

Praise for *Mia and the Lightcasters*:

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SHORTLISTED – THE WEEK JUNIOR BOOK AWARDS

LONGLISTED – THE BRANFORD BOASE AWARD

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The Bookseller

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janelle McCurdy is an author and fully fledged gamer. After graduating from Royal Holloway University with a Criminology and Sociology degree, Janelle moved back home to London, and began writing middle grade fantasy. In her free time, you can find her holed up in her room, gaming and watching anime, or attending numerous comic cons and gaming events. Her FAB Prize winning story, *Mia and the Lightcasters*, was acquired by Faber in a major auction.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Ana Latese is an illustrator based in North Carolina. She has illustrated *Boys Don't Cry* by Malorie Blackman, as well as working with editorial clients including *The Washington Post*. When she's not illustrating, she enjoys playing video games, bundling up with her dogs and watching *Criminal Minds* 24/7.



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MIA
AND THE
SECRETS OF LUNIS

JANELLE MCCURDY

ILLUSTRATED BY ANA LATESE

faber

*This book is dedicated to you, the person reading this
book, and all my fellow gamers out there!*

Lunis



Stella

Umbra
Cave

Nexus

Ignis



Swamp

Astaroth

Nightmare
Plains

Lunavale

The
Parents' Tree

Nubis



CHAPTER ONE

Today is the worst day of my life. Cold air bites the back of my neck as we walk to the place where people come to mourn the dead. A field where the purple glow of the grass turns icy white in the presence of a body whose soul has left this world. The Field of Mourning, where even nature knows what's happening and cries with the people who've come to say goodbye.

Just a few days ago, Dad was telling me how proud he was of me. How he would always be there for me. We were fighting to save Lucas and Samuel in Astaroth, and now . . . The hollowness in my chest grows bigger every time I think about it. I hear Dad's screams of pain as that monster stole his life away while I couldn't do anything to stop it. I wish the whole ground would swallow me up. It's what I deserve.

Every single person in the city is here, dressed in white, each carrying a blue crystal star. They fill the field and the roads leading to it, all to bid their goodbyes. I chew the inside of my cheek and fight against the shakiness of my fists. My stomach lurches and the back of my throat burns. I wasn't strong enough to save him.

A powerful wind blows, and everyone suddenly turns around. Their sad eyes look behind me, but I stay completely still, clutching at my white dress. I bite my lip. *No . . . This shouldn't be happening. I don't want to see it!*

I hear footsteps slowly approaching. In the corner of my eye, I see the long white crystal box being carried by the tamers, passing through the white rose-vine arches that lead to the front of the mourners. *Please. Don't.* Sweat prickles my forehead and I look down and focus on the small speck of dirt on one of my shoes. *I don't wanna see it.*

Tiny soul butterflies slowly flap around the field on colourful wings like little flying hearts, but their presence only makes me wanna throw up. They only ever appear when someone has died; a symbol of death.

I hear the soft thuds of people pounding fists against their chests in respect as the box passes, but what's the point when he can't see any of it? What's the point in any of this? My fingernails dig hard into my palms next. The pain keeps my feet planted to the ground. No matter how much I want to, I can't run away. There's no changing the past.

A soft snout rubs against my cheek, but I can't bring myself to look at the black shadowy umbra beside me, even though I appreciate the gesture.

The sight of Jada's braids catches my eye. She tries to make eye contact, but I stare blankly ahead. Next to me, Lucas's wails sound distant, a faint echo in the freezing wind. Mum picks him up with one arm and holds him close. To my surprise, she pushes the fingers of her free hand against mine, breaking through my clenched fist. I barely register her touch because all I feel is numb. *I should have done more. I WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH!*

Then I properly see it. The long white box that glistens in the moonlight. Only . . . It's not a box. It's a coffin . . . with my daddy in it, and I won't ever be able to see him again.

Sobs echo around me, but I can't cry, or shout, or

anything. There's emptiness where my heart should be. I stare at the coffin through narrow eyes. Maybe it's because I know the truth. I could've saved him, so I don't deserve to cry.

The coffin is lowered on to the pedestal of ancients, which is made from stone and moon crystal. Engraved around the top and bottom are symbols of stars and the moon. When the coffin touches down, both it and the pedestal illuminate. My jaw clenches. Mum squeezes my hand again.

Lux interrupts my thoughts. *'Mouse.'*

I turn to him. His fur is as white as the coffin in front of me. He's swapped places with Nox to stand beside me and he licks my cheek and nods towards Mum, whose eyes shine with tears.

'It's time to send his soul to the light, sweetheart,' she whispers. 'Will you come to the front with me? You don't have to, if you don't want to.'

'I'll do it,' I mutter hoarsely. I don't even recognise my own voice.

'Me too, Mummy,' Lucas whispers into her neck.

One by one, the tamers place a crystal star on the coffin and stand on either side of it. Jada squeezes my arm when she passes me and places her star down.

She glances back at us and presses her fist to her chest in honour of the greatest tamer who ever lived.
Daniel McKenna.

Now it's our turn.

My hand slips from Mum's grasp and I make my way to the front with Lux and Nox. Overhead, Jada's umbra, Ruby, soars through the air with her beautiful black-feathered wings, singing. Her beautiful voice fills the entire field, stirring even my numb heart.

I stare at the coffin in front of me. I can't picture him inside. Just lying there, motionless. There, but not there, and now it's time for his soul to fly.

My fingers brush against the rough crystals, and I feel Mum and Lucas's presence beside me. Spike joins us next and finally Bolt, who doesn't say a word, but whose dull, barely golden eyes say it all. Devastation. Loss.

I inhale a deep breath and let my hand fall to my side. Time to say goodbye.

'Together,' Mum whispers. Lucas stands on the other side of her and my hands slowly rise with his and Mum's and, as one, we say the words of farewell.

'Today you return to the stars, for that is where your soul was born. Though you may not be physically here,

you're never gone because you're always in our hearts. So, we will carry on this life for you, in your honour.'

'I love you, Daniel,' Mum says.

'Love you, Daddy,' Lucas whispers next, and my throat clogs up. For the first time since the funeral started, the backs of my eyes burn.

This is really goodbye. No more butterfly notes, no more hugs, no more kisses. Never hearing 'Baby-girl' again. Nothing but the memory of them. A single tear rolls down my cheek.

'I love you . . . Dad.' *And I'm so sorry.*

Bolt walks closer and bows his head. I've never seen an umbra shed tears, but the heartbreak on his face is enough to make anyone cry as he places a shadowy paw on the coffin. '*You will forever be my tamer, Daniel McKenna.*'

The pedestal opens and glows brighter as the coffin descends inside of it and it closes shut. Moments later, a burst of shimmering stars erupts into the sky, and Dad's beautiful soul returns to the light.

The stars vanish and rain sprinkles down on us. It's like the moon is crying too. As our friends and neighbours walk forward to pay their last respects, I sigh, falling back into the crowd, letting the mass

swallow me. I make for a quieter space, but jump when someone pats my back.

‘Mia.’

I turn around and Mikasa, Thomas, Lincoln, Layla and TJ stand there. My heart tugs seeing them. ‘Guys.’

I open out my arms and they all hug me close. Tears finally fall down my cheeks and I squeeze them as tight as I can.

‘We’ve got your back,’ Mikasa whispers. ‘Always.’

‘Thanks, Kas,’ I whisper back, choking on the tears. The strength of their arms around me gives me comfort and I close my eyes, burying my face into them. *Thank you, guys.*

I let go and wipe my eyes with my sleeves. Layla bites her lip like she wants to say something, but whatever it is, she decides to keep quiet. Lincoln lets out a sigh, probably relieved that Layla showed some restraint for once. I could almost laugh, but I’m not ready for that yet.

A little way off, I see Mikasa’s parents and Thomas and Lincoln’s dad waiting for them, and jealousy grips my heart. It’s so unfair that my dad is gone.

The ceremony ends, but the emptiness inside me stays. Mum tries to convince me to come to the Celebration of Life party, but I just wanna go home

and sleep. As much as I want to celebrate Dad's life, my energy is completely zapped. I need to be alone.

Lux and Nox decide to come home with me and, to my surprise, so does Bolt. The panther-like umbra walks silently beside me down the empty street and I rest my hand on his dark head. His shadows brush my hand and lightly wrap around my fingers. He's hurting as much as me, if not more. If that's even possible.

In the distance, the faint buzz of music echoes behind us from city hall, where the party is being held. There will be hunter's wine, astrology caramel cakes and cinnamon bread. Right now, people are probably remembering all the cool things Dad has done and what he was like growing up. They'll be sharing stories of how he helped them, or maybe some funny tales, like the time he was giving me a piggyback ride by the bridge and Mum pranked us with a scary mask. We almost fell into the river. The memory brings a momentary smile to my face.

'He was the best tamer.' Bolt's words catch me off guard. *'I will miss Daniel, but I see him so much in you and young Lucas. I wish to stay here with you all. If you do not mind.'*

I raise an eyebrow. 'Of course, Bolt. Why would

you even ask that? You're family.' His words bring a lump to my throat. The fact that he thought he might have to leave makes me even sadder. He'll always be one of us.

'Remember the number one family rule,' I tell him, running my fingers along his shadow fur, noticing it feels rougher than usual. He stops in his tracks and his gold eyes take in my face. I manage a smile, just for him, and he slowly nods.

'Always stick together,' he says.

'That's right. You're not going anywhere,' I tell him.

'You really thought you'd get kicked out or something? What do you take us for?' Lux exclaims.

'It's the approval of Mia, Lila and Lucas that matters.'

There's a hint of amusement in Bolt's reply that makes me smile again, and he brushes against me.

'Charming!' Lux snorts.

We carry on walking, but I slow down when we reach the medicentre, where Nan and Grandad are still unconscious. So much has happened and they don't even know. And they should have been at the funeral. They would have wanted to be there, for Mum, for all of us.

I chew the inside of my cheek. If Mum had just let

me try to wake them up again when we got back from Astaroth, they could have been there.

Red and blue glow bugs buzz at my feet and the medicentre doors slide open, almost calling me in.

Before I know it, I'm walking towards the building.
'Mouse—'

Lux, Nox and Bolt quickly follow. I feel their agitation, but I don't slow my pace. I know I can do it. I couldn't save Dad, but I can help them. *I got this, and this time Mum can't stop me.*

'Young one, what are you doing?' Nox asks.

'Nan and Grandad should've been there today...' I murmur. *I can wake them up. Only I can do it.*

My shoes click against the shiny white floor of the reception. *I guess everyone really is at Dad's funeral... I've never seen this place so empty.* I walk further in and spot the only other person in the room. A woman behind a desk startles and clears her throat. She tucks a strand of her curly hair behind her ear and smiles.

'Mia? What are you doing here? I thought you'd be...'

I speed straight past her towards the decontamination zone. I don't want to give anyone the chance to stop

me. Lux and Nox follow swiftly after me, but Bolt trails behind slightly.

'Mouse, are you sure this is a good idea?' Lux asks.

'Yes,' I state.

'Well, it certainly doesn't feel like one of your best,' he mutters.

I shoot him a look, and he stares right back at me, unflinching. *Clown.*

Muppet.'

The door seals shut behind us and the room hums to life. A power-jet of antibacterial mist bursts from the walls, covering us. The excess is suctioned away and the opposite doors open with a beep and a sigh. We step out into the corridor of the patient wing.

I head straight towards Nan and Grandad's room, several doors down.

'So, you have nothing to say about this?' I hear Lux whisper to Bolt.

'If this is her wish, then so be it,' Bolt responds wearily.

Lux snorts and my eyebrow twitches. Does he think I can't hear? I stop in front of the door and press my ear to it. *It doesn't sound like there's anyone else in there . . . Should be all good.* I push open the door and slowly step inside.

The room is completely empty except for the beds where Nan and Grandad lie, two armchairs and some medical stuff. A green light from a small machine next to their beds scans them every few minutes. If I remember right, Mum said it was checking their ‘vitals’.

‘Young one, are you sure you’re up to this?’ Nox asks, and for some reason I get the feeling he’s speaking so only I can hear.

I roll my neck left to right and look at him. ‘Why wouldn’t I be?’

His golden eyes stare into mine, unblinking.

‘No reason. I was just asking,’ he says after a moment, leaving it at that.

Bolt rubs against my side before walking over to the corner of the room, where he lies down, blending into the darkness. I walk towards Nan’s bed. I take a deep breath and hover my hands over her, closing my eyes.

‘Mouse—’

The door suddenly bursts open and I jump. Mum stands there with Lucas, panting, eyes wide.

‘Honey, what are you doing? Leona called from reception and told me you were here,’ Mum says.

‘Nan and Grandad should’ve been at the funeral

today . . .’ I mutter. My hand clutches the bed railing. Lucas and Spike walk in behind her.

‘I know, darling . . . I feel the same way,’ Mum says, wrapping her arms around my shoulders.

My body tenses at her touch. *Here it comes . . .*

‘But we spoke about this already. I don’t think this is a good idea,’ she says. ‘Especially after what happened—’

‘I have control!’ I snap. The lights flicker and she lets go. ‘I won’t lose it like I did in Astaroth. I can do it. Nan and Grandad need to know what happened, and I have the power to wake them up!’ *So, don’t get in my way!*

A fire burns in my gut and my hand shakes against the bed railing. The shock on her face makes me shift my eyes to the ground, but she places her hand over mine again.

‘I can help too, Mummy,’ Lucas says, stroking Bolt’s shadow fur.

‘I don’t need your help,’ I state. The last thing I need is for him to mess things up.

He stamps his foot. ‘You do too! Our powers are extra strong when we work te-gether. Daddy said so lots of times!’

I sigh. 'Fine. You can help.'

'Good!' he says, giving Bolt one last stroke before running over to me and Mum. He rubs his small hands together and smiles. We both look at Mum.

'Maybe it isn't a bad idea if they do it together, Lila,' Spike says, shaking his spikey bear-like body. *'If anything looks like it's going wrong, they will stop.'*

'We will,' I promise. 'Just let us try.'

Mum sighs again. 'All right, but take your time, my loves. Deep breaths and let your powers flow out of you. Do not force it, and focus on the intention of healing and helping.'

I smile at her and Lucas nods. His little eyebrows wrinkle as he closes his eyes and concentrates. I keep mine open, finding the spark of power inside me almost instantly. *I got this . . .* Light flows from my chest to my arms and into my palms, where a warmth swirls and spreads throughout my fingers. One word echoes in my mind. *Heal.*

A flood of purple light bursts from my hands and spreads across Nan's body. It flows into her like a river, and Lucas's blue light mixes with it, turning the light a deep blue-violet colour. Lucas hums, trying to stay focused. His hands shake, but his light continues

to flow into Nan along with mine. *Just a little bit more . . .*

Suddenly our light vanishes and I gasp as the last of my power zaps outta my hands straight into Nan. Lucas stumbles back, but Bolt catches him with his shadowy panther head pressed against his back.

‘Did we . . . do it?’ Lucas pants.

I feel like I’ve been punched in the stomach and I press a hand against my chest, feeling my heart pounding. Mum quickly checks us over, then turns to examine Nan.

She walks to one of the monitors and flicks her finger across the screen, scrolling through different bits of information I don’t understand. It beeps like normal and the green light continues to scan them.

‘I’m not sure it worked, sweethearts,’ she says.

My nails dig into the skim of my palm and I grit my teeth. *Why didn’t it work?! I’m still weak!*

‘Strange. Yet your light acted in the same way as when you healed Nox,’ Lux says.

That’s what I thought too. I did the exact same thing when I freed Nox from Riley’s grasp on the Nightmare Plains, and it felt the same when I just did it on Nan. My light went into him and his red eyes turned back to gold, so why didn’t I wake her up?

Mum sighs and fixes Nan's blanket. 'Maybe—'

A gasp cuts her off and we all jump back. Nan jerks up into a sitting position and I almost crash into Nox in shock. She grips her head and blinks several times before her eyes slowly focus on us.

'Lila! Mia! Lucas!' she exclaims in a croaky voice. Her bottom lip trembles and, coming to our senses, we rush to her side. I wrap my arms around her, hugging her so tight. *We did it!*

'Nan!' I bury my head into her neck, and Lucas jumps up and down.

'Yay! Nanny is up!' he cheers.

'How long have I been unconscious? I thought ...' Nan trails off and clutches her head again. Mum quickly presses the back of her hand against Nan's forehead.

'Does your head hurt, Mum?' she asks, checking one of the medical screens.

'Just a little,' Nan says, closing her eyes.

Seemingly satisfied with whatever she looked over, Mum props up the pillows behind Nan's back and Nan leans against them.

'Spike, can you get a medic in here, please?' Mum asks, trying to make sense of things.

'Of course.'

Adrenaline pumps in my veins and a huge grin spreads across my face. We did it! We really did it! I flip my palms back and forth, feeling the electric current of energy that tickles through my fingers.

'It's Grandad's turn now,' I say, just as determined to do it again.

'Maybe you should both rest for a bit,' Mum says. 'Don't overexert—'

'We're fine,' I say, cutting her off. For the first time since Astaroth, I feel strength within my bones again. My entire being. It's like I can do anything and I *will* wake up Grandad. This power will do something good for once.

'It's OK, Mummy. I can do it too,' Lucas insists, but when he drags his feet over to Grandad's bed, it's clear to see how tired he is.

'Let me do most of it, OK? Just do what you can,' I tell him.

I join him at Grandad's side, roll my neck and stretch my arms. My power crackles in my fingertips, and just like with Nan, our light glides over him, encasing him in a blue-violet light.

Moments later he gasps too and sits up.

‘What . . . ?’ His eyes trail to me and Lucas, and he almost falls out of bed. ‘What’s going on? Where am I?’

He looks around the room and his eyes widen, seeing Mum. She reaches out and holds his hand with tears in her eyes.

‘You’re in a medicentre in Nubis, Grandad,’ I tell him.

‘Wait!’ Nan says suddenly. ‘The Queen’s Guard attacked us. She wants Mia and Lucas for some sort of plan. We went to visit her to inform her of how we were worried that we couldn’t get hold of any of you in Nubis. We told her about you potentially being a lightcaster, and then this happened.’

‘Yeah. You guys . . . have missed out on a lot,’ I say, twisting the bottom of my sleeves. There’s a knock at the door, and a medic walks in tapping a tablet.

‘I can’t believe you’re awake. Welcome back,’ she says, walking over to Nan and Grandad. Me, Mum and Lucas step back as she does a few more health checks to make sure they’re OK. ‘All right, it’s looking like you’re both well on the way to a full recovery. I’ll be back to check on you both again soon,’ the medic says.

‘What’s happened?’ Nan asks the second the door

closes. Mum and I share a glance and nod. Together, we tell them everything.

From the Elite's first attack on Nubis, to me escaping the city with Lucas, TJ and Jada, and taming Lux and Nox. Nan's hand trembles in front of her face as we tell her about the Elite, and their first attempt to bring back the Reaper King. Grandad gasps as we tell them about Riley's betrayal of the tamers, Ria's existence and imprisonment in Stella – and her ties to the Reaper King, and Lucas's possession by the Reaper King in Astaroth. Fear fills their eyes, and slowly my emotions numb more and more as we reach the next part of the story.

'Mia managed to free Lucas by allowing the Reaper King to possess her instead. Thankfully Daniel saved her, but it was too late – the Reaper King was coming through the portal from the Spirit Plain no matter what. The Elite used Samuel to free him, and then there was a huge battle . . .' Mum trails off, taking a second to wipe a tear from her eye.

'And where is Daniel?' Nan asks slowly.

We all immediately fall silent and the realisation dawns on her face. The quiet is almost deafening. Grandad looks between us, confused, but soon it hits

him too. He slumps back against the bed and Lucas snuffles. He hugs Mum's legs and she clears her throat and takes a seat with him. Her foot taps repeatedly as she struggles to get the words out.

'He's gone,' she finally says with a dry throat.

'He died, saving us all,' I mutter, gripping my arm. 'And I couldn't save him.'

'Oh, my loves, I'm so sorry,' Nan says, wiping a tear.

Lucas gets down from Mum's lap and Grandad hugs her tight. Nan stretches her arms to me and Lucas, and he climbs on to the bed and hugs her. I stay still but I hold her hand.

'Right now, the Reaper King is out there, and he's possessing one of my best friends – Miles,' I say.

'Miles. Yes, I remember him. Magnus's son. So, what do we do next?' Nan asks, letting go of us.

'We're currently trying to come up with a plan to save Miles, then Ria,' Mum says.

A sense of relief washes through me now that Nan and Grandad are awake, but at the same time, none of this brings Dad back. He's still gone and Miles is still out there, and this nightmare is never-ending.