

FROM THE MILLION-COPY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

WHEN
THE
WORLD
TIPS
OVER

JANDY NELSON

"SIMPLY THE VERY BEST" SARA BARNARD

Contents

Part One

Dizzy

Encounter #1 with the Rainbow-Haired Girl

Dizzy

Dizzy

Miles

Encounter #2 with the Rainbow-Haired Girl

Miles

Miles

Wynton

Encounter #3 with the Rainbow-Haired Girl

Wynton

Wynton

Part Two

Wynton

Cassidy

Dizzy

Miles

Cassidy

Cassidy

Wynton

Cassidy

Wynton

Cassidy

Dizzy

Wynton

Dizzy

Part Three

Miles

Miles

Miles

Cassidy

Cassidy

Cassidy

Wynton

Miles

Miles

Miles

Miles

Wynton

Miles

Dizzy

Part Four

Cassidy

Cassidy

Cassidy

Wynton

Dizzy

Miles

Cassidy

Miles

Miles

Cassidy

Cassidy

Wynton

Dizzy

Miles

Cassidy

Part Five

Miles

Dizzy

Wynton

Acknowledgements

About the Author

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*WHEN
THE
WORLD
TIPS
OVER*

JANDY NELSON

WALKER
BOOKS

For my family,
who double as the very best friends,
and
for my friends,
who double as the most amazing family



***One can live sometimes without living at all,
then all life comes crowding into a single hour.***

Oscar Wilde

***Day by day and night by night we were together –
all else has long been forgotten by me.***

Walt Whitman

***There is another world,
but it's in this one.***

Paul Éluard

***Are you looking for me?
I am in the next seat.***

Kabir

FANTASIA (NOUN)

fan·ta·sia | \ fan-'tā-zhə

1: a composition, often musical, with an improvisational style

1b: a literary work composed of a mixture of different forms or styles

2: a work in which fancy roves unrestricted

3: something possessing fantastical, bizarre, or unreal qualities



**PART
ONE**



DIZZY

Encounter #1 with the Rainbow-Haired Girl

The morning of the day twelve-year-old Dizzy Fall walked into the path of the speeding eighteen-wheeler and encountered the rainbow-haired girl, everything was going wrong. In the divorce with her best friend, Lizard, who now went by his real name, Tristan, Lizard-now-Tristan had been granted popularity, a cool haircut, and a girlfriend named Melinda.

Dizzy had been granted nothing.

They'd been a twosome since first grade, wandering around in each other's innermost secrets, baking through the list of *Pastry Magazine's* most ambitious desserts as well as their mutual favorite activity: surfing the internet for pertinent information regarding existence. Lizard's area of expertise was weather and natural disasters while Dizzy's was all cool things.

Lately those cool things had been stories about saints who rose into the air in fits of ecstasy, Himalayan yogis who could turn their bodies into stone, Buddha, who'd made duplicates of himself and shot fire from his

fingers (yes!). Reading about these woo-woo things made Dizzy's soul buzz and Dizzy wanted a buzzy soul. A buzzy *everything*.

Also, recently, pre-divorce, Dizzy and Lizard had kissed for three seconds to see if they'd feel the endorphins Lizard learned about online or the spontaneous internal explosions Dizzy read about in the romance novels her mother kept behind the literary ones on the shelf, particularly *Live Forever Now* starring Samantha Brookweather, which was Dizzy's favorite. Lizard thought romance novels were totally useless, but Dizzy learned so much from them. She wanted the door of her wild femininity to swing open already, her fiery furnace to ignite, her passion-moistened depths to awaken, and, although, unlike Samantha Brookweather, she'd never seen a real live penis, from these books she knew an absolute ton about stiff members, turgid shafts, and throbbing spears. Unfortunately, however, during the three-second kiss with Lizard, neither of them had felt endorphins nor spontaneous internal explosions.

Anyway, all that morning of the telltale day of the first encounter, Dizzy sat in class and watched ex-best friend Lizard-now-Tristan stealthily texting with awful new girlfriend Melinda, probably about all the spontaneous internal explosions they experienced when they kissed each other at the dance three weeks before. Dizzy had watched it happen, her throat knotting up as Lizard's hand reached behind Melinda's neck right before their lips met. Since that moment, Dizzy, a renowned motormouth, hardly spoke at school and when she did, she felt like her voice was coming out of her feet.

But what was there for Dizzy to say anymore? Her mother had told her once that the great loves of one's life weren't necessarily romantic. Dizzy had thought she had three great loves already, then: her best friend, Lizard; her mom, Chef Mom; and her oldest brother Wynton who was so awesome he gave off sparks. But what now? She didn't know people could stop loving you. She'd thought friendship was permanent, like matter.

After lunch – which Dizzy spent in the computer room learning about a group of people in Eastern Europe who believed someone or something was psychically stealing their tongues – she walked halfway across school to the

bathroom no one used. She was trying to avoid passing Lizard-now-Tristan and Melinda, who were always camped out together lately by the water fountain outside the closer bathroom with their hands and souls glued together. Only when she swung open the door, there was Lizard at the sink of the school's one all-gender bathroom.

He was alone at the mirror putting some kind of gel in his new hair, looking like all the other boys now, not like the Lizard of a month ago with cyclone hair like hers and geek-kid-at-the-science-fair personal style, also like hers. He'd even gotten contacts, so their black ten-ton Clark Kent eyeglasses no longer matched. She wanted the old Lizard back, the boy who'd told her about sun pillars, fog bows, and said, "So dope, Diz," at least five hundred times a day.

The fluorescent lights in the slug-colored bathroom flickered. They hadn't been alone in what felt like ages and Dizzy's chest felt hollow. Lizard glanced at her in the mirror, his expression unreadable, then returned his attention to his hair, which was the color of butternut squash. He had pale skin with scattered freckles on his cheeks, not galaxies of them like Dizzy. Once in fifth grade when lifelong Dizzy tormentor Tony Spencer had called Dizzy an ugly freckle farm, Lizard had come to school the next day with galaxies of his own that he'd drawn onto his cheeks.

Dizzy glimpsed her reflection in the mirror and had the same sinking reaction she always did to her appearance because she looked exactly like a frog in a wig. She couldn't believe this was what people had to see when they looked at her. She wished they got to see something better, like Samantha Brookswether's head, for instance. Samantha Brookswether set men's hearts on fire with her soft silken locks, pouty pillowy lips, and glittering sapphire eyes.

Dizzy settled her plain old unglittering brown eyes back on her ex-best friend, the real version, not the mirror one. She wanted to hold his hand, like they had secretly for years under tables. She wanted to remind him how she used to braid their hair into a single braid so they could pretend they were one person. She wanted to ask him why he wouldn't return her texts or calls or come to his bedroom window even after she threw thirty-seven

pebbles in a row at it. Instead, she went into the stall and held her breath for as long as she could and when she came out, he was gone.

On the mirror in black marker was written: *Leave Me Alone*.

Dizzy felt like she was going to blow away.

Then came gym. Dodgeball. Hour of terror and dread. She was sweating through her shirt on the broiling field, practicing invisibility, pretending not to notice Lizard huddled with Tony Spencer. Ack. Ick. Lizard the Traitor. Dizzy wanted to burrow into the ground. Why hadn't she thought to make more than one friend in life? But she had no time to contemplate this because Tony Spencer had broken away from Lizard and was charging at her with the ball and a gleaming, cartoon-y knife of a smile. Plus homicidal intent. Her insides plunged. She tried to psychically steal his tongue then cancelled the order because: ew.

A weird embarrassing yip of a noise came from her lips as Tony lifted the ball into the air and then pummeled it into her gut, knocking the breath out of her, the dignity out of her. Then when she was lying on the ground like a gulping, gasping fish, holding her belly where he'd reamed her, he turned around, squatted over her, shoved his sweaty, gym-shorted butt in her face, and farted.

Dizzy's mind froze. No, she begged, make it so this did not just happen to her. Let her hit delete. Hit escape. Power off.

"What color is it, Dizzy?" Tony said with glee because Lizard must've told him about her synesthesia, how she saw scents as colors.

Everyone laughed and laughed but Dizzy focused only on Lizard's horse-neighbor of a laugh, laughing like Dizzy wouldn't have eaten a tub of spiders to spare him a second of sadness.

That was what had made Dizzy cry. That was what had made her command her bare, bony stick-legs to run across the athletic field, climb over the fence of Paradise Springs Middle School, and peel through vineyard after vineyard, so that now here she was in a deserted part of town in her gym clothes in the middle of the school day, in a heatwave, wanting to just jump out of her stupid sweaty body and leave it behind.

Because Tony Spencer had done that in her face! In front of everyone! And Lizard had laughed! At her! God! She'd need a disguise from here on out, a whole new identity. She could never go back to school, that was certain. She'd have to steal her mother's credit card and book a flight to South America. Live in the savannah with the capybaras because Dizzy had learned in one of her online research marathons that capybaras were the nicest of all mammals.

Not hateful like seventh-grade people.

And hello? Synesthesia wasn't even something Dizzy was embarrassed about, like she was her frog-in-a-wig looks, or her nuclear mushroom hair, or her freckles, which colonized every inch of her including her toes, including her fiery furnace. Or the everything. Like how small and concave she was and how she had no hair anywhere exciting yet and how she often felt like a dust particle. Not to mention how scared she was to die or to go to sleep or to lie there in the dark or to leave a room if her mom was in it or to be ugly forever. Or even how much time she *really* spent surfing the internet for pertinent information regarding existence or so many, many things that made Dizzy feel like life was hopping from one private or public humiliation to the next.

She careened down the empty sweltering sidewalk, lost in her mind, not registering the burnt amber scent of the air, nor the shops closed because of the infernal temperatures, nor the sun-scorched hills in the distance, nor the strange creaking quiet because all four streams that ran through Paradise Springs had run dry. She didn't even register the sky, empty of birds who couldn't be bothered to fly with The Devil Winds roving down the valley, causing the worst heatwave in recent memory.

She stepped blindly into the street.

Then, a screeching like the world was splitting in half.

The ground beneath her shook, the air rattled. Dizzy had no idea what was happening.

She turned around and saw the massive metal face of a truck barreling toward her. *Oh no oh no oh no oh no*. She couldn't move or scream or

think. She couldn't do anything. Her feet were encased in concrete as time slowed, then seemed to suspend entirely with the revelation: This was it.

It it.

The End.

Oh, she hoped she'd get to be a ghost. A ghost who baked all day beside Chef Mom at her restaurant, The Blue Spoonful. "I want to come back immediately, please," Dizzy said urgently, out loud, to God. "A ghost who can talk, sir," she added. "Not one of the mute ones, please."

She swallowed, flooding with sorrow, with *so* not-ready. She was going to die only having used up three seconds of the two weeks the average person spent kissing in their lifetime. She was going to die before she fell in love and merged souls like Samantha Brookswether and Jericho Blane. Before she rose up to meet someone's urgent thrust or was burnt to cinders from the frenzy of simultaneous eruptions or any of the other epic sex stuff in *Live Forever Now*. Worse, she was going to die before she ever even had an orgasm on her own – she couldn't figure it out or was malformed; she wasn't sure which.

And this was even worse than all of that: She was going to die before the father she never met – because she was in the womb the night he left – returned. She knew he wasn't dead like some people said though, because she'd seen him once up on the ridge in his cowboy hat, looking like he did in all the photos, except no one believed her about this (except Wynton and Lizard) on account of how she regularly saw those mute ghosts in the vineyard, and no one (except Wynton and Lizard) believed her about that either. Oh Wynton. And her other brother Perfect Miles. Her mother! Panic seized her. How could she leave them? Leave the world? She didn't even like leaving the breakfast table. How could she die before they – Wynton, Perfect Miles, Chef Mom, Un-disappeared Dad, Weird Drunk Uncle Clive – could squeeze together on the ancient red velvet couch in the living room, a happy people-pile with Dizzy smack in the middle, all of them watching *Harold and Maude* or *Babette's Feast* (her mom's favorite old movies and now hers too). Oh, she hoped everyone would watch those two movies in her memory, in lieu of flowers.

Not that her family had ever watched anything in a happy people-pile or been that happy, period. But now there was no chance of it.

She was going to die before all the chances.

And the really awful part wasn't even that the last thing that happened to her before death was being face-farted by Tony Spencer and betrayed by Lizard. (Actually, forget the old movies – in lieu of flowers, please egg and toilet paper both their houses.) The worst part was she was going to die before anything truly miraculous happened to her in life.

And then something truly miraculous happened to her in life.

Two hands planted themselves hard and strong on her hips. She turned and saw a girl. A bright and shining, shooting star of a girl.

Dizzy lifted her hand to touch the face that was framed by rainbow curls tumbling to the girl's waist, fairy-tale tresses of every color, but before Dizzy could touch the light-struck cheek, the girl spoke, bopped Dizzy's nose with her finger, then shoved Dizzy mightily, and up Dizzy went. Up, up, up. The sky tipping as Dizzy hurled forward out of all thought, out of time and place, landing finally in a splatter of limbs and bewilderment on the hot pavement.

Holy holy holy.

Dizzy didn't move for a moment. Um. What had just happened? Her heart was a wild animal in her chest, her face pressed into burning gravel. Was she a ghost? She touched two fingers together. No, still flesh. She tried to lift her head and was met by blur – where were her glasses? She rolled onto her back and a figure, a man, she could tell even without her glasses, not the girl she expected to see, was towering over her, blocking the sun, offering her a hand, and talking a blue streak.

“Close call. Close call. Oh Jesus God. But look at you. Like new. Not a scratch. Thank the lord.” He helped Dizzy to shaky feet with shaky arms. Despite the gravel in her cheeks and palms, the pavement burns on her knees, the pounding in her chest, she was okay. Dizzy wasn't so sure about this man, though, who she thought might be on the road to hyperventilation. He was sweating through his shirt in stained patches, his scent staggering, a pumpkin-orange smell, the color Dizzy associated with men, with men-

sweat. Girls and women smelled mostly green. Except not all of them, she now knew. The rainbow-haired girl who'd just saved her life had smelled magenta, like flowers did. "Oh jeez. Oh lord. Oh God," the man said. "What are you, nine, ten? I got a grandbaby your age. Built like a feather just like you."

"I'm a *twelve*-year-old feather," Dizzy said defensively. Because yes, it was annoying to still be asked to be an elf in the Paradise Springs summer parade, thank you very much. She bent down to feel for her glasses, only to realize they were stuck in her hair, which doubled as her personal lost and found. She disentangled them and put them on to see that the man, with his big sweaty friendly mustached face, was, for all intents and purposes, a talking walrus.

The girl, however, was nowhere in sight.

"Okay then, twelve. Stand corrected," the man said. "Whew-y. So glad you're all right. Thought you were a goner."

"Me too," said Dizzy, her mind revving. "I hoped I'd get to come back as a ghost, but I didn't want to be one of the mute ones, you know?" She could feel words, words, words, a tidal wave of them, straining to break out of her like they used to in the good old pre-divorce days. Sure, some people who shall remain nameless thought Dizzy talked too much and should get her vocal cords removed, but those people weren't here, so on she went. "That would be awful. There, watching everything and everyone but unable to talk, to tell people anything, even your name. Like the ones in our vineyard."

"I think you'd be terrible as a mute ghost," the walrus-man said.

"Yes. Exactly." She looked around. "I have to thank the girl, sir. Where'd she go?"

The man made a face that caused his bushy eyebrows to bunch up. "Where'd who go? All I seen is sun, then you standing in it, frozen, looking up to the heavens like some religious statue. And then I'm slamming on the brakes, riding 'em for my life, but the next second you were flying outa the way. You must be some kind athlete, 'cause you really flew. It was a sight."

“*So* not an athlete. That’s my brother Perfect Miles. I hate sports. All of them. I don’t even like being outside.” She took a breath to slow down her thoughts, which loved to avalanche. “I flew like that because a girl pushed me. Hard too, just shoved me into the air. You didn’t see her?” Dizzy looked up and down the street again. No one was anywhere. No tourists. No cars even. The Devil Winds had turned Paradise Springs into a dry, dusty ghost town. “She had all these colorful tattoos of words” – Dizzy touched her arm where the tattoo of the word *destiny* had been on the girl – “and she was *so* beautiful, her face—”

“Just us here, honey. Must be the heat. No one’s thinking straight.”

Walking home through the vineyards under the burning sun, her sweat-soaked clothes stuck to her, Dizzy couldn’t get the girl out of her mind. That magenta smell. The way she’d looked right at Dizzy, eye to eye. “Don’t worry. You’re okay,” the girl had said in a strange husky voice before touching Dizzy’s nose with her finger – *bop*. All Dizzy’s panic about the oncoming truck had vanished. All Dizzy’s panic and uncertainty about *everything* had vanished. Light had been everywhere on the girl, streaming around her head, around those endless rainbow-colored curls, like a halo.

Like a halo.

And then she’d pushed Dizzy into the air.