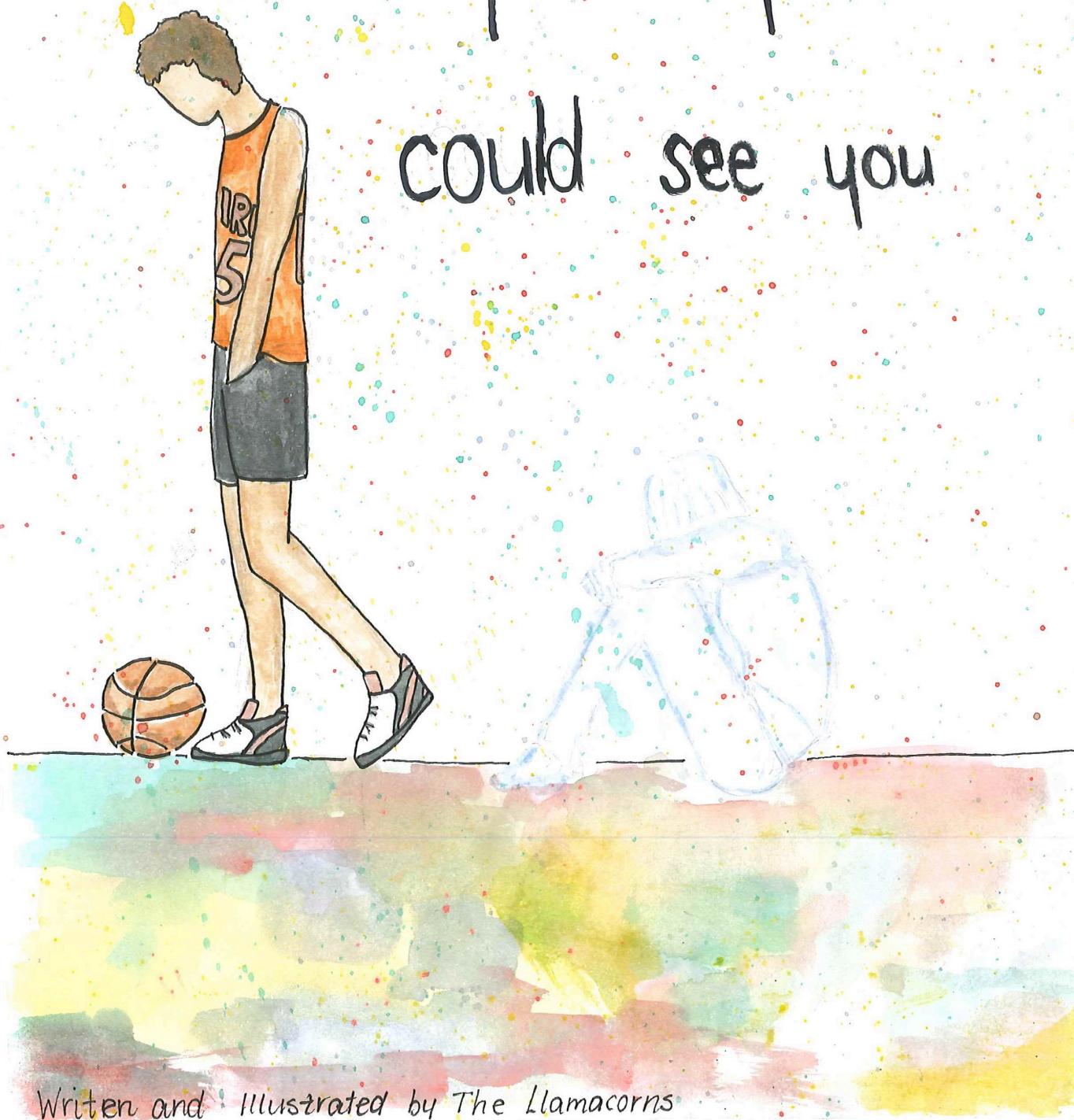


If only I  
could see you



Written and Illustrated by The Llamacorns

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## Prologue

I don't know what happened in the beginning. There's no one to ask.

My name is Riley. I am 9.7658697 years old. My world is a cold, wooden attic with an area of 16.385493 metres square. I get food twice a day.

But not anymore.

Today, when the food comes out of the floor, I will escape. I know what goes on here. There is a surveillance system that watches me every minute of every day. Almost. Twice a day, when the food comes out of the floor, the system turns off for a total of 23.93461 seconds. Then, I will escape.

It's nearly time. There's a minute digital clock next to the camera, clumsily hidden in the corner of the room, angled at 22 degrees exactly, aiming at my bed – if you can call it that. The food comes up every day at 7:00 and 19:00.

It's here. I leave NOW



## Chapter 1

Dear Riley,

Do you remember when we first met? You came running across my front lawn at 5:37am. DINGA-DONG-DONG-DONG, went my doorbell. I dragged my sleepy body down the stairs to the front door, my footsteps echoing through the house. I passed the mirror in the hallway and saw myself and I looked as though I hadn't brushed my hair in a week. Walking through the kitchen I spotted my mother's pancake mixture waiting to be cooked and I could see the pavlova ingredients ready to form that **delicious** dessert that I love so much. I walked past the old piano that belonged to my father before he passed away three years prior. Suppressing the memory I continue walking to the front door. Opening the door, I saw you. You introduced yourself as Riley. The most beautiful 10 year old I had ever seen, although you later informed me that you were in fact 9.7658697 years old. You were unlike anyone I had ever met, Riley. You had a certain air about you, as if you knew something I didn't. I remember every single feature of your beautiful face. Your graphite grey eyes, those full lips always turned upwards in a mischievous smile, button nose and your long curly caramel coloured hair. I loved it all, and I still do.



## Chapter 2

Dear Riley,

I remember when you came back to my house every night to tell me about your life before you met me. You'd knock three times on my window. The first two knocks were fast and the last knock was exactly 3.1745 seconds after the first duo. You came to my house 7 days, 4 hours and 29 minutes after your 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. Talking to you was the highlight of every day. Three months, two weeks, twelve hours, thirty minutes later, my Mum discovered I was staying up late talking to you. Being a mother, she wasn't impressed at all by what I was doing. I remember her shouting at you and all of her foul language about how you were a bad influence on me. I still can't understand how she could feel that way without even getting to know you. Later, my mum did get to know you and treated you like her own daughter. I was so glad when I heard that she had become your Mum too! All of those days and nights that we got to spend together, going on holidays to Spain, Greece, America and our camping trip around Australia, going to school with you, playing sport with you, watching movies with you and talking to you. I miss that year. The best year I've ever lived in my whole life. But not for my mother. She never truly loved you as a daughter. You could see in her eyes and the way she spoke to you that although she had accepted you into her family she had not accepted you into her heart. We spoke for weeks about you leaving

and living in an apartment, a 14 minute walk from my house. My mother reluctantly agreed to pay for the apartment and keep you in school as long as you got a job working at the local chemist to pay for your own food. You and I agreed that we would walk home from school together and complete our homework at the restaurant La'Burrito- despite the fact that you were in year 9 by the time we were 12. I listened to your rants about exams and extension homework, bullies and just how horrible high school was for you without your best friend by your side. Whenever you spoke about me in that way I could feel my cheeks glow with redness and my love for you ignited from a flickering candle to a warm hearth.



## Chapter 3

### FIVE YEARS LATER

“Excuse me!” I laughed, casting a quick look Jace’s way. I’ve known him for years now, and even though we aren’t living together any more, I still felt just as close to him. He put his arm around my shoulders, and I almost shuddered. That would have been embarrassing. But it’s sweet.

I looked at him nervously. He stared at me, searching my eyes for any sort of reaction. His face turned red, but he didn’t move. Neither did I.

That was the most awkward that I’d ever felt, in my life. We walked for a while, not really knowing where we were going, until we reached my apartment block. He walked me home – that’s so cute!

We reached the elevator, inside the lobby and he turned toward me. I was torn, not knowing what I should have done, until he lifted his arms and put them around me. I try so hard not to melt into him. But then he moved away and I felt my face turn a delicate shade of beetroot. “Well, goodnight,” he said. “Goodnight – night – bye – it’s all the same,” I said, fearing that my skin was now burgundy. “Goodnight to you too,” he smiled, and he turned and left. I walked the few remaining steps to the elevator, and pressed the wrong button.

As I got ready to sleep, Jace's voice flowed through my ears like water. I tried to block it out. *You think about him too much*, I scolded myself. *Do not forget how you got here*. But it was hard. Every time I saw him, my heart did this skipping tap dance inside my chest, no matter how hard I tried to control it.

*My dreams are punctured by images of Jace which make me devoutly thankful that Jace's mother cannot read my mind. But then something cold clamped around my ankle. I looked down, still dreaming, and then suddenly woke up.*

My eyes **cracked** open, straight into another pair that glared at me threateningly. Those eyes, fractured, dangerous and insane. Those eyes that were precisely the same shade of graphite-grey that I saw in the mirror every day. Through the dim light, I faintly saw a round object soaring, fast, through the air toward me. And then pain resonated through my head and my brain declared "You will pass out now."



## Chapter 4

Dear Riley,

You were the main character Maria in the Sound of Music school musical and you had the most amazing voice I had ever heard. I wasn't very good at singing and I only got the part, Wedding Guest #21. You always came to rehearsals and stayed there the whole time, working as hard as you could, but a week before the opening night you didn't come to rehearsals. We were all really worried. You didn't come to school either, you didn't text me, you didn't call me and I couldn't find you anywhere. The day I went to your apartment I brought flowers because I thought you were sick. When I knocked on the door, I expected to hear you bouncing along the hallway, humming a tune. Instead, it was eerily quiet. The door was unlocked so I walked right on in.

Your room looked like a bomb had hit it. Everything was broken. There was a note left on your bedroom door, 'She's gone, forever, don't bother looking for her. She's mine.' I collapsed onto your bed. The covers were ripped in half like a vicious dog had attacked them. I buried my face in your pillow.

I had never cried so hard. I felt a deep ache in my chest and my salty tears were dampening your pillow. It was getting late and I needed to get home. I cleaned all of the broken glass jars, candles and mirrors from your floor. I promised myself that I would come back over the next few days to make sure that it would be nice and clean when you returned.

She's gone, forever, don't bother looking  
for her, She's mine!

## Chapter 5

My eyes flickered open. The room that came into focus was not my old bedroom, but a room similar to my schools' science lab, but with luminescent liquids in test tubes and beakers, with a constant bubbling noise filling the room. It smelt burnt and foreign, mingled with the delicious burrito aroma from the restaurant above.

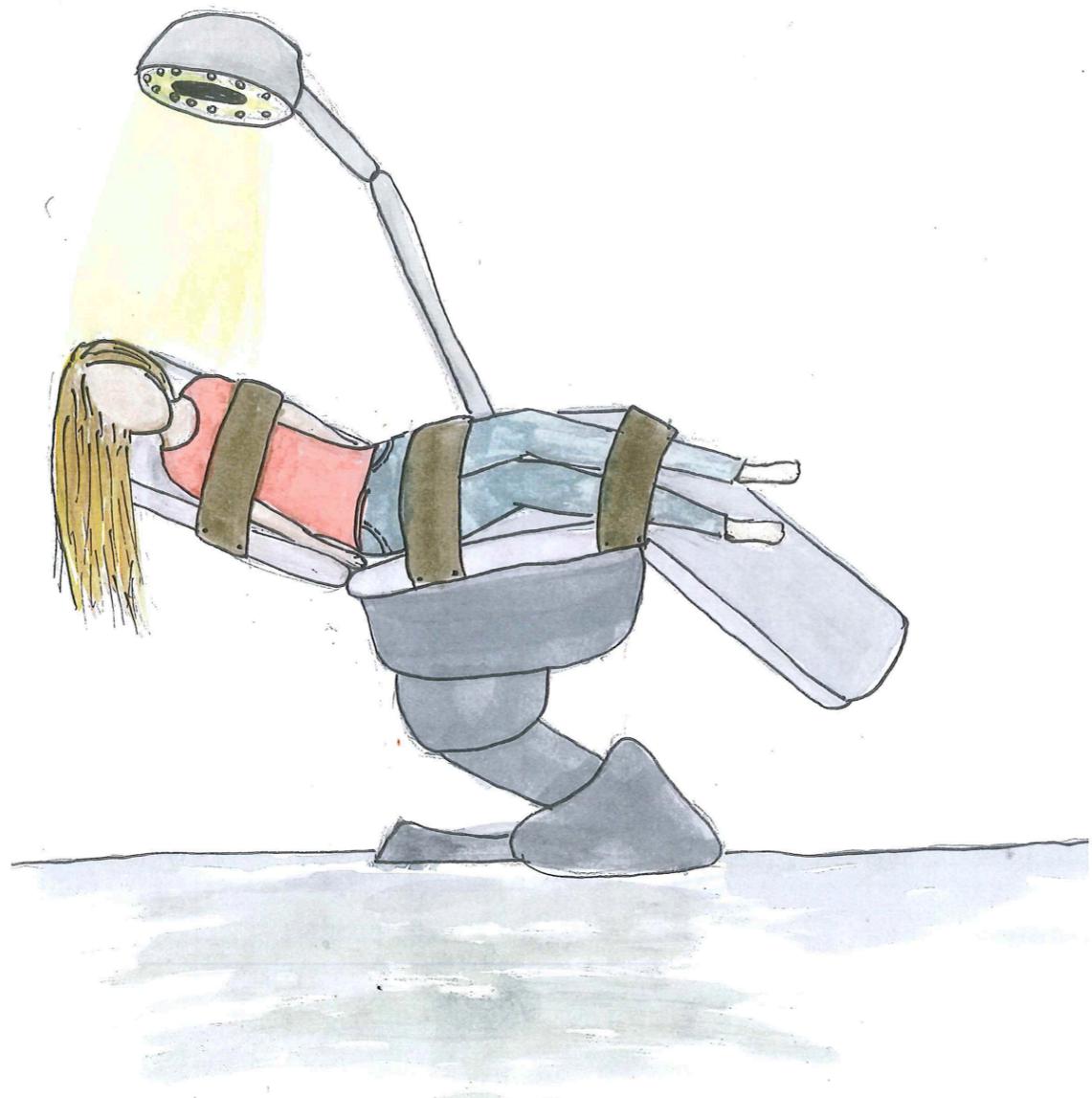
A familiar face was smiling unpleasantly, muttering something about his new experiment he wanted to test and other nonsense. His graphite eyes, identical to mine were lit up with excitement. I suddenly remembered I wasn't normal, and I knew I was an experiment gone wrong. This man, Mordecai never meant to create me.

He roughly shoved me into a chair, similar to one found at the dentists. I lifted my head weakly, but he pushed me down and bound my body with layers of duct tape. I glanced down at my wrists, and attempted to move them just a fraction, but no such luck. He laughed maniacally, muttering complete **nonsense**, whilst drawing a long blunt syringe full of moonstone shimmering liquid. His slow footsteps taunting me, as I knew inevitable torture was about to descend on me. The blunt tip stabbed into my skin, and a scream erupted from deep inside me. The pain was too much to bear. I soon fell unconscious.

I look down at my wrists again to see if the tape was still in place. I see...I see a strange shimmer, then nothing. I'm sure I'm hallucinating. I check again, blink a few times. Nothing has changed. The tape was still holding me. Mordecai walked in, seeming to be very happy with himself.

“Well well well, look what we have here,” He chuckles to himself “Oh wait! I can’t! No one shall ever see you again, not even your precious little Jace,” He cut the tape, and my skin felt raw and hot. “You are free to leave. I have no use for you anymore.”

He left the room, swishing his black velvet coat. I cautiously stood up, my legs trembling as I try to not let the strange mechanical **hums** worsen my headache. I stumble to the door, clinging to the doorframe for support, as my breathing became labored and shallow. I passed a mirror and saw no reflection. Suppressing a scream, I staggered out into La’Burrito, wondering how I ever trusted that villainous man. I wandered back to my apartment, dazed and confused. My last thoughts before I fell asleep were about Jace. I had to see him, even if he couldn’t see me.



## Chapter 6

Dear Riley,

I never knew what to expect if you ever came back. I cleaned and redecorated your room, and made sure that it was kept as perfect as you so that when you returned you'd be happy and comfortable. I thought of different scenarios when you returned. I thought you would be so delighted when you returned to your apartment that you would jump up and hug me for eternity and eventually softly kiss me with your beautiful lips. I kept my hopes up and fantasised for the best. Never could I have predicted what actually unfolded.

It was the night that my basketball team (The Jabirus) won the grand finale. The whole team was filled with excitement as we entered our winning dinner house. We filled our stomachs with mountains of junk food. It was a night of celebration and craziness - one of the best nights I had had in a long time. It only got better. I walked to a lonelier corner of the restaurant, tired of the constant noise. I was sitting in a chair, at an empty table, when I heard a voice.

“Hey, Jace.”

I jumped and hit my head on the branch. I have to admit it really hurt.

“Who are you? Where are you?” I replied.

“It’s complicated.”

“What do you mean complicated? It’s not like your face has been half-torn off by a wolf or something. I mean it might be, but, I, uh. I mean it doesn’t matter. I wouldn’t really mind. Where are you anyway?”

I was starting to become a bit scared and I gripped the tree branch so hard that my knuckles became white.

“Ok. Let’s play a game. Try and guess who I am.”

“This is stupid. I can’t.”

“Are you sure? I think you’d like to know.”

“Um, ok. Fine. Why not? Let’s begin.”

“Think of all the best friends you’ve ever had.”

“Oh wow. There are a lot. Alex, Thomas, Flynn, Daniel, Col-“

“What about girl best friends?”

“I don’t have any. I’m scared of them.”

“Haha!” The voice laughed “Scared? Wow. What? Before you were, um, 17?”

“None. Oh wait. How could I have forgotten? There was this girl I met when I was twelve. She was amazing. Even the first time I met her. She came to my house at 5:37am and rang my doorbell. She was beautiful. Probably the prettiest girl I had ever seen. She had been locked up for ten years and managed to get out, somehow. She was a genius. Anyways, she came to my house every night to see me. She told me stories of her life. I was so fascinated that she knew so much but had never been outside of the attic that she lived in. She became my foster sister eventually. But, my cruel mother didn’t love her, so she decided to leave. I have to admit. I loved her so much, and I still do. I loved talking to her, being with her and in general being around her. She was my night and day and I wanted her.

Then when she moved out. She went missing. I went to her room and cried when I found her room smashed into pieces.”

I was starting to cry and my voice was wavering. I looked away from the tree and wiped my eyes with my sleeve.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have told you.” I said, my voice beginning to waver.

“No please. Keep talking. What happened after?”

“Well, I cleaned her room and redecorated her whole apartment, hoping I’d see her again.”

“What was her name?”

“Ri... Her name was Riley.” I was crying long streams of tears now and I felt so embarrassed. This was extremely personal information. Why had I shared it? But I was glad to get it off my chest.

“You loved her. A lot?” the voice asked.

“More than I ever thought I would.” I replied.

“I don’t know how to break this to you. You’ll probably run away from me but. But...” the voice sounded as if it was crying too. I was getting a bit suspicious but I didn’t flinch.

“I’m Riley.”

When I heard that. Yes! I did want to run away. It was a bit, no, very overwhelming when I heard that.

“How can you prove that to me. Tell me how you used to get into my room. Tell me about the day you went missing.”

“I used to knock three times. First two knocks were fast and then I’d wait for 3.1745 seconds and knock a last time. I went missing because, the crazy Chemist, named Mordecai was jealous that you and I were in love. So he kidnapped

me and made me invisible. That's why you can't see me. However, you can still touch me."

I was so amazed. Of course I was stunned but it was true. You knew everything that we used to do and it could only be you.

"Were we in love?" I whispered playfully.

"You said so yourself," Riley said.

"How close are you to me." I asked trying to imagine that I could see her.

"Right here." Riley replied.

"Good." I said.



## Chapter 7

I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat. I couldn't talk. I couldn't function like a normal person now that I knew that Riley was alive and well. Unfortunately I was unable to see her but I could sense her emotions as she walked beside me. I could feel her presence beside me constantly. I heard a knock on the window. I could make out the vague shape of a human. It had to be Riley. Opening the window there is a person in a black velvet coat crouching below the window. I quickly saw a flash of a badge that said La'Burrito and another badge that said Chemist of the year. The person was not Riley.

"You should have left her alone. Why did you follow her? Leave her alone from now on or suffer the consequences!" he said.

"I will never leave her with the likes of you." I replied fiercely."

"You had your chance"

A flash of black velvet swept over me and I was pulled out the window onto the balcony. I was about to scream but a black velvet glove covered my mouth and then I passed out.



## Chapter 8

I woke up, heart pounding at a rate of 96.48 bpm. I haven't let it get above 80 in years. I think back to my dream. It isn't rapidly fading, like most dreams I have, but it stays imprinted in my mind as though its been branded. I recall it.

*"I warned you. You were foolish to try and follow her. You will suffer the punishment."*

*"I would do anything for her! You can't stop me!"*

*"Would you die for her? Go through torture for her?"*

*"A million times over."*

*"Are you sure?"*

*And Mordecai welds a white hot poker, looking as though it's come straight out of the fireplace...*

Wait, a fireplace? How would I know that there was a fireplace? The room I was in had all those glowing potions and chemicals. There was no fireplace. Something bubbles in my head, making me feel sick.

*"No," I moan. "Not now,"*

Another memory surfaces, after being suppressed for 14 years.

*"But why, Mor-cai?"*

*“I don’t feel the inclination to disclose my reasons to a 3 year old.”*

*“But, Mor-cai-!”*

*“SILENCE!”*

*And a swish of black velvet robes extinguishes the memory.*

Discarding the memory, I think about the dream. Was it real? If it was, then Jace was in serious **danger**.

I put on a tattered tan coat and gloves. I flexed my hands, just to check if the power was still there. A spark flew up from my fingers. Yes, it was definitely there. I grabbed a torch, just so I could see, and set off.

From another person’s perspective, it would have looked like a floating beam of light running through the middle of Brookfield in the early hours of Saturday morning. They would have discarded the memory as a drunken Friday night hallucination. But for me, it was a desperate chase through the city to find Jace, my best friend.



## Chapter 9

The pain that raced through my arm when Mordecai prodded me with that burning iron was excruciating. I never realised before how bad your life must have been before you escaped and found me. In the few hours when I was kidnapped, I experienced more pain and stress than I ever have before. I was sure that I would be burnt to death. What it must have been like for you every day, I can't even imagine.

When Mordecai dragged me through the colossal doors of his lair, under La'Burrito, he had no mercy. He swung my head into doors, kicked me if I ever tripped him over, punched me if I ever screamed or groaned at any pain. I didn't know what happened to my head, but it hurt a lot.

Just before you arrived, I was waiting for Mordecai, certain he would be back to torture me soon. But when the door was opened, it was you instead. Even though my chest was tied down, I was sure my heart would burst out with joy.

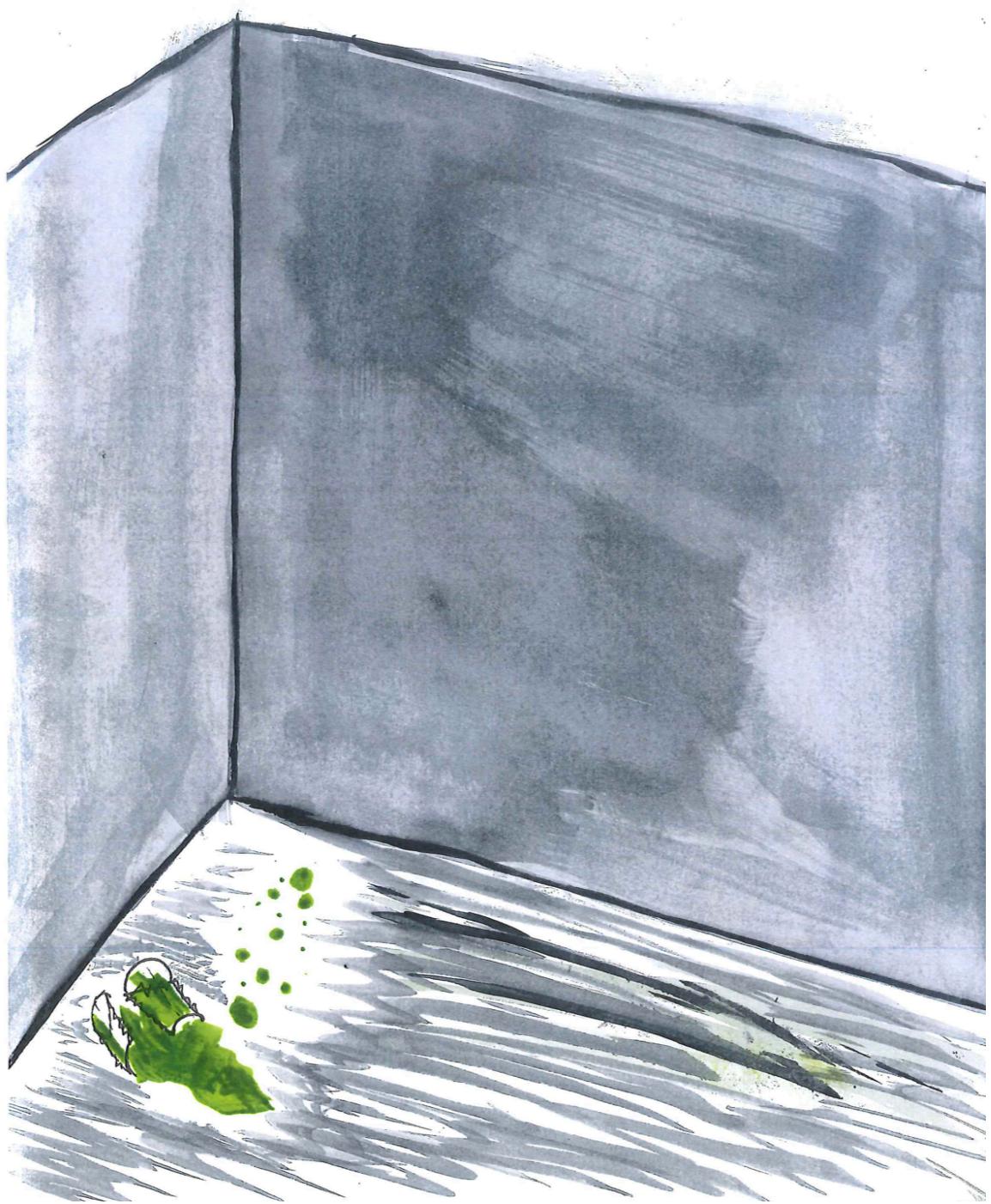
Your incredible intellect broke the code that opened the door. I couldn't see you, but I knew it was you. You untied me, and I felt like I could kiss you, but I didn't.

Because then Mordecai entered the room.

I was so scared, but you seemed so calm and cool, like Mordecai didn't even frighten you. Then, with some kind of power that I had no idea you had, you moved all the potions off the lab shelves without touching them until they fell and shattered over the floor.

It unleashed some kind of smoke that immediately knocked Mordecai out – I know because I saw him crumpled on the floor. But I also knew that it wouldn't last for long.

Then I felt some kind of force tugging my sleeve to the corner of the room. I let it pull me, because I knew it was you.



## Chapter 10

I pulled Jace aside. He turned to me, as though he could see me. I felt a tear streak down my cheek but I wiped it away. It fell to the floor and Jace watched it as it made its way through the air. “Hey, it’s ok,” he whispered, and I tried very hard to contain a whimper. “I have a plan,” I told him. “Any idea that you have would be perfect,” he said softly. “I take it back,” Jace snarled. “I can’t let you do that!” “You have to, Jace,” I said, tears cascading down my face and onto the floor.

“It’s the only way,”

“It’s a terrible idea! It’s-!”

“The only thing that will work,” I finished for him, patting his shoulder. A pathetic gesture, but he seemed to relax at the pressure of my hand.

“Take cover, Jace. I’m about to blow this place and you don’t want to be here when it happens. Trust me,” I sobbed. Jace awkwardly felt round for me, and then managed to hug me. I cried into his shoulder and leant against him. I knew full well that I wouldn’t live. The only thing that mattered was that he did think I would.

The words were on the tip of tongue and my mouth was next to his ear when he pulled away. “I’ll hide in the next room,” he whispered.

There were no words. I nodded.

I walked forward to where Mordecai was starting to regain consciousness on the floor. Next to him was a metal shelf where cracked beakers were starting to seep luminescent potions onto the floor. They fizzed and burned.

Mordecai shifted, and I set to work immediately, my heart and hands moving faster than they ever had before.

*Hydrogen. Chlorine. When mixed, create a large and dangerous explosion. Not recommended.*

And then it was done. I stood back and looked at my concoction, so foolishly. Suddenly I felt an arm grappling me from behind, constricting my breath. Mordecai had awoken.

“You die now, girlie,” he hissed, and he tightened his grip on me.

I wheezed and coughed, but I managed to choke “I’ll take you with me, then.”

I shot out a trembling hand and grabbed my chemicals and poured them together into a big beaker. The chemicals immediately began fizzing loudly. Mordecai snarled.

“What! What is that?”

I didn’t answer him. I burst out of his vice-like hold and sprinted across the room.

I didn’t look back. The only thought I had was- *Jace*.

But then a clamorous *boom* rang out across the room, so loud that I’m sure that they would have heard it halfway across the street. A searing pain pierced my back, and I fell to the floor.

I heard a scream. Lying on my back, on the floor, I brought my hands to my chest. When I took them away, they were covered in blood.

Suddenly, Jace was there, leaning over me. His face contorted and he screamed something muffled, and I blinked. He picked me up, his face so full of love that my heart broke. And I realized he could see me.

He laid me down on his lap and stroked my hair, and I relaxed into him. I opened my mouth, took in a shuddering breath, and said “I...”

But then he kissed me, and nothing else mattered. He placed my hand on his shoulder and I fell into his arms. Then, with Jace holding me, I slipped away.



## Chapter 11

### SIX MONTHS LATER

Dear Riley,

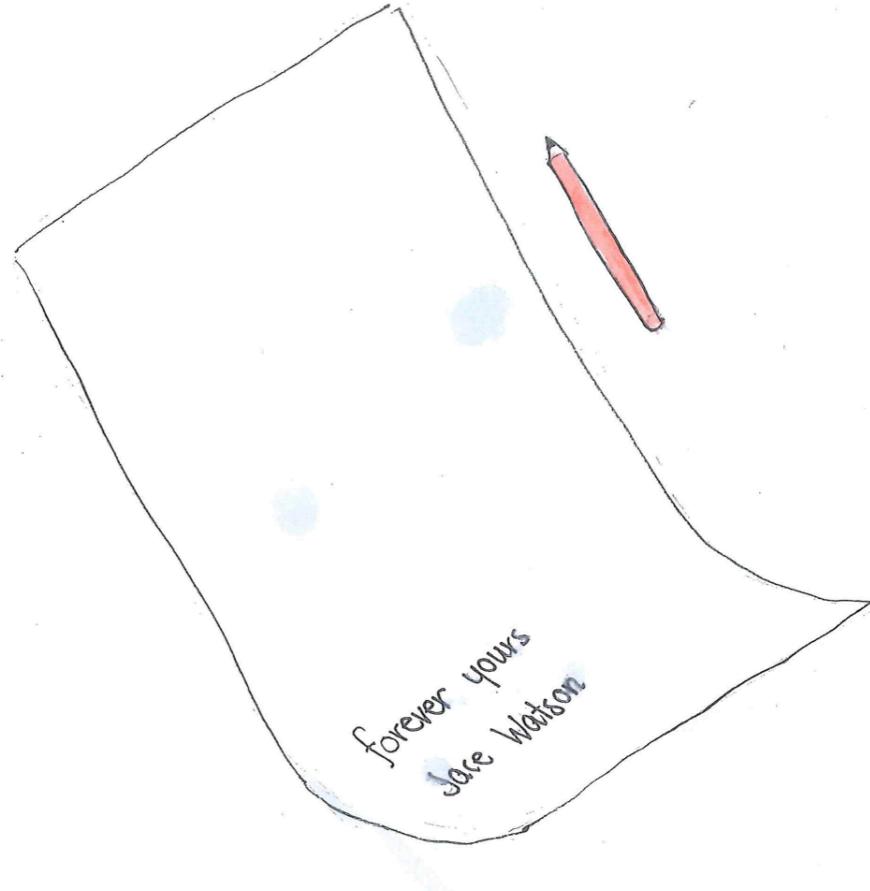
It's been six months since your death. The pain of not being around you is still as tender and raw as the night it happened, even after half a year. It's hard to be in love with someone who is no longer living. I miss you. Watching you die was the worst thing I could have possibly seen in my entire life. I figured out what you were planning too late. I watched you mix chemicals with a fascinated horror because even though your life was close to ending you didn't falter once. Although I couldn't see your expressions I could see the vials of multi-coloured liquids floating through the air with a purpose. You said "Take cover, Jace. I'm about to blow this place and you don't want to be here when it happens. Trust me."

And I did. I trusted you with my life so hiding behind a wall in the next room I heard the reaction start. "RILEY!" I screamed as the horrific realisation struck that you were not with me and wouldn't have time to take cover. Running out from behind the wall I sprinted into the room you were in and a wave of heat hit me like freight train. The sound of the explosion was deafening and once it stopped the whole laboratory began to crumble. You slowly began to reappear and I saw you lying in a pool of blood with your hair and clothes singed by the fire. A large piece of shrapnel was protruding from your chest, blood seeping slowly from the wound. "NO RILEY! WHAT HAVE I DONE!" I picked you up and placed you gingerly on my

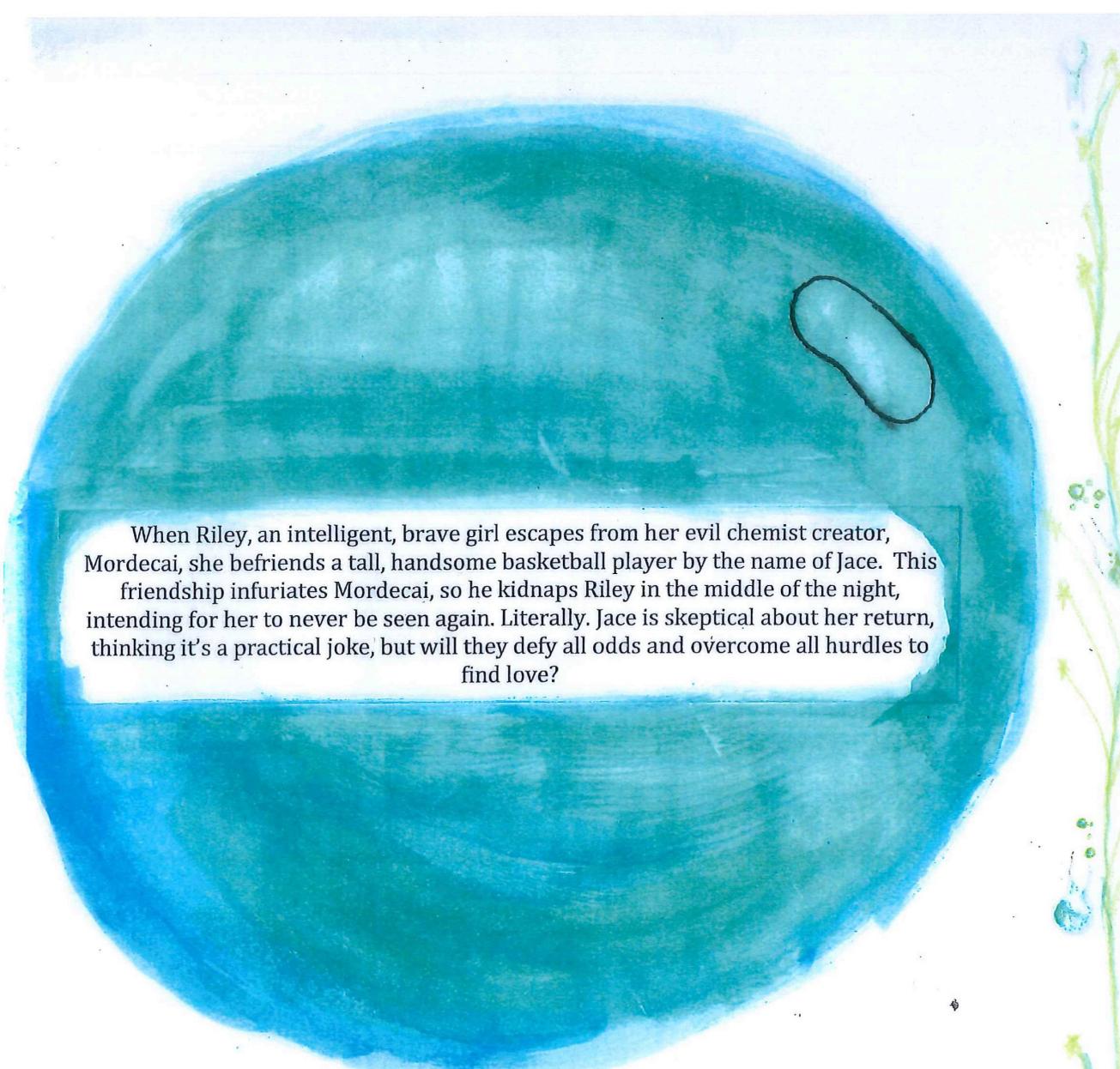
lap and, stroking your beautiful caramel hair I began sobbing. I did not care that the whole building was beginning to collapse because my world had collapsed with your death. Your eyes flickered open for a brief second and you whispered “I...” but your sentence was never to be finished because I cut you off with a kiss. Your lips were as I had imagined them to be. I put your hand on my shoulder and my hand in your hair and the world dissolved around us. Your caramel hair flowed seamlessly around you and your graphite eyes were alight with passion. Sparks flew and my love for you ignited to wildfire proportions. We were the only people in the world for a brief few seconds right before you died in my arms.

The laboratory roof would only hold for at most 45 more seconds so with you, lifeless in my arms, I walked solemnly towards the exit. Just like the light of day hit my face the realisation that you were gone and were not coming back was too much to bear. I collapsed to the ground and wept for hours. The police came and I was unable to speak, for the grief that had overcome me was like the weight of the universe pressing down on my shoulders. Riley, I still love you, and always will.

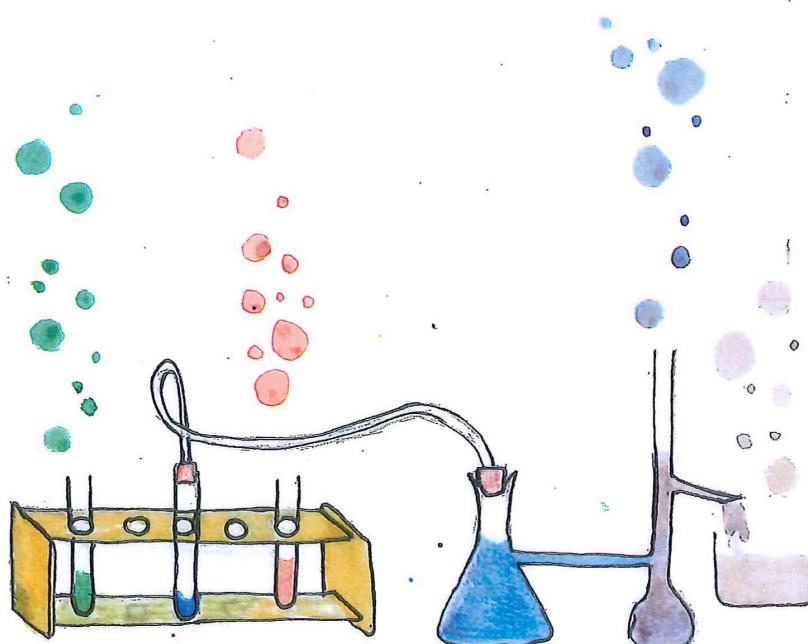
Forever yours,  
Jace Watson



forever yours  
Jane Watson



When Riley, an intelligent, brave girl escapes from her evil chemist creator, Mordecai, she befriends a tall, handsome basketball player by the name of Jace. This friendship infuriates Mordecai, so he kidnaps Riley in the middle of the night, intending for her to never be seen again. Literally. Jace is skeptical about her return, thinking it's a practical joke, but will they defy all odds and overcome all hurdles to find love?



Ages 12+