



Emma Shevah

Illustrations by *Helen Cranford-White*

**Chicken
House**

2 Palmer Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
www.chickenhousebooks.com

Text © Emma Shevah 2018

First paperback edition published in Great Britain in 2018

This electronic edition published in 2018

Chicken House

2 Palmer Street

Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS

United Kingdom

www.chickenhousebooks.com

Emma Shevah has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions.

By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this ebook on-screen.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic, mechanical or otherwise, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express prior written permission of the publisher.

Produced in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

Cover and interior design by Helen Crawford-White
British Library Cataloguing in Publication data available.

PB ISBN 978-1-910655-46-7

eISBN 978-1-911077-49-7



To Sean, my cousin and almost-twin. Born two weeks after me and pushed around in the same pram, we grew up sharing games, jokes and birthday parties, and years later, we had our children a few months apart. You are my Eleni.



Also by Emma Shevah

Dream On, Amber
Dara Palmer's Major Drama





1

Have you ever been so close to someone that you could wah-wah in whale song?

I have. Well, sort of, anyway.

When I say 'wah-wah', I mean communicate, but not in a normal way. In a special telepathic way that wah-wahs out of your brain and into theirs, or wah-wahs out of their brain into yours. Come to think of it, it's nothing like whale song. I don't know why we ever thought it was, but when we were little that's what Eleni called it, and it stuck. Look, we were about five at the time, and when you're five, the craziest nonsense makes perfect sense.

What our five-year-old brains were trying to say was this: sometimes two human beings know each other so well, they can talk in a language that isn't made up of



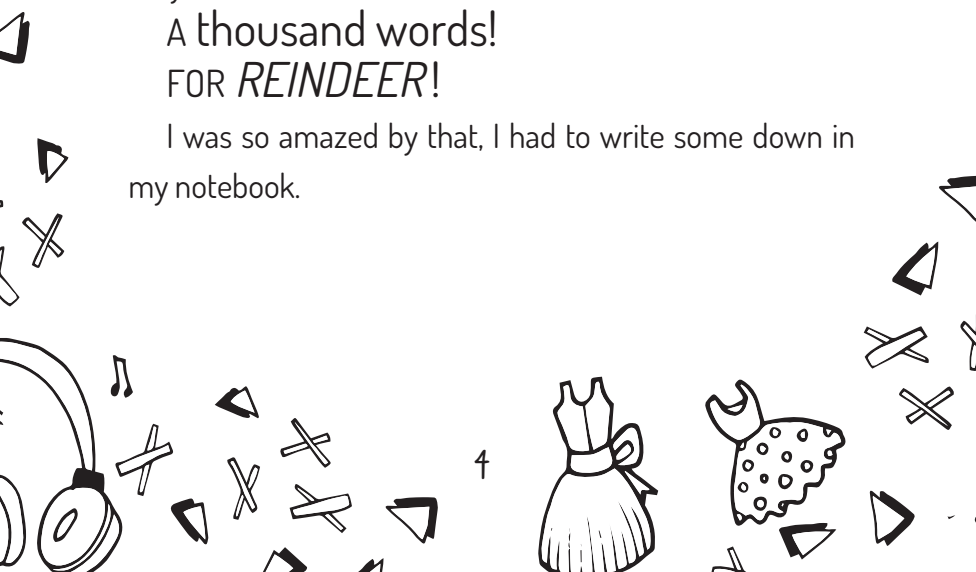
words. It isn't made up of eye squints, hand twists or face gymnastics, either. No. This communication is much more wooOOhhh and spooky than that (just without the aliens and ghosts).

You can only wah-wah with someone you're super-crazy-mega-extra-*seriously* close to, and for me, that person is Eleni.

She's my cousin, but the word 'cousin' needs an update, if you ask me. You know how some languages have tons of words to describe one thing? I looked up 'Eskimo words for snow' once, and found out that the Sami people of Scandinavia and Russia use around 180 snow-and-ice-related words, and 300 words for types of snow, snow conditions and snow tracks. Even more mind-blowing, they use around a thousand words for reindeer.

A thousand words!
FOR *REINDEER*!

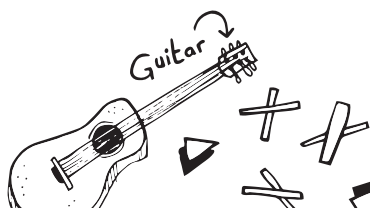
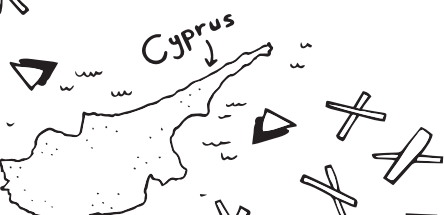
I was so amazed by that, I had to write some down in my notebook.



Sami words for specific types of reindeer:

- short fat female
- pregnant female
- female that has not given birth to a calf that year
- female that lost her calf in late spring
- female that can never have a calf
- miserable, skinny female without a proper coat
- miserable, skinny male without a proper coat
- young healthy male advanced enough to accompany his mother in difficult conditions
- dark yellowish-grey male with brown belly
- males with no antlers/cut antlers/many branched antlers/tall, quivering antlers (etc.)
- lazy old hand-biters
- flying red-nosed present-deliverers

(I might have made those last two up.)



So it's strange that there's only one word for cousin. Cousins aren't all the same – there are *degrees* of cousin-ness. Some are close as twins, like Eleni and me, and some are people you barely know. Amy Mitchell in my class has cousins she's only met once because they live in Germany.

Weird.

The only person I know who has more first cousins than us is Mohammed Rashid. We have twenty-eight and he has forty or fifty – he doesn't know the exact number – but his are spread all over the world and ours all live in the same five-mile radius of South London. I bet if we could, we'd all live in the same house. Maybe even the same *room*.

When I grow up, I'm going to write dictionaries and invent a thousand words for 'cousin'. These are just a few of the very complicated rankings:

Degrees of cousin-ness:

Categories:

- Cousin on mum or dad's side

- Older or younger than you
- Degree of hairiness

Sub-categories:

- How close they live to you
- How often you see them
- How well you get on
- How many games you make up together
- How likely you are to win

Like-ability:

- Do they fire Nerf guns at you/stick jelly sweets in your shoes/give good birthday presents/let you watch stuff you're not allowed to watch when they're babysitting at your house?
- Are they a bit strange but you need to be nice to them or you'll get shouted at?
- Are they useful to know later, like Vasillis, who's a locksmith?

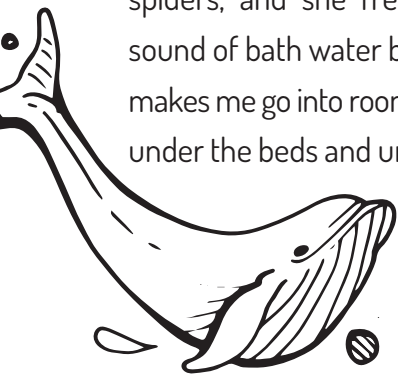
As for Eleni, she's the closest a cousin could possibly be. Closer than *anyone* could be. I mean, if it's possible to have

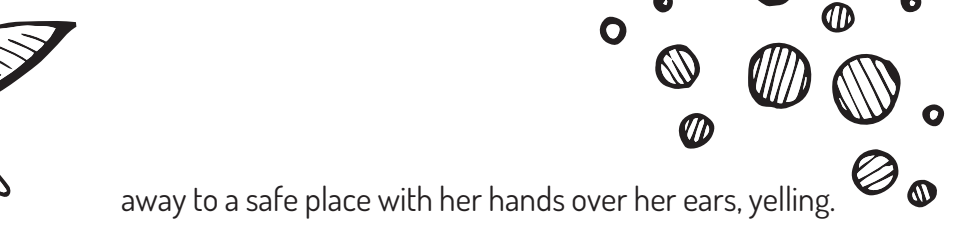


a twin who isn't *really* your twin – like not from the same egg or mother, but a twin deep down in your heart and your cells and your soul, or something – then Eleni is mine.

We don't look like twins. My hair's dark brown, but it looks a little reddish in the sun. It's also thick and wavy, and even though Mum makes me tie it up, it still gushes to my waist in a hair waterfall. Eleni's hair is light brown, and it's so fine and straight and thin, it's more like a hair dribbly tap. She has a small, pointy nose and huge hazel-green eyes, so if you ask me, she looks a bit like a bushbaby. My eyes are chocolate-brown, I've just got new glasses and I look more like a human being. I'm strong and fit but Eleni's weak and as skinny as a sweeping brush because of her complication. That's one of the reasons we're so close, but I'll come to that later.

So we might not look identical, but that doesn't mean anything. We're twins anyway. And we need each other for all kinds of things. Eleni's terrified of the dark and of spiders, and she freaks at fireworks, thunder and the sound of bath water being sucked down the plughole. She makes me go into rooms and turn lights on, do spider checks under the beds and unplug the bath for her so she can run





away to a safe place with her hands over her ears, yelling.

And when I worry too much about the bad things in the world, she reminds me of some of the good things, like pizza with pineapple, snowy days and watching cartoons in pyjamas, to make me feel better. We have notebooks full of them, just in case, and write lists of them all the time so we have them whenever we need them.

So I make sure the bath monster doesn't suck Eleni down the plughole and she reminds me that because the world contains conkers, hummingbirds and chocolate brownies, everything is going to be just fine.

What I'm trying to say is that we look out for each other. We always have. And we always will. Least that's what I thought. But then something bad happened, which led to some *really* bad stuff happening, and then I did something that changed everything.

After that, we forgot we were basically twins, and that we were once so close we could wah-wah in whale song.

And it all started with the picnic.

