

Dear Reader,

Like many of my stories, *Millie Fleur's Poison Garden* started with something I read about that made my brain light up – a real life poison garden in England! You see, I myself am wonderfully weird and a poison garden would've been just the kind of place I would've wanted to visit as a child.

From a very early age I was multi-passionate, interested in all manner of things. But my unquenchable curiosity and varied interests often made me feel like I didn't quite fit into any one box. And being curious and questioning sometimes put me at odds with the grown-ups in my life. I wasn't satisfied with "because it's always been that way" or "because I said so." And I especially wasn't interested in the words "you can't."

In that way, Millie Fleur and I are alike.

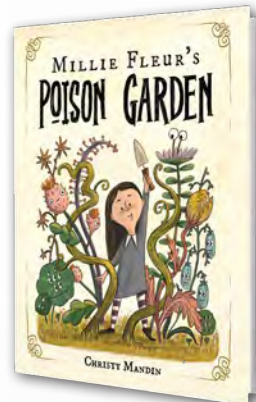
But the biggest difference between me and Millie Fleur is that she never stifles her personality just because others don't understand it. She's no shrinking violet. This is the book I wish I'd had as a kid when I started to feel like I needed to fit in and hide my weird. She gives kids (and adults) permission to embrace their weirdness. She takes charge and finds people who appreciate what makes her special.

The heart of Millie Fleur's story is that weirdness, lived with honesty and positivity, is captivating. People aren't enamored with sameness. The world needs weirdos. You know who's weird? Astronauts, scientists, innovators, geniuses, creatives. Throughout history, the best and brightest among us have been willing to stand out, push boundaries, and be perceived as weird. Nikola Tesla, Margaret Wise Brown, Jim Henson, Katherine Johnson. Original ideas are weird. And then they are replicated. And that's exactly what happens in this story.

My hope is that *Millie Fleur's Poison Garden* helps readers embrace what makes them wonderfully weird, redefining the label in a positive way, so that the next time someone calls them weird they can respond with a confident and resounding, "Thank you!" knowing they make the world more interesting.

Stay curious, friends.

Christy Mandin



Meet Millie Fleur La Fae



Facts about wonderfully weird Millie Fleur!

She has a pet toad named Wart T. Wigglesbottom who is a feisty and devoted companion.

She loves growing interesting plants, but has plenty of other hobbies, too. When she's not in the garden you can often find her being creative in other ways, like designing invitations to her poison garden or making paper chains of her plants.

She is curious about her world and loves making new friends.

Her favorite plant is her Grumpy Gilliflower. He might not be the most cheerful plant, but all varieties are welcome in her garden. He has the exact opposite attitude about the world and teaches her a different perspective.

She loves gardening because it reminds her that we are all connected – to each other and to the earth.