

ROSIE

LOVES

JACK

Rosie loves Jack. Jack loves Rosie. So when they're separated, Rosie will do anything to find the boy who makes the sun shine in her head.

Even run away from home.

Even struggle across London and travel to Brighton, though the trains are cancelled and the snow is falling.

Even though people might think a girl with Down's syndrome could never survive on her own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MEL DARBON spent a large part of her childhood inventing stories to keep her autistic brother happy on car journeys. Having worked as a theatre designer and freelance artist, as well as teaching young adults with learning disabilities and running creative workshops for teenage mums, young offenders and toddlers, Mel now writes young adult novels. She is a recent graduate of Bath Spa's MA in Writing For Young People, where she found a channel to give voice to young people who otherwise might not be heard. *Rosie Loves Jack* is her first book.

 @DarbonMel

“There is no greater barrier to success than the barrier set by low expectations.”

*Pablo Pineda (BA Educational Psychology,
Teaching Diploma, actor with Down's syndrome)*

My story begins when I was four years old and my brother Guy was born. I realized, even at that young age, that nothing was ever going to be the same again, because it soon became apparent that my brother had severe disabilities; but it wasn't until many years later that he was diagnosed with Autism.

The Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD, includes a wide range of symptoms, levels of disabilities and skills. Some people have mild disabilities and can lead a relatively “normal” life, whereas others, like my brother, have very severe difficulties and require constant care. He cannot look after any of his own physical needs, has limited language, equivalent to that of a two-to-three year old, and will never live independently. Throughout his life his frustrations have boiled over many times as he navigates a world that often terrifies him. His inability to express any sort of emotion means he cannot even articulate when he is in pain.

For my older brother and I it meant saying “goodbye” to childhood and understanding that all the choices made by our parents wouldn't be directly about us any more and that our lives would be, in many ways, as disparate as that of our disabled sibling.

But the positives far outstripped the negatives. The love I have for my brother and him for me is unconditional. When I visit him and he greets me by placing his head on my shoulder and saying, “My Mel”, it means more than a thousand words or gestures ever could. I adored him from the moment he was born and wanted to protect him and take care of him. In return he has taught me compassion, patience, the ability to empathize and to laugh; I would not be the person I am today without him in my life.

It was when I was nine years old and my brother was five that an episode occurred which had a huge impact on me. I was out with my mother and my brother shopping when he exploded in a tantrum, shouting, kicking and screaming. Several people came up to us, not to offer help, but to berate my mother, telling her she was a disgrace, my brother’s behaviour was disgusting and that he ought to be put away.

I couldn’t understand why people were so judgmental. I wanted to tell them to “put my brother’s shoes on” for a moment and try and comprehend what it must be like to be him, locked in a frightening world that made no sense, where something like a flight of stairs can paralyze him; a world where even sleep holds no respite, his dreams tormenting him and making him shout out throughout the night.

I knew then that one day I would give my brother Guy a voice. This decision was reinforced when, many years later, we all accompanied my father to South Africa on a work trip. In the taxi on the way to the hotel, the driver turned round to

the back and, pointing at my brother, said, “Over here we have a policy of dealing with people like him.” I have never forgotten those brutal words or the horror I felt when he said them. Why did he feel my brother’s life was worthless compared to his?

Over the years my voluntary work at my brother’s centres helped me understand that when you judge someone on their disability you disregard their uniqueness and abilities. When he was younger, my brother was placed with children of varying learning difficulties. As a volunteer I was able to spend more time on an individual basis with some of them and these young people taught me not to make assumptions, that we all communicate differently but everyone has a voice inside them which needs to be heard, because we experience the same emotions and desires; to be loved, to love, to be accepted without limitations.

I also began to recognize that people’s judgment of those with learning disabilities didn’t necessarily come from a bad place but because of fear. There was, at the time my brother was a child, so very little education or contact with people with learning disorders. Things have improved greatly over the last few years but we, as a society, still have a long way to go, so this has fuelled my desire to help dispel the myths of disability even more.

“Having Down’s syndrome is like being born normal. I am just like you and you are just like me. We are all born in different ways, that

is the way I describe it. I have a normal life.”

Chris Burke (actor and folk singer)

I was lucky to work as a Teaching Assistant at a very innovative, inclusive sixth form college where students of all abilities learned together. It was at this college that I assisted some teenagers with Down’s syndrome, all of whom were striving to live as independently as possible in the future.

Despite my brother being schooled alongside children with Down’s syndrome, it wasn’t until I worked at the college that I realized that, like people with autism, there is a wide range of abilities, disabilities and skills within the Down’s syndrome spectrum. At one end of the scale at the college there was Charlie, who had limited cognitive skills and needed help in most areas of his life, including eating, and then there was Rosie, who opened my eyes and inspired me to write this story. She was kind, funny and fiercely independent, determined to make her mark in the world; to work, fall in love and get married – after all, her friend Paula’s mother had Down’s syndrome. Like my brother, Guy, I knew Rosie deserved to be heard, because every single one of us merits seeing themselves within the pages of a book.

I shall leave the last words to my Rosie.

“Why is it different? Is it cos I have Down’s syndrome? Down’s syndrome isn’t *me*. I am Rose.”

Mel Darbon, January 2018

ROSIE

LOVES

JACK

MEL DARBON

USBORNE

To my brother, Guy,
who made me the person I am.

DOWN'S TEEN MISSING

FEARS are growing for a 16-year-old girl with Down's syndrome who has not been seen since leaving home five days ago.

Rose Tremayne set off for Henley College just before 9 a.m. on Friday, December 12, but never arrived.

Police want to speak to a caller who rang the college in Oxfordshire to say Rose was unwell and would not be going in that day. Chief Inspector Tim Jones, who is leading the search, said it was possible that the teenager, of Rupert's Lane, Henley-on-Thames, was making her way to Brighton, where her boyfriend is currently staying.

"The recent heavy snowfalls and resulting problems on the trains mean her journey won't have been straightforward," he said. "I would urge any member of the public who thinks they may have seen Rose to contact the police immediately."

He added that Rose's parents were desperately worried and anxious for news.

Rose is described as 4ft 11in, with a pale complexion, green eyes and shoulder-length red-gold hair.

She was last seen wearing a black duffel coat, black jeans, a cream cable-knit jumper and distinctive purple Dr Marten boots with rose design and carrying a purple fur bag covered in badges.

CHAPTER 1

2ND DECEMBER

Ur marsh-melos have sunk xxx

I put my phone down and clean a circle on the glass to look for Jack. I can't see him anywhere. Jack always gets here at three. It's three and a quarter now.

It's Christmas outside. I like the lights on the tree in the square. They go blue...then green...then red...then white. I like blue best. It looks like the moon shining. And hundreds of stars. And everyone's breath is coming out of their mouths in clouds.

I try writing Jack's name in the window mist.

It's noisy in the cafe today. There are lots of students from my college here. They've taken all the sofas up. The girls have tinsel on their heads and they're joining in with all the Christmas songs, but real Christmas is three weeks and two days away.

Jim is laughing at something one of the girls said. I like Jim cos he's always happy. He wears a green stripy apron with a pocket at the front, for his phone and some mints for fresh breath con-fi-dence.

It's going to be three and a half round the clock soon.

My friend Jess walks by and waves to me. She comes into the cafe. Jess helps me with literacy at college on Tuesdays. She's cool. I want to get a silver nose stud like her.

"Hi, Rose, good to see you. I love your new Doc Martens, they're sick! Oh – that doesn't mean they're—"

"YeahIknow. Ben told Mum her meatballs were sick, and Mum said it was a revolting expresshun."

"True, lol! Can I join you?"

"Course."

"I'll miss seeing you when I'm away."

"I don't want you to go. I like you coming to help us read and do writing on Tuesdays."

"Six months will fly by. I can't believe I started planning this gap year seven months ago and now I'm off next week, it's crazy."

"Will you come back to help after?"

"I hope so, but I don't know for sure. I'm probably going to have to find a proper job to pay for me going to uni, so I might not have Tuesdays free to help you and Lou any more."

"I wish I could go away with Jack."

Jess takes my hand. "Perhaps you will one day."

"Only if Mum and Dad are with us, or someone."

"I thought you did quite a lot on your own together?"

"In Henley-on-Thames. And once in Reading with Jack."

"Where is Jack?" Jess drops my hand and peers out the window.

"Don'tknow. I'm worried."

"Nothing to worry about. He'll be in the art room and have forgotten the time. I was like that with my photography A Level."

"It's ICT today. Jack hates ICT. P'raps he doesn't want to see me any more."

"Don't be silly! Have you checked your phone?"

"Lots of times."

"Give him a call and I'll get us a drink. Your usual?"

"Yesplease. My healthy option, please."

I kiss my Jack on my phone screen before pressing the button to ring him.

"Hey, it's me, Jack. I can't talk cos I'm busy. Leave me a message. Ta."

"Hello, it's Rosie. I'm sitting at our table and your hot choclet's gone cold. All the squirty cream has gone invisible. So hurry up. Love you."

Then I ring him again, just so I can hear his voice. I wish it was his real voice.

"Here's your green tea, Rose, be careful, it's very hot."

"I know, thankyou."

"Hey sweetie, your tongue is out again. Remember what we said? It can make people stare."

“I didn’t see it sticking out.”

“No probs. Did you get hold of Jack?”

I shake my head. “I think he’s with Emma Golding. He told her he loved her in Drama.”

“We’ve talked about this, Rose. Jack does NOT love Emma, they were just acting in a play.”

“He said, ‘I love you’ to her.”

“It was just pretend, not real, okay?”

“Okay... But he said he loved Emma *two* times.”

“Jack loves *you*, he doesn’t want to be with anyone else.”

“Then where is he?”

Jess looks at her watch. “He’s late, even for Jack, so let’s hope he hasn’t done anything dopey.”

“Whatd’yumean?”

“Well, Jack has been a bit *arsey* recently.”

I don’t want to look at Jess for a bit. She’s all wrong about Jack.

“I didn’t mean to upset you, Rose. Jack’s great, I like him a lot, we all do, but he can...overreact.”

I turn my face away from Jess.

“Rose, look at me, I’m not being mean. When you first met Jack he was much more chilled—”

“That’s cos of me.”

“Yeah, I get that, lovely, he’s been coping with his anger so much better since he met you, but since his gran died he’s been getting worse again.”

“Jack cried and cried when his gran died. He loved his

gran best of all after his mum.”

“I’m sure she loved Jack very much too, which is why he’s been finding it so hard. But lots of people don’t understand why Jack is so angry; you and your friends might in your part of the college but not everyone in the main part of the college does. All they know is that he shouts and swears and hits out at them.”

“Jack’s brain got hurt when he was being born.”

“I know, Rose, and that’s very sad, but people can’t see that his brain is hurt inside his head, all they see is the nice-looking Jack on the outside, so they don’t get his fighting. He’s frightened a few of the students. Nadia Johnson’s mother complained about him.”

“Henevergetsangrywithme.” I shove my chair back. “I’m going to check for him outside.”

Jess sighs. “I’ll watch your stuff for you.”

It’s night-time on the street already, cos it’s winter. Jack always meets me just before the dark comes.

The cold air nettle-stings my face. I pull my jumper up over my nose to stop it but then my middle freezes. I put it back and wrap my arms around me. Whichever way I look, I can’t see Jack. I don’t feel right inside me. I check the time. It’s gone past an hour. Jack is never that much late without telling me.

Toby Varley knocks on the window of the bus as it goes past. He’s waving his arms about and pointing up the hill. I don’t know what he’s doing, but he’s always silly. He should

be in Pathways at the college, where you need LOTS of help.

I go back into the warm and get my coat. "I'm going to find Jack. Something's wrong."

"He'll be fine; I bet you meet him on your way up the hill. Aren't you going to finish your tea? If the cafe were on *fire* you'd usually finish it."

"OhnoI forgot! Jack filled up my head." I drink my tea to the bottom of the cup. "All gone. ByeJess."

"See you soon, Rose, take care."

I pick up my bag and head to college. I look over my shoulder at the bright lights spilling out of the cafe window. Jess is laughing into her phone.

My feet keep slipping on the snow cos I can't walk fast enough to get to Jack.

All the students are going in a different direction to me. Jack's face isn't coming down the hill with them. He's vanished.

I can see the college at the top. It's the same size as my hand. I push my legs harder up the hill. They hurt by the time college is bigger than me.

As I run through the car park I see a police car. The light is spinning in a circle on the top, making the snow blue.

Inside the building the corridors are empty. My boots squeak on the floor. I tiptoe along to make them hush. The swing doors at the end burst open and make me jump. A police lady runs through the gap. She stops to find her breath

and asks, "Did you see a young man in a grey hoodie go past this way?"

I shake my head. She turns and goes back through the doors. My heart has a race in my chest. Jack has a grey hoodie.

My legs can't decide which way to walk, so I make them go to the art room. It's Jack's best place. When he was little his mum told him to paint all the angry monsters fighting in his head. To get them out. He painted all the time after that. He's the best artist ever. Everyone says so.

I'm worried as I go up the stairs. Please be there.

I open the art room door, smiling my special smile for Jack. It's empty.

I so wanted him to be here. I try not to get upset. My head is too muddled to sort it all out.

I check my phone again. Still nothing. Maybe Jack went home instead of meeting me? I don't want to think that. Or about the police lady.

Street light from outside shines into the room. It makes shadow shapes across the wall. I shiver. Something taps on the window, which makes me drop my phone. It clatters across the floor. I stand very still and listen for anyone coming.

I hear something breathing in the darkness. All the hairs on my arm stand to attention. I watch as the paint cupboard door opens by itself. My mouth opens but no sound comes out. In the gap, I see an eye looking right at me. I scream. A body leaps out of the cupboard and grabs me. A hand stops my mouth.

“Don’t scream, Rosie,” a voice shout-whispers in my ear, “it’s me, Jack.”

He takes his hand off my mouth and I push him away. “Whatareyoudoing? Youscaredme!”

“Shush!” Jack puts his finger on my lips. “We can’t make a noise.”

Jack’s face is white and full of fear but a bubble of angry pops out of me. “Why are you hiding in there? I waited and waited but you didn’t come. I got upset.”

Jack grabs my hand and pulls me into the cupboard and shuts the door. It smells of damp paint. I can’t see Jack very well, but I can feel his body shivering against mine.

“Whatisit?” I whisper into the dusty air.

“I fucked up big time, Rosie.”

“Don’t say that word! What’s happened?”

The dark starts to go away and my eyes see Jack’s looking into mine. Then he groans and lets his head fall into his hands. “I’ve ruined everything.”

“Stop being a drama person. You’re scaring me. Jess said you’ve been scaring lots of people at college. And one of the mums com-plained about you.”

Jack holds my face and says, “I couldn’t help it. I lost it in ICT. That prick, Davidson, wound me up and wound me up. Bastard!”

“Stop it! I don’t like mean words. Whatdidyoudo?”

Jack won’t look at me now, so I pull his face round. “Tell me.”

“I smashed a computer. I couldn’t control myself, Rosie. Then...then, shit!”

“What?”

“I threw a chair at the window.”

“Jack that’s badbadbad.”

“A bit of glass flew into Mrs Foster’s eye. Oh God, Rosie, there was blood everywhere. I never meant to hurt her. I’d never hurt anybody, you know that, don’t you?”

“Yes... But you did.”

Jack looks at the ground. “The police came and it was horrible. They were asking hundreds of questions. Mr Dean shouted at me, then Mrs Foster grabbed him as she went by on the stretcher and told him that I didn’t hurt her on purpose and that she won’t press charges or anything, but—” Jack takes a big shuddery breath...

“What does *that* mean?”

“Press charges?”

I nod.

“They won’t send me to prison—”

“Nonono! Not prison!”

“No, it’s okay, *not* prison. But, Rosie, remember when I kicked the art table and it fell down?”

“I do. You broke Sam’s work.”

“And they said I might have to go away to some place and deal with my anger? What if they send me away now?”

I start crying. “They can’t send you away. What will we do? We need us. I stop your angry, Jack. And you make me strong.

You make me Rosie.”

“And you make me a good Jack. When you’re with me, Rosie, all the darkness vanishes and my brain calms down; even more than when I paint. You take away the black inside my head and turn it into colours.”

I touch him gently where he showed me his brain had got hurt. He puts his hand over mine and kisses my wrist. He looks at me with eyes full of frightened.

“I’m so fucking stupid! We can’t be apart, that’s why I ran away from the police so they can’t take me. I need you, Rosie, I have to find a place to hide, so we can be together.”

Jack folds his arms around me. I bury my face in his chest and smell his Jack smell. Lynx and sweat and lemon shampoo. He strokes my hair and whispers, “Rosie, Rosie, Rosie,” over and over again.

I don’t want to leave the cupboard. They can’t take my Jack away. I kiss his eyes and his lips and the soft bit at the bottom of his ear. He trembles when I touch him.

“I love you, Rosie Tremayne,” Jack says softly.

I’m about to answer him when the door flies open and a torch light shines in our faces. All I can see is white in my eyes. I scream and Jack pulls me to the back of the cupboard with him. I bury my face in Jack’s chest and wrap my arms around him, so I can’t let go.

“Come on, you two,” a prickly voice says. “We’ve been looking everywhere for you, Jack. You’re not helping yourself by running off like that.”

A police man with a big frown on his face looks into the cupboard. A police lady next to him shakes her head from side to side. She comes in and takes my arm.

“Leave us alone! Take your hands off my girlfriend!”

“Come on now, let go of him, love.” The police lady tries to tug my arms away from Jack. He knocks her hat off, sending it flying out the door.

“Jack, don’t! Calm down.” I try and stop Jack doing anything else but the police lady pulls me out of the cupboard.

“Let go of him now, it’s for the best.”

The main art room doors swing open and Mr Dean, the principle, comes in. He’s all out of his breath.

“Have you...found him? W...what are you doing here... Rosie?”

“They’re taking my Jack. Stop them taking my Jack, Mr Dean.”

“They have to...Rosie. Where is he, off...officer?”

The police lady nods at the art cupboard. The police man drags Jack out into the art room. He’s trying to sit on the floor but the police man won’t let him.

“Control yourself, Jack,” Mr Dean bellows at him. “You’re making things ten times worse.”

The police man stands Jack on his feet. “Let’s get you to the car. Your mother is waiting for you at home.”

Jack struggles to reach me, but the policeman holds him tightly by one arm.

“Rosie! I’ll come back and get you. Wait for me at our

special place!” He swings his fist out at the police man who grabs it and yanks Jack’s arm behind his back.

“Enough! Or I’ll handcuff you if I have to.”

Jack stops fighting and goes sad all over. The police man leads him out of the room. He looks round at me and whispers, “I’m sorry.”

I twist myself free, then run after Jack. Mr Dean shouts my name. I catch Jack and hold on to him as hard as I can. The police man marches Jack along, making me run with him. “Don’ttakehimaway! Pleasedon’ttakehimaway.”

I stumble and let go of Jack. The police lady catches me as I fall.

“JACK! JAAAAACK!”

The doors slam.

He’s gone.

CHAPTER 2

10TH DECEMBER

“I don’t feel like talking, Mum.”

She strokes her finger over my forehead. “All right, darling, but it might make you feel better if you do.”

I turn my face to the wall. “I haven’t heard from Jack in eight days.”

Mum sighs. “He has a lot to deal with, Rose.”

“He could text or call. Hedoesn’tlovemeanymore.”

“Maybe it’s best you forget about Jack and let him sort himself out.”

“I’ll never forget Jack. Jack took away my lonely.” I pull my duvet up to cover my face. When I peep back over the edge, Mum has gone. Mum’s upset. I always talk to her, but I can’t now cos she doesn’t understand about Jack. No one does.