

Dear Reader,

Recently, I was on a panel where I was asked to describe my middle school self using only one word. I eventually said “hiding.” And I was hiding—from bullies, and from myself. I kept my head down. My favorite place in the world was the library, and I used books as a hiding place, an escape.

Early on, I also used writing as a way to hide. I thought the point was to disguise myself from the world. Only later did I come to realize that my stories began to come alive when I put myself—my heart—into them. I bury my emotional truths in the text in hopes that perhaps in discovering my heart on the page, readers will learn something about their own hearts as well.

That brings me to *A Strange Thing Happened in Cherry Hall*. I got the idea to write it after being asked over and over again during school visits if I was ever going to write a mystery. I thought this was a peculiar question. Why were so many kids clamoring for mysteries?

But then I thought about myself when I was younger, and how much I loved mysteries. I loved mysteries because I had this sense that there was a lot about the world that I didn't understand. And, similarly, that there was a lot about me that the world didn't understand. But I think I also loved mysteries (and still do) because they're fun and exciting to read.

This book is my love letter to lonely kids who, like my younger self, are longing to feel seen and understood. It's also my love letter to the classic, quirky mystery novels I adored as a kid. I buried a big chunk of my heart in it, and I hope you'll connect with it. But most of all, I hope you'll have fun reading it.

Lots of love,

Jasmine