

JACK'S SECRET
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JACK RYDER



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For Ella and Marnie



PROLOGUE

A secret can be a very powerful thing. Who knows, you may have even come across one before ... Perhaps you were told one by a wrinkly old grandparent? Or maybe you heard the tiny whisperings of one in the playground at school?

Like many things in this world, secrets can come in all shapes and sizes. Some are big, some are only small. Some are dark, and some shine with bright colours. Some are dangerous and some have curious truths and some are just too crazy and ridiculous to understand!

As you probably already know, most secrets don't stay *secrets* for very long. More often than not they are whispered to another person, and then to another, and then another, until soon the whole town is gossiping about it and nobody can remember it was even a secret in the first place!

Now, lean in a little closer because there is something very important I have to tell you ...

Some secrets are extra special. Because *some* secrets are *magical* ... and if you look carefully, you might just find one within the pages of this book ... though how long the boy who discovered it will be able to keep it a secret is another matter altogether ...



DAY STARS

Jack squeezed his eyes closed tightly as he, Bruno, Rocco and Dottie stepped through the wall of the old, empty house and into the glimmering, sparkling light of another world.

Now as fun as this sounds, I wouldn't suggest trying this at home, children. It doesn't work with the walls in most houses. You'll just end up banging your head. But as you've probably guessed, this wasn't any old house, and the summer that led up to this moment wasn't any old summer. It had been a summer filled with fun, adventure and —



most exciting of all — *magic*.

The fun had begun when Jack and his new neighbours, Bruno and Rocco Buckley, and their dog, Dottie, went to explore an old empty house, covered in ivy, that used to be owned by Jack's granddad. Inside the house, they found a strange girl with no memory who was looking for her father. The girl was called Blossom, and the boys agreed to help her. Together, they formed a gang — the secret summer gang — and set out to solve the mystery of who the girl was and where her father had gone.

They began by searching the house for clues and soon discovered it was filled with magic, left behind by the girl's father's — magical potions, kept in glass bottles, and when you opened them, peculiar and wondrous things started to happen ... Rocco found that he could fly like a falcon. Bruno could run as fast as a cheetah. And to their

delight, Jack and Blossom were able to talk to animals.

But most exciting of all, the ivy that covered the house, both inside and out, was itself magical, and when there was a storm, the rain watered it and turned one of the ivy-covered walls into a doorway to another world.

It was this doorway that Blossom had gone through some time earlier, looking for her father, and it was this doorway that Jack, Bruno, Rocco and Dottie were stepping through now, in pursuit of her. Jack couldn't leave Blossom now. He had promised to help her find her dad. And, well, there was another reason he needed to find her, a secret reason that only Jack knew. But we'll come back to that. For now, we'd better step through the doorway too ...

With his eyes still closed, Jack took another

step, and stopped. The storm that had been raging all around him in his world suddenly ceased to exist. The rumbling thunder and howling winds faded away and were replaced by a vast quietness.

Jack could feel the ground beneath his feet had turned soft. It felt like ... grass. And was that a gentle ray of sun he could feel against his cheeks?

Very slowly, Jack dared to open his eyes and what an amazing sight it was that met him.

All around him was a world of green country. There was green grass and green fields stretching out as far as the eye could see, dotted all over with bright yellow buttercups, just like the ones that were growing inside the old empty house, and above it all was the most extraordinary sight — an enormous rainbow-coloured sky that was filled with stars, even though it was clearly the middle

of the day!

Just then a swarm of bumble bees came hovering past singing a tune.

*'We love it when it's sunny,
We sing because it's funny,
We're off to get the honey,
To fill our furry tummies.'*

Jack laughed at their funny song.

'Did you hear that?' he asked Bruno and Rocco.

'Hear what?' Bruno shouted back.

It must still be the magic, thought Jack. Now that he could understand what they were saying, Jack wondered if bees always sang like this. He watched them fly over to a small tree standing in the middle of the field. There was bright sparkling fruit hanging from its branches and the glorious colours from the sky made the whole thing twinkle



like a Christmas tree.

‘Apricots!’ barked Dottie.

Jack looked down and saw Bruno and Rocco’s dog, Dottie, rubbing up against his legs, wagging her tail excitedly. ‘See? I told you I could smell apricots!’ she barked up at him, then went chasing after the bees.

‘Come on, Jack!’ Rocco shouted, waving Jack over to the tree. Beyond him Bruno was climbing the tree already and reaching out to grab one of the sparkling apricots.

‘These are delicious!’ Bruno shouted down. He was hanging from a branch chewing away happily, with enormous hamster cheeks filled with fruit. He tossed one of the sparkling apricots to Jack.

‘Hey, where’s mine?’ cried Rocco.

‘Get it yourself, you lazy bum,’ Bruno called down to him cheekily.

Jack offered a bite of his

apricot to Rocco, but Rocco waved it away and began instead to magically rise off the ground. Even though Jack had seen him do this a few times now, it still gave him a shock every time.

Rocco flew up into the tree, plucked a juicy apricot from one of the branches and took a great bite out of it.

‘Mmmmm ... so sweet!’ said Rocco between bites. ‘Come on, Jack, climb up and join us!’ Rocco shouted down.

Jack climbed up and joined the brothers. The three of them sat there, perched on the tree’s thick branches, happily munching on the wonderfully sweet fruit and looking out over the view. They all gasped as a chorus of shooting stars glided silently over their heads.

‘What sort of place has stars in the daytime?’ Rocco was saying curiously as he looked up squinting at the magnificent sky.

‘I love it,’ said Bruno, gazing upward. ‘It feels like we’re in another galaxy!’

From up there they could see right across the field and down into a beautiful valley. At the bottom was a river with crystal blue water flowing through the middle of it, and along the riverbank there was a whole mass of pink blossom trees. Beyond the valley, resting peacefully on the horizon, Jack could see a spectacular waterfall. A thin needle of sparkling water was flowing all the way down it and as it reached the bottom it exploded, sending clouds of rainbow-coloured mist into the air.

Jack knew he was awake but there was a very real part of him that felt he was asleep inside a mysterious dream.

‘Do you think we’ll be able to get back?’ asked Bruno, glancing over his shoulder towards the shimmering curtain of ivy.

‘Get back?’ Rocco blurted out through a

mouthful of apricot. ‘Why would we want to get back? This place is awesome!’

Bruno sighed and turned to Jack, hoping for a more intelligent response.

Jack thought for a moment. ‘First we need to find Blossom,’ he said. ‘Then we’ll figure out how to get back home.’

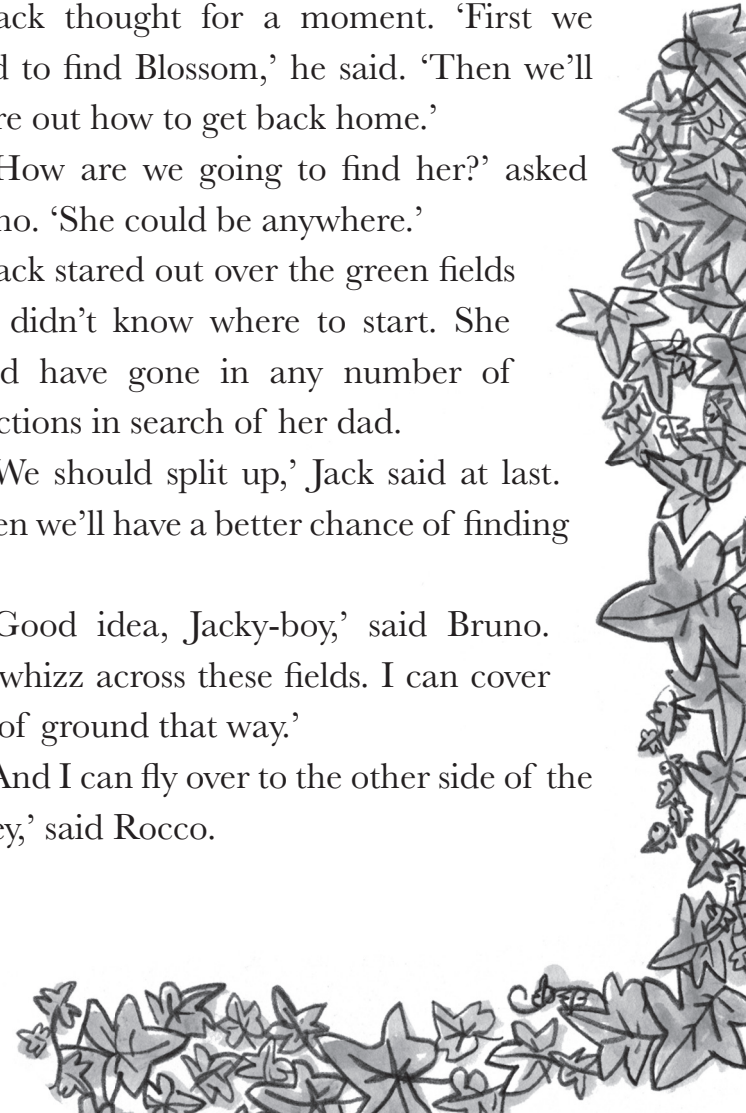
‘How are we going to find her?’ asked Bruno. ‘She could be anywhere.’


Jack stared out over the green fields and didn’t know where to start. She could have gone in any number of directions in search of her dad.

‘We should split up,’ Jack said at last. ‘Then we’ll have a better chance of finding her.’

‘Good idea, Jacky-boy,’ said Bruno. ‘I’ll whizz across these fields. I can cover lots of ground that way.’

‘And I can fly over to the other side of the valley,’ said Rocco.





‘Fine,’ said Jack. ‘I’ll walk down to the river with Dottie. Maybe she can use her sense of smell to track Blossom down.’

Dottie jumped up with her paws resting against the trunk of the tree and barked excitedly. ‘I’m ready!’ she said. ‘Let’s go!’

‘We have to be careful though,’ Jack said. ‘We don’t know what this place is yet.’

There was a short pause.

‘What do you mean?’ Bruno asked him.

‘Well I know it all looks wonderful and everything,’ Jack said, ‘but we don’t know anything about this world. We don’t even know what lives here ...’

Bruno leaned into Jack with a very serious look in his eyes. ‘You mean like lions and stuff?’ he said.

Jack felt a cold shiver slide up the back of his neck and said, ‘Yes, possibly ...’

‘Ah great!’ said Rocco, reaching for another apricot. ‘No one said we were gonna



get eaten by lions! I didn’t sign up for this!’

‘*You* won’t get eaten,’ said Bruno, raising his voice. ‘You can fly! All you have to do is fly up into the air and nothing can touch you.’

‘Oh yeah,’ said Rocco more cheerfully. ‘What about you though?’

‘I can just zoom off!’ said Bruno, folding his arms confidently. ‘I’ve got cheetah speed! Cheetahs are faster than lions so I’ll just outrun them if they come anywhere near me!’

‘And what about me?’ Jack asked a little more fearfully.

‘I guess you’ll just have to try and talk your way out of it,’ said Bruno, chuckling.

‘Yeah good luck with that!’ Rocco said, slapping him on the back.

‘Last one back to the apricot tree’s a loser!’ yelled Bruno as the Buckleys disappeared,



leaving Jack and Dottie alone.