



EVERY
SHINY
THING

CORDELIA JENSEN
and
LAURIE MORRISON



AMULET BOOKS
NEW YORK

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for and may be obtained from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4197-2864-8

Text copyright © 2018 Cordelia Jensen and Laurie Morrison

Illustrations copyright © 2018 Kimberly Glyder

Book design by Alyssa Nassner

Published in 2018 by Amulet Books, an imprint of ABRAMS. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher.

Amulet Books and Amulet Paperbacks are registered trademarks of Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Printed and bound in U.S.A.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Amulet Books are available at special discounts when purchased in quantity for premiums and promotions as well as fund-raising or educational use. Special editions can also be created to specification. For details, contact specialsales@abramsbooks.com or the address below.



ABRAMS The Art of Books
195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007
abramsbooks.com



For Vermont College of Fine Arts—
the place that brought us together
and the people who've helped us grow

A decorative border at the top of the page features several overlapping, intricate geometric patterns. These patterns are composed of various shapes like triangles and polygons, creating a complex, crystalline or floral appearance. The colors are muted, consisting of shades of gray and white.

LAUREN

The Hardest Goodbye

There's nothing harder than saying goodbye to Ryan.

It was hard enough back in August, when Mom and Dad first took him to his new school. Back then, I knew I'd miss him. And I was afraid that this fancy therapeutic boarding school way far away in the middle of nowhere, North Carolina, wasn't the right place for him, even though Ry said he wanted to go, and Mom and Dad kept gushing about what a wonderful opportunity it was, and his old occupational therapist, Jenna, said you couldn't find a better school for a teen on the autism spectrum.

But saying goodbye today, at the end of Family Weekend? This was worse. Way, way worse. Because now that I've seen the place for myself and seen how Ryan is there, I'm not just *afraid* it isn't right. Now I *know* it's not.

It was awful. Really, it was. Not the kind of awful that would be obvious right away, if you weren't paying close attention. It's actually sort of beautiful, with purple-gray mountains in the distance and a long, winding driveway and super-green hills. The buildings are all new, with big windows and soft lights, and there are pretty wood stables with brown and black

and reddish horses, and vegetable gardens with neat rows of kale and broccoli and beets.

But it's awful for *Ryan*.

Ryan's happiest at home, where he has his own calming corner set up in the basement, and his own, always-tuned piano in the living room, and his own fish tank to take care of.

At the school, they let him set up his keyboard and a teeny-tiny fish tank in his room . . . but still. It's nothing like the calming corner at home, which took ages to get just right. And he has to take piano lessons for his "arts component" even though he likes to play *his* way, just hearing the notes in his head, not reading music.

And he's supposed to help take care of horses and vegetables even though he doesn't like getting dirty. Horses and vegetables aren't "therapeutic" at all, when it comes to Ry. *That's* why he got so upset yesterday when he was taking us around to see the stables and gardens. This know-it-all occupational therapist named Scott said maybe Ryan needed some alone time in his room, since Family Weekend can be a big stressor for students who have just gotten used to their school routine. As if *we* were the reason he got overwhelmed. When really we're the ones who know how to help him the best.

I was sure Mom and Dad saw how wrong it all was, too. I was sure they were going to say something this morning, when we all went back to Ryan's room after breakfast. About how it was good that we'd given it a try, but this wasn't working, so we should just take Ryan home.

They looked at each other for an extra long time, and then Dad gave a tiny little nod, like he was telling Mom it was time. Time to say it.

Mom's eyes were a little teary, as if maybe she felt bad about how wrong they'd been to think Piedmont was a good idea in the first place. But then she reached into her giant bag and pulled out two wrapped, rectangular presents—one big and one little—and handed them to Ryan.

"What are these for?" Ryan asked.

"Dad and I wanted you to have something special," she said. She gave Ryan a wobbly smile, and her voice was way too cheerful. "For being so brave and independent."

"We're proud of you, buddy," Dad added. "Go on. Open them."

So Ryan tore the paper off the big one, and he let out a happy yell when he saw what it was: a MacBook Air. Then he opened the other one and yelled out again. The newest iPhone.

He yanked the computer out of its box first, and Dad recited the stats he'd learned at the Apple store, about how fast the processing speed was and how quickly YouTube videos were going to load.

I lowered myself down to sit on the edge of Ryan's school bed, which has a boring gray comforter because the bed's too small for the green one from home, and I tried to understand what was happening.

It's not like Mom and Dad have never bought us anything nice before. And Ry had told us a hundred times when the new iPhone was coming out, so it wasn't a secret that he wanted one. But they'd gotten him a phone *and* a laptop, when it wasn't even a holiday?

And once he opened his presents, we didn't talk about the smelly horses and muddy vegetable gardens, or how Scott the

OT is nowhere near as nice as Jenna, Ry's OT at home. We only talked about the apps Ryan wanted to download and a new music program he was going to set up on the computer.

Which was Mom and Dad's plan, probably. To distract Ryan with these shiny new electronics to make it easier when we left.

When it was time for us to go, Ryan walked us to our rental car. Dad said goodbye first. He leaned in close to whisper something I couldn't hear, and then he kissed Ry on the forehead. Then Mom clasped Ry's hand and rested her head on his shoulder for just a second, since he's taller than she is now. "I love you so much," she told him. "We'll miss you so much, honey."

When she pulled away, tears were streaming down her face. For a fraction of a second, I felt sorry for her, but *she's* the one who decided it was a good idea for Ryan to go to this terrible school, where he obviously doesn't belong. She and Dad both did.

Then Ry pressed his palm to mine, the way we always do instead of hugging.

"Bye, La," he said.

"Bye, Ry Guy," I said back, and I couldn't help it. I cried, too. It was too much, knowing he was about to go back into those too-new buildings with all of those people who think they understand him so much better than we do just because they're autism experts, when we're *Ryan* experts.

"I'm okay, La-La," Ryan told me. "I'm happy."

But I don't believe he's really happy. I mean, happy for a minute, because of Mom and Dad's guilt gifts? Maybe. But for-real happy? There's just no way.

The thing about Ry is, sometimes he goes along with things that make him feel awful because he wants to make other people feel good, and then it all gets to be too much, and he melts down. Like how he came along to Visiting Day at my camp over the summer and went to lunch in the loud cafeteria with fluorescent lights and then came into my crowded cabin that stank of Addie Lester's peach body lotion. Noises and lights and smells are so intense for him that he probably felt like someone was scratching their fingernails down a blackboard one millimeter from his eardrum while shining a giant searchlight straight into his eyes and squirting skunk spray up his nostrils. But he did it all because he thought it was important to me.

So now he might just be sticking out boarding school because he thinks it's important to Mom and Dad. And there'll be nobody around but Scott the Smug OT to comfort him when it's all too much to stick out.

"You *sure* you're okay?" I asked him. "You don't want to come home?"

He tapped his fingertips against mine, twice, and then took his hand away. "I'm going to go to a good college," he said. "I'm going to learn so much."

That's what convinced him that the Piedmont Therapeutic Boarding School was a good idea. Mom took him to the University of Pennsylvania a lot last year to see lectures and tour the archaeology museum. He wants to go there for college someday, so he can listen to all the history and science lectures he wants and visit the Egyptian exhibit anytime. Mom says, now that Ry's fourteen, they've hit their homeschooling limit, and he needs real professionals to push him so he can "reach his academic potential."

But she could hire tutors who could challenge him in subjects that she can't. And then he could learn enough to get ready for college and still live at home with us. In what universe is dumping him at Piedmont better than that?

And . . . OK. Here is the very worst thing. Now that we've just left him at his school with the shiny new electronics that won't fix anything and horses I know he doesn't want to clean up after and gross kale plants I know he doesn't want to water and piano lessons I know he must hate, there's a terrible, terrible thought that I can't push away any longer:

What if it's not that Mom and Ry reached the limit of how much he could learn with her homeschooling him?

What if Mom and Dad have reached their *Ryan* limit, and they've decided our lives would be easier without him?



SIERRA

Out of Body

Mom hugs me hard,
says she'll be home soon.

Her eyes swollen,
she whispers,

"Don't worry,
my baby girl."

She doesn't say goodbye,
so I don't either.

As one cop car
takes her away,

my heart stays stuck
in the spot
she left behind

my body
steps into another cop car
a lady cop plugs in the address.

Even as she walks me
to Cassidy's front door,
my heart stays frozen.

It might never leave
that parking lot.

Not Until

“Happy birthday, hon,”
Cassidy’s mom, Lena,
my mom’s best friend,
pulls me in.
The smell of her day-drinking
wakes me up.

As a rule: She allows herself just one
before the bus comes to deliver:

Cassidy,
the twins,
and then the older girls
Michelle,
Dawn,

all back home.

Lena and I walk together to the bus stop.

“Something I know about your mom is, she loves you more
than anything.”

I don’t want to cry anymore, so I focus
on stepping over the cracks in the sidewalk.

If she loves me so much, why didn't she listen to me?
Why doesn't she ever listen to me?
I want to ask.

Cassidy and her sisters bound off the bus.
At first, Cassidy's not surprised to see me.
Not until she sees my face.

And all my tears
painted there.

Won't Fit

Lena tells Cassidy's oldest sister, Dawn, to run to the
mini-mart.

She sticks candles in my favorite kind of Tastykake.
A puffy pink Snowball.

Thirteen candles won't fit.
Lena settles on three.

They all sing happy birthday to me,
but just hearing the song makes me feel

swollen,
sick.

Counting

Mom uses her one phone call
to ask for bail money
from Lena.

I count what's in my wallet.
\$11.

Mom uses her one phone call
to ask Lena
to keep me
until she can get out.

My fingers, uncrossed, cross.

Promises

“It’ll be fun, you can sleep next to me.”

Cassidy smiles,
showing her crisscrossed teeth,
tapping the bed next to her.

“Michelle sleeps there,” I say.

Usually, on sleepovers, we just drag
sleeping bags into their den.

“We’ll make her sleep with the twins!”

she giggles.
Mischievous creeping in
to her yellow-green eyes.

Trying to laugh with her feels like trying to believe
Mom

every time she says
she will get sober
things will be different.

A new apartment.

A new pet.

A new job.

“It will be so fun,” I laugh with Cassidy, toss a pillow
at her.

Getting Ready

The morning,
 menthol in hand,
 one twin on her lap,
 cereal bowls crowding the table,

Lena tells me—
She doesn't have bail money.
Or enough to keep me
long.

But she says—the arrest was just for
disorderly conduct & resisting arrest.
Usually those sentences
are
short.

“Unless—”
Something passes over her face,
but she drags her cigarette,
stuffs it back down.

I want to ask her if she knows where I'll go.
But, instead, I get ready for school.
Borrow Michelle's clothes, tiny Cassidy's too small for me.

Close my eyes, see Mom handing me lunch money.
Tell myself she will make bail from someone else.
She will get me back.

She has to.

Practice problems in my head.
It's Wednesday, and there's a big math test.

Moving Sideways

Lena drives us to school,
to make sure I'm OK.

Walks us in.

From the car to school,

Cassidy whispers:

she will convince her mom to keep me as long as I need,
she will snag a mattress from her neighbor,
she will start saving some of her food for me.

I nod at all her plans.

But when we get to school,
instead of letting me go forward
to math for my test,
the school counselor
is there waiting for me.

And someone else I don't know.

A heavyset woman with glasses.

Moving me sideways.

They need to speak to me

right away.

Lena clasps my hand

I have no choice but to follow.