tap of my feet on the pavement and the fizz of a can of Coke. I can find music in the whoosh of our front door opening and in Mum calling my name. I can fit the notes that I hear together and they build into a symphony. A symphony of sounds that swirl and swish and lift me up like I'm flying. Mostly.

But not when the music is the sound of  
glass breaking.

Not when it's the sound of metal crumpling.

Not when it's the sound of tyres screeching.

Not when it's the sound of me screaming.



## Chapter 2

Seven months ago, everything was fine. Better than fine, I think. It was almost perfect, even if I didn't realise it at the time. I wasn't full of fury and always angry at Mum. She had a job and we owned our house and whenever anything went a bit wrong, I could pick up my flute and play.

When I played, the whole world faded away. I could forget arguments at school or Maths tests covered in red pen or the dog next door barking into the night. Playing the flute was



like magic. I could see the music. It made colours everywhere.

Then the crash happened. And everything changed.

After the crash, I woke up from the operation and all I could see were bandages and needles and black stitches in my skin that looked like teeth.

I tried to lift my water glass but my fingers wouldn't obey.

I tried to button my pyjamas but my fingers wouldn't obey.

I tried to lift my flute but it felt like I'd lost everything.