

Nia and the School-Gate Unicorn



THIS BOOK WAS MADE ESPECIALLY FOR

Nia

Given with love by



On the morning of the first day of school, Nia found a unicorn on the doorstep. Not a big unicorn. Not a fierce unicorn. A small, worried unicorn, chewing the end of its own tail.

“I can’t go,” said the unicorn. “School is too big for unicorns.” Nia’s tummy felt exactly the same way. But it’s hard to say so — when a unicorn says it first.



“Unicorns are supposed to be magical,” said Nia.

“Everyone knows that.”

“Magic is easy,” sniffed the unicorn. “Brave is the bit I never learned.”

“Then walk with me,” said Nia. “I’m starting school today. We can learn brave together.” The unicorn thought about it, tail going swish, swish. “Only if you hold my hoof at the crossings.”



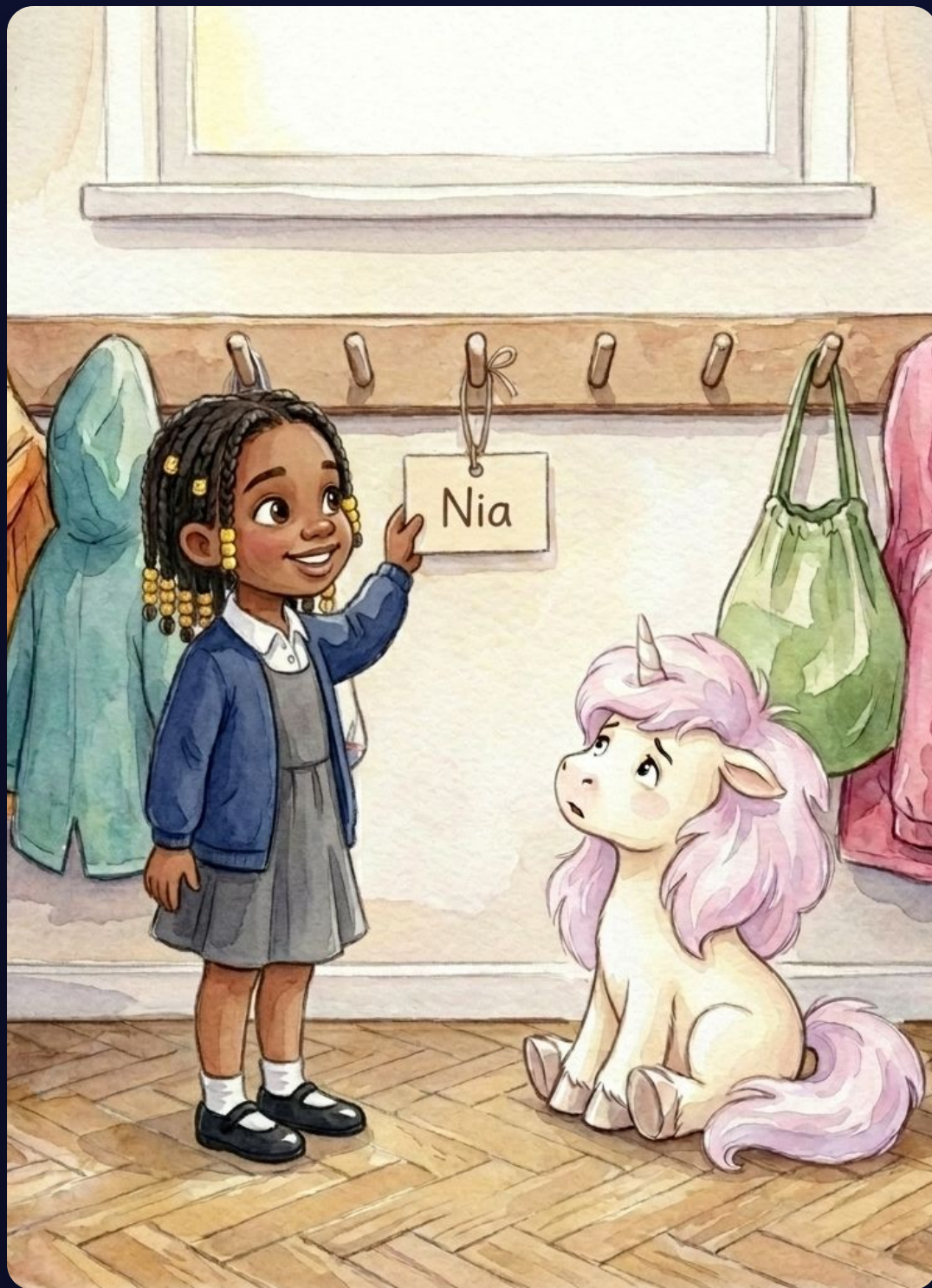
They walked the school way. The unicorn hid
behind every lamppost, and twice inside a hedge.

“Watch me,” said Nia, and showed the unicorn how
to walk tall — chin up, steps steady, school bag
high on both shoulders. By the last corner, the
unicorn was almost doing it. Almost.



The school gate was the tallest thing the unicorn had ever seen. “Nope,” said the unicorn. “Nope, nope, nope.”

“Chin up,” said Nia. “Hooves steady. One step, then another — that’s all a gate needs.” And the gate was only tall for a moment. Then it was behind them, and the unicorn was through it — and so, Nia noticed, was she.



Inside stood a row of pegs, and one peg wore a little card. Nia read it out loud — it said Nia.

“That’s me. This is my peg. It was waiting for me.”

The unicorn looked at the card for a long time. “It knew you were coming,” it whispered. “That means you belong.”



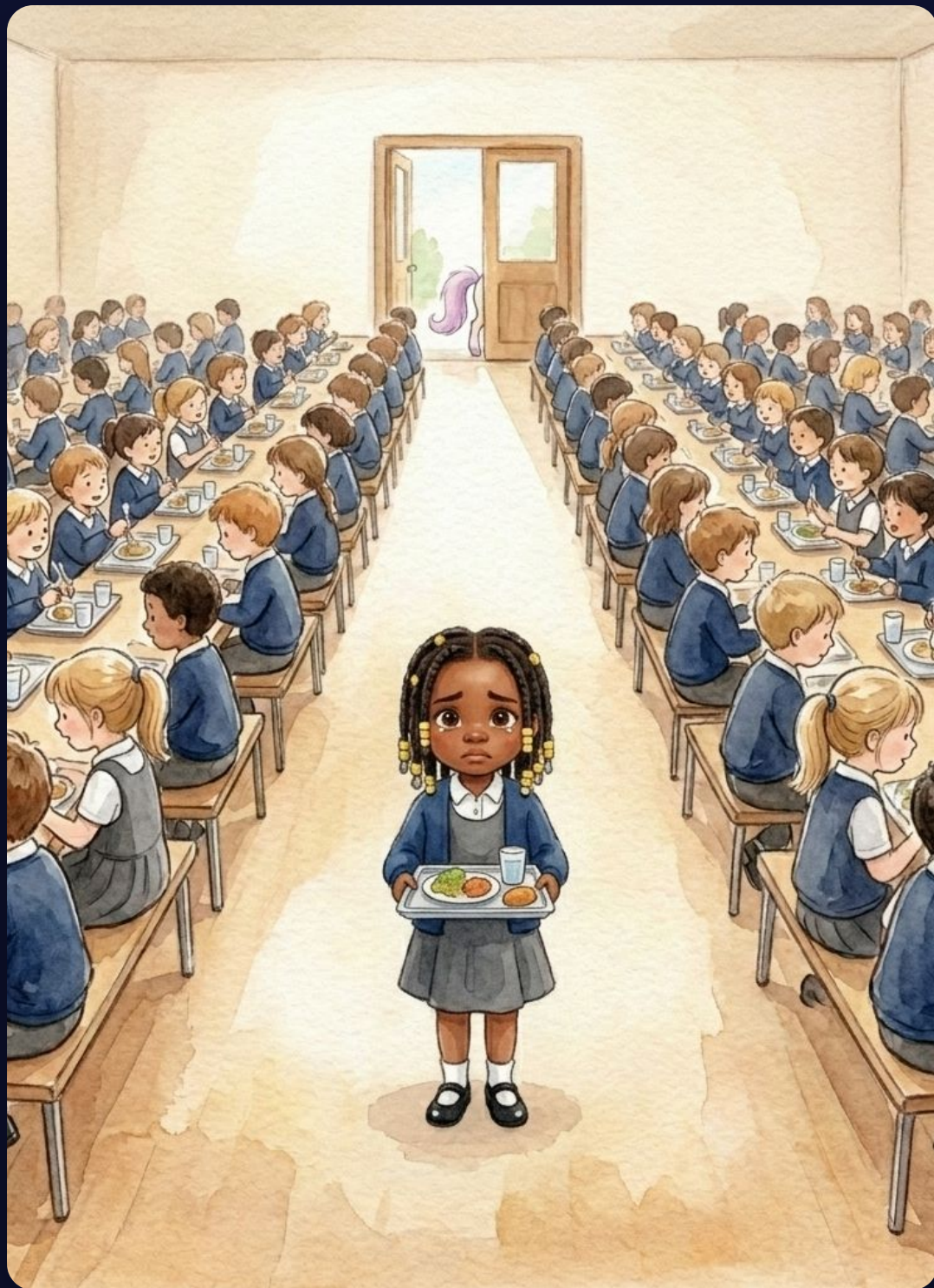
On the carpet, sitting still was hard for unicorns.
The tail wanted to swish. The hooves wanted to trot.

Nia showed the unicorn crossed legs and a listening face, and the unicorn copied everything — even the listening face. “Am I doing it?” it whispered. “You are the best-sitting unicorn I have ever seen,” said Nia.



In the building corner they made a tower taller than the unicorn – until the unicorn’s tail went swish, and down it came. CRASH. Oh no.

But the child beside Nia just laughed a kind laugh and said, “Again?” So they built it again, twice as tall, everybody helping. The unicorn held the bottom brick very, very still.



Then came lunchtime. The lunch hall was a ROAR — trays clattering, a hundred voices at once. Too much roar, even for a unicorn. A flash of tail, and the unicorn was gone, out of the door.

Nia stood in all that loud, on her own, a wobble starting in her lip. Somebody had to find that unicorn. And there was nobody to do it but Nia.



So Nia walked through the loud — past the trays,
past all hundred voices — one step, then another,
chin up, just the way she had taught the unicorn
at the gate.

And there, curled up small in the quiet book corner,
was one worried unicorn. “You came,” it said.
“Through all that roar. On your own.” — “I know,”
said Nia, a little surprised. “I did.”



The unicorn sat up straight. For the first time all day, it didn't look worried at all.

"I have a secret," it said. "Unicorns aren't born brave. Nobody is. Brave is a thing you practise — and every time you were brave for me, you were really being brave for you." Nia thought about the gate, and the peg, and the roar. "Then I've had a whole day of practice."



In the afternoon there was painting. Nia painted a unicorn, of course — a huge one, with a mane like a rainbow, standing at a school gate, not one bit afraid.

The real unicorn studied the picture for a long time. “Is that me?” it asked. “That’s you tomorrow,” said Nia.



At home time they walked out through the big gate together – and the unicorn didn't hide, not even once. It walked tall, tail high. "Same again tomorrow?" it asked.

"Same again tomorrow," said Nia. "But tomorrow, YOU carry the bag." And that night, a certain unicorn slept at the end of Nia's bed, dreaming the brave and gentle dreams of unicorns.

The End

The hero of this story is Nia