

# STEPPING

THROUGH  
TIME



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We would like to dedicate this book to everyone who believes in themselves,  
especially those involved with the Kids' Cancer Project, and those who are  
currently fighting cancer.

Keep believing and stay strong!

Love Zahra, Hannah, Amelie, Chloe, Eliza and Vivienne

## Prologue

“Just a little bit more can’t hurt!” Cindy murmured to herself, adding another droplet of a murky green liquid to a brimming beaker. Screwing on the lid, she walked over to the drawers where she stored the catalysts of her work. She peered into the drawers, musing over her options when her gaze landed on potassium chloride. Perfect! Cindy turned back to where her latest idea was bubbling away, a bright **emerald** colour.



**BANG!**



She froze in horror as she saw her creation boiling over and dripping onto the hardwood floor. The beaker containing her formula slipped off the stand and smashed onto the ground, the glass shattering into a thousand tiny fractals. The liquid inside spilled and formed into acidic green puddles that burned holes through the wooden floor. A wisp of thick green smoke rose from the pools of acid, snaking upwards. Cindy’s vision went **fuzzy** as the fumes of her concoction spread through the air, clouding her mind. She fumbled her way towards the ladder on the right of her workbench. Just one thought was left in her befuddled mind: get out!

Gingerly, she dragged herself up the ladder, opening to her caravan. In the safety of her bathroom, she slumped onto the floor, taking in as much fresh air as she could. She pulled herself up on the towel rack and stood over the sink to catch her breath. Cool water splashed on her face and she could think clearly again. But in her relief she didn’t quite notice that the trapdoor wasn’t completely shut, and green fumes began to seep through the cracks, like weeds in the pavement.

## Chapter One

Somewhere in the house Reggie's phone rang. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, wondering who would be calling him. Grumbling, he got off the couch and walked towards the sound of his ringtone, 'Hey Jude'. He looked at the display, and his face lit up when he saw who was calling.

"Cindy!", he exclaimed. "How did your experiment go?" remembering Cindy's previous doubts about her work.

"Well it went... badly. It was an absolute fail, Reg! I can't even make a simple chemical formula! How am I supposed to be great if I'm not even good?"

"No, that's not true at all. If only you believed in yourself the way that I believe in you. You *are* gonna get the right formula."

"Yeah oh well, come cheer me up would you, wanna watch some TV?"

"Sure I'll be over now."

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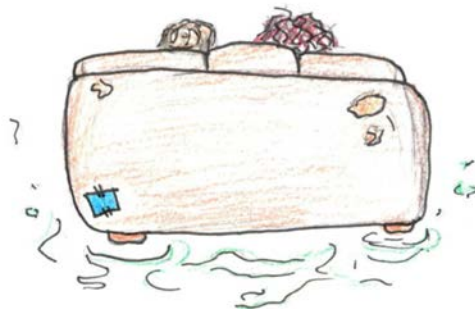
Reg stepped into Cindy's caravan, immediately spotting her flaming red hair amongst the clutter of her home. The shelves were covered in an assortment of knick knacks; from porcelain cats to her prized rubix cube collection. The floor was covered in everything from dirty clothes and soft drink cans to bottles of strange liquids and open chemistry textbooks. Thin, mismatched paisley curtains filtered the sunlight so only the most strong-willed and stubborn rays could get through. Walking quickly past the kitchen, Reg managed to avoid the strange smell exuding from the fridge.

"Hey Reg." Cindy grinned up at him from her spot on the couch. Reg was happy to see that Cindy was her same brazen, yet **awkward** self, despite her self-proclaimed failure. He plonked himself on the couch **pillow** next to her.

"What's on, Cindy?"

"Ah, nothing much. Just another doco 'bout Aussie history." Cindy replied.

A program about the Gold Rush blared on the TV, illuminating their faces. Birds-eye shots of tent cities of gold miners filled the screen, before panning to an eye-level shot of grubby workmen kneeling on the river's edge, engaging in a futile search for gold. Cindy sighed and leaned her head on Reg's shoulder. Unbeknownst to the two on the couch, a thick haze of green smoke licked at the edge of the lounge and enveloped the room, seeping into the TV.



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Cindy's lazy chameleon, Cleo, slinked into the room to find Cindy and Reg, their gazes fixed on Gold-rush town covering the screen. Cleo made her way across the floor, curling up next to the remote, her tail flicking out against it. She flicked the remote again and, unwillingly, pressed the buttons on the remote. Bright lights emanated from the screen, and a gust of wind rattled the caravan. Smoke began to swirl around the room, creating a whirlpool in front of the TV. Cindy and Reg found themselves drawn to the TV, closer and closer, stepping together through the screen.

## Chapter Two

Cindy and Reg found themselves within a whirlwind of colour and sound. They spun uncontrollably, the concept of time escaping them as the blood rushed to their head and a feeling of dizziness enveloped them.

And then, after what could have been a second or all of eternity, they fell to a heap on the ground. There they stayed, both their brains full of a dazed giddiness that prevented them from rising. As her eyes returned to focus, Cindy noticed the scene around her. Instead of the comfort of the caravan, they were surrounded by bushland. In the distance was the sound of shouting, clanging metal and running water.

The sun was high in the sky, so they couldn't have been out for long. But she felt so detached, like she'd awoken from a winter of hibernation. Beside her, she spotted Reg, looking as dazed as she felt.

"Far out! Where are in the world are we? And why do I feel so terrible?" he mumbled. Then, almost as an afterthought, "And what was that whirly thingy?" Cindy decided that this was the best question she had ever heard, better even than any of her advanced chemistry questions.

"I don't know Reg, I don't know. But let's head back home. None of my gadgets can find any signal, but according to the sun, I'd say the caravan is... that way." She pointed off to the left, and they set off. But instead of emerging in the familiar caravan park, or even in the hustle and bustle of the nearby town, they were faced with a most unusual sight. Hundreds of men crouched on the edge of a river, panning for... gold? Now Cindy was really starting to freak out.

"What are we doing here? More importantly where is here?" she wondered out loud. All the men seemed tired and defeated. Lining the river on either side, as far as the eye could see, were canvas tents.

"Well, well, well. What have we here? You guys aren't from around the time, are you?" Cindy and Reg stared in shock as a fox prowled around them, speaking. "Of course, I know where you're from, and, well, it's really not very close to here, is it? Why are you staring? Never seen a talking fox before?" When he was met once again with silence, the fox continued. "Well, Cindy and Reg, I'm Freddy. Freddy the Second, to be precise. How are you enjoying 1854?" Once again, Freddy was met with silence. A cloud of disbelief had settled over Cindy and Reg, and they were both pinching themselves.

"No no no no! None of this makes sense. It can't be. It must be a dream. Yes. A dream. That's right. Well I'm ready to wake up now. WAKE UP!!!" Cindy started jumping up and down like a maniac, soon followed by Reg. Meanwhile, the fox looked on in amusement, as though this was the funniest thing he had ever seen.

"Oh, humans. You'd think they'd learn. Oh well, makes a funny scene. Righteo, come with me." At this, Cindy begun to realise that she wasn't





dreaming. This was real. It didn't make any sense, it wasn't physically possible, but it was real. And so, she and Reg followed the talking fox.

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They were led by Freddy through the gum trees around the back of the tents. As they walked, a million thoughts raced through the chemist's mind. *How did we get here? How will we get back? How can this be? Was it my experiment? How? What? Why?*

The fox's knowing voice brought Cindy back to the real world. "And here we have it folks. You can stay here as long as you want. Or rather, as long as you're here, since you'll have no choice in the matter." Upon Reg's puzzled look, Freddy continued. "Ah, nothing. Anyway, in you go."



The tent was almost identical to all the others along the river - small and basic. Inside were 2 makeshift mattresses, stuffed with leaves, and a table with a log to sit on. "Course, it's not much, but, well, it *is* 1854. Anyway, I'd best be off. I'll see you guys later." And off Freddy went, disappearing into the bush and leaving Cindy and Reg to their wonderings.

"I just don't understand why you wouldn't tell me you were working on a time machine Cindy. I would have worn something more..." Reg looked down at his dirty trackies "time appropriate." By now he was going a bit delirious. Not that Cindy was far behind.

"Geez, Reg, don't you see? I would have told you if I was working on something like this. It wasn't me. Of course, I've tried before, and it didn't work, and I don't know what happened today and... far out, how will we get back?" By now, she was really freaking out. There was nothing she could do, they were stuck here.

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Back in the caravan, Cleo the chameleon heard a fly buzzing around her ear. Squeezing her eyes shut she willed herself back to sleep, but the buzzing would not go away. Irritated, she lunged towards the fly, but missed, and crashed back down onto the remote, changing the channel. Replacing the fields filled with tents and rivers, was a grainy visual, crowded with rejoicing civilians waving flags and military ships docked in the harbour.

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Cindy and Reg sat around a campfire, moaning somewhat childishly about their current situation. Reg was particularly worried about his clothing, while Cindy grumbled about not having access to her lab. And then it happened. With a whirl, Cindy and Reg felt themselves slide away from the tent and into weightlessness...



## Chapter Three

For the second time, Cindy and Reg felt solid ground materialise beneath their feet. "Geez Cindy, couldn't you have made time travelling a little more comfy?" Cindy couldn't help smiling. "Reg, I told you, I wasn't trying to make anything to do with time travel!" she said. "I wonder what time we're in?" Reg shrugged. They both looked around. They stood in a clearing, gum trees towering over them like giants, the ground littered with dead leaves.

"Hey, can you hear that?" asked Cindy. They both stood still, listening. There was the sound of a crowd cheering in the distance. "Come on, let's go check it out!" Reg and Cindy headed off towards the sound of people, Reg catching Cindy as she tripped on a wombat hole. The cheering became louder and louder, and before long they were strolling down a deserted street.

"This is just insane!" Reg declared, "Totally and completely insane!"

"I know Reg, my brain is just utterly overwhelmed." Cindy agreed, "I don't know where we are, how we got here and I have no idea how we are going to get back! And to top it all off we met a talking fox!"

"I was wondering when I'd come up." Freddy appeared by Reg's side, making him jump.

"Crikey, you scared the living daylights out of me!" Reg exclaimed.

"Freddy! Please, you have to tell us what's going on." Cindy begged.

"Hello again to you too, Doc. Well, you're looking great, considering 63 years have passed."

"63 years..." Cindy murmured, her brain whirring. "Reg, that means we are in 1919. Look that must be Sydney harbour!" They all looked. Ahead there were thousands of people, women and children, men in uniforms disembarking the huge ships that were crowded into the port.

"Yes," said Freddy "1919, and the men are coming home from World War 1."

Reg smiled. "They are all so happy!"

And it was true. Jubilation radiated off the crowd. Every face shone, every shout resonated with joy. After more than 4 years of separation, of fear for one another's lives, the fractured families were whole again.



It was a beautiful thing to witness. Couples were embracing, fathers holding their children like nothing could ever separate them again. Cindy watched as a young woman passed her, holding the hand of a little boy. "Mummy," he asked, "What does Daddy look like?"

"Your dad is tall and strong and handsome, and you'll meet him very, very soon." his mother replied.

Cindy watched on and smiled at the boy when he met her gaze. Her heart swelled with fondness for this child who'd never met his

father, and for his father, who'd never met his son. Reg gave her a supportive smile. Cindy smiled back at him, a lump in her throat that she couldn't explain.

"Hey, where did Freddy go?" exclaimed Reg. Cindy looked around, but their little red companion had disappeared. "Oh well, he'll know where to find us," she said.

"How?" asked Reg, confused.

"The same way he seems to know about everything else that's happening to us." replied Cindy, suddenly annoyed at the fox.

They wandered the streets looking for a place to sit. People gave them strange looks, which confused Reg and Cindy, until they passed a shop window and saw their reflection. Compared to the long, modest dresses, elaborate hats and starched suits of the time, they looked utterly ridiculous. Cindy wore her lab coat over her favourite flowery shirt, short skirt and long rainbow socks, her flaming red hair sticking out at every angle. Reg looked only slightly more normal, in daggy trackies and runners, with scruffy hair.

They finally found a park where they flopped down onto the grass, exhausted by the day.

"Alright, let's figure out what the heck is going on!" exclaimed Reg.

"Well, we are somehow time travelling..." pondered Cindy.

"Thanks for that Cinds. That made everything much clearer!" retorted Reg.

"Sorry," Cindy said, rolling her eyes, "Well, I can assume my experiment caused this somehow, and I think I know what, but you wouldn't understand." Reg laughed.

"But how did that affect us in the caravan?" he asked, "I thought you kept the trapdoor to your lab shut tight."

"I do normally, but I think the explosion today made me a little crazy --"

"Even more than normal you mean?" Reg interjected.

"Yep," Cindy laughed, "Anyway, I must have forgotten in my muddled state and the particles must have become airborne and reacted with the electronics in the TV and that connected with the stuff in our lungs." She took a breath.

"But that doesn't explain why we are changing places."

They were silent, lost in thought.

"Oh well, let's not worry about that. I mean, our biggest concern is how we're going to get back!" said Reg. No one spoke for a while, but then Reg realised there were tears running down Cindy's face. He put his arm around her.

"Cind, what's wrong?" he asked, concernedly.

"Well, just what's the point of me going back Reg?" She was sobbing openly now. "Nothing I do goes right, all my experiments fail. It's my fault we are stuck here and I don't even have a single idea on how to get back. I am just one huge train wreck!"

"Oh Cindy!" exclaimed Reg, "You're my best friend! I know you better than everyone else in the world. I know your quirks, like your fear of lobsters. I know your down sides, and let me tell you there aren't many, and being a bad chemist or a trainwreck are not on that list. Most importantly I know your good sides, and I can't even list them all. Being an amazing chemist is definitely one of them. You are the smartest and most extraordinary person I know Cindy, and it is honour to be stuck in a different time with you."

Cindy hugged Reg and they stayed like that for a long time. "Don't worry," said Reg, "We'll find a way to get home somehow and you'll keep being great."

“Oh, I wouldn’t worry about getting home. That’s way out of your control.” said Freddy, seeming to appear out of thin air.

“You have to stop doing that!” cried Reg, breaking away from Cindy and glaring at the fox. Cindy was deep in thought.

“So are you saying we don’t have to worry about getting back?” said Cindy.

“Yep,” said Freddy, “It’s out of your control. Just the same way you can’t control when time changes and where you’ll go.”

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Cleo squirmed on the ground. Something on her hind leg was itching. Standing up, her leg scraped on the side of the remote as she looked for something to get rid off the itch. Turning around, her tail thudded onto the remote. The images on the TV screen switched from 1919 victory celebrations to images of the complicated construction of a grand building.



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For the third time, Reg and Cindy felt their feet rise up off the ground and they re-entered the vortex.

## Chapter Four

And with a rush of wind and a flash of light, Cindy and Reggie emerged in a new place, completely different to anywhere they had seen before.



Movement was everywhere, peeking from behind ajar doors into people's homes, flashing brightly on posters and reflecting on cars dashing across **zigzagged** roads. A eager sun sat high in the sky, staring at the sparkling deep blue ocean. Skyscrapers stood grandly in the distance, overlooking the city like a protective mother duck.

"Wow, where are we now?" Cindy wondered in a hushed tone, staring in awe at the hurrying crowd, busily completing their daily tasks.

"You're in the time of culture and music. The time of change. And the time of love!" a voice cried over the hubbub of the action.

"Who was that voice? Freddy?" Reg asked.

"We meet again. What a coincidence. Or not. Anyway, welcome to the new city of Sydney. Can you guess what time we are in now?" replied the fox, grinning widely with a twinkle in his eye. "Only joking, we're in the 1970s. A beautiful era, if you ask me. One of the best."

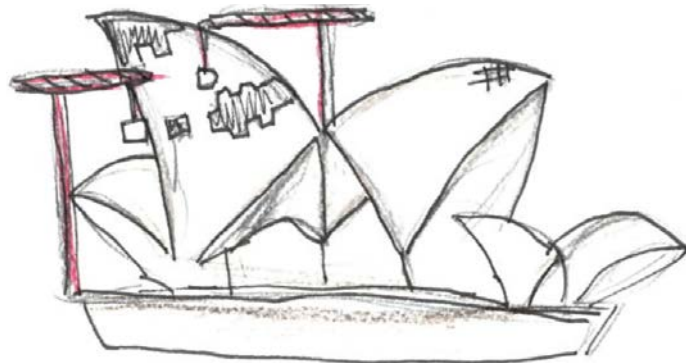
"Woah, check out these people." admired Reg, as a hollering campaign emerged from the corner of the street, people of all ages thrusting forward huge posters full of bold fonts and bright colours. Women in loose flared jeans and flower crowns raised their index and middle fingers in peace. Tie-dye clad men held painted signs with love slogans and walked in unity.

"Those flares are the greatest fashion nowadays. At least, flares, fluorescent afros and peace signs." Freddy guffawed in amusement.

As they strolled through the lively street, Cindy noticed a large stage of construction taking place by the harbour. Intricately patterned tiles covered soaring sails that appeared to burst into the sky, while towering glass windows and a granite platform added to the magnificence.



Yet something looked different to the photos they were used to seeing on TV. Cranes protruded out of the structure, and workers swarmed over the building like bees. This design was in the making, almost, but not quite, finished.



“Why don’t you have a chat with an architect?” suggested Freddy, interrupting their speculations about the occurring construction. “You might find some answers...”

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“Hello there, what do you think of our architecture?” the middle-aged architect asked, as Cindy and Reg stared in wonder at the colossal creation in front of them.

“It’s incredible!” they replied in astonishment, admiring the hundreds of people fitting together in their individual work.

“This is the epitome of my career. I’ve dreamed of it since I was a child, and now, I have had the opportunity to do it. I can tell you guys appreciate our work. The only thing is we have a little problem - the glue for the tiles may not be as sticky as we need it to be. In fact, if this thing lasts after decades of wind, sun and maybe even hail, I fear that the tiles will simply slide off.”

“What about if you put crushed shells inside the cement and mortar mix? It’ll help it grip.” Cindy suggested, much to the delight of the architect.

“Oh yes! What a wonderful idea. That could really help. Thank you very much, I really do wonder how nobody else has thought of that.” He gruffly smiled his appreciation. But Cindy wouldn’t have any of it. “No, it’s fine, really. I hope the rest of the construction goes well. Goodbye.” she said, blushing. And off she and Reg went, followed closely by Freddy.

“See Cindy, you can do this,” Reg pointed out as they walked away.

“I see now, I really do.” She replied exuberantly. “My gosh, this is incredible. Reg, I really want to go home now. Just to go back to the caravan, and have a fresh start. These adventures have given me an idea! I want to create a time machine that works and I think I know how. You know what? I bet I can do even more than just make it. I can make it with a bang, and maybe even receive that Nobel prize I’ve dreamt of for so long.”

“Oh, you will,” said Freddy mysteriously.

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Raindrops clanged noisily onto the corrugated iron roof of the caravan, creating a cacophony of noise. Cleo slowly blinked awake, and seeing it was getting dark outside, decided she had slept for long enough. Standing up, she made her way across the floor, padding over the remote, finally switching the TV to ‘OFF’.

## Chapter Five

Reg and Cindy were thrust out of the TV, narrowly missing the couch and landing on the hard wooden floor of the caravan. Never had the two been so thankful to have their feet planted on solid, familiar ground. Cindy opened her mouth to speak, scrambling to find the words to describe what had just happened. But not a sound came out. They were both speechless. Reg gave a nervous chuckle, and Cindy joined in. The chortle gradually got louder and louder until they couldn't contain it anymore. Bursting out in fits of laughter, they didn't stop until their bellies ached and their sides were in stitches.

"Cindy?" Reg panted.

"Yeah Reg?"

"Did that really just happen or did I just wake up from a crazy dream?"

"Not even I can answer that question Reg!"

"Well I guess there's a first for everything!"



Neither of them could believe what had happened on this strange yet wonderful day. After all Cindy had just created a time travel formula - even if it was by accident. One day they would look back on this memory, when they were old and grey, and wonder whether this really happened or if it was just their minds playing tricks on them.

"Do you want to watch some TV Reg?"

"Sure, why not."

## Epilogue

*10 years later...*

“And the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, goes to Doctor Cindy Martin for her work in time travel!

34-year-old Cindy walks up to the stage, looking stunning in floaty green dress. Hundreds of faces stare up at her, but one stands out. Reg has even bothered to make his hair look less scruffy for this special occasion.



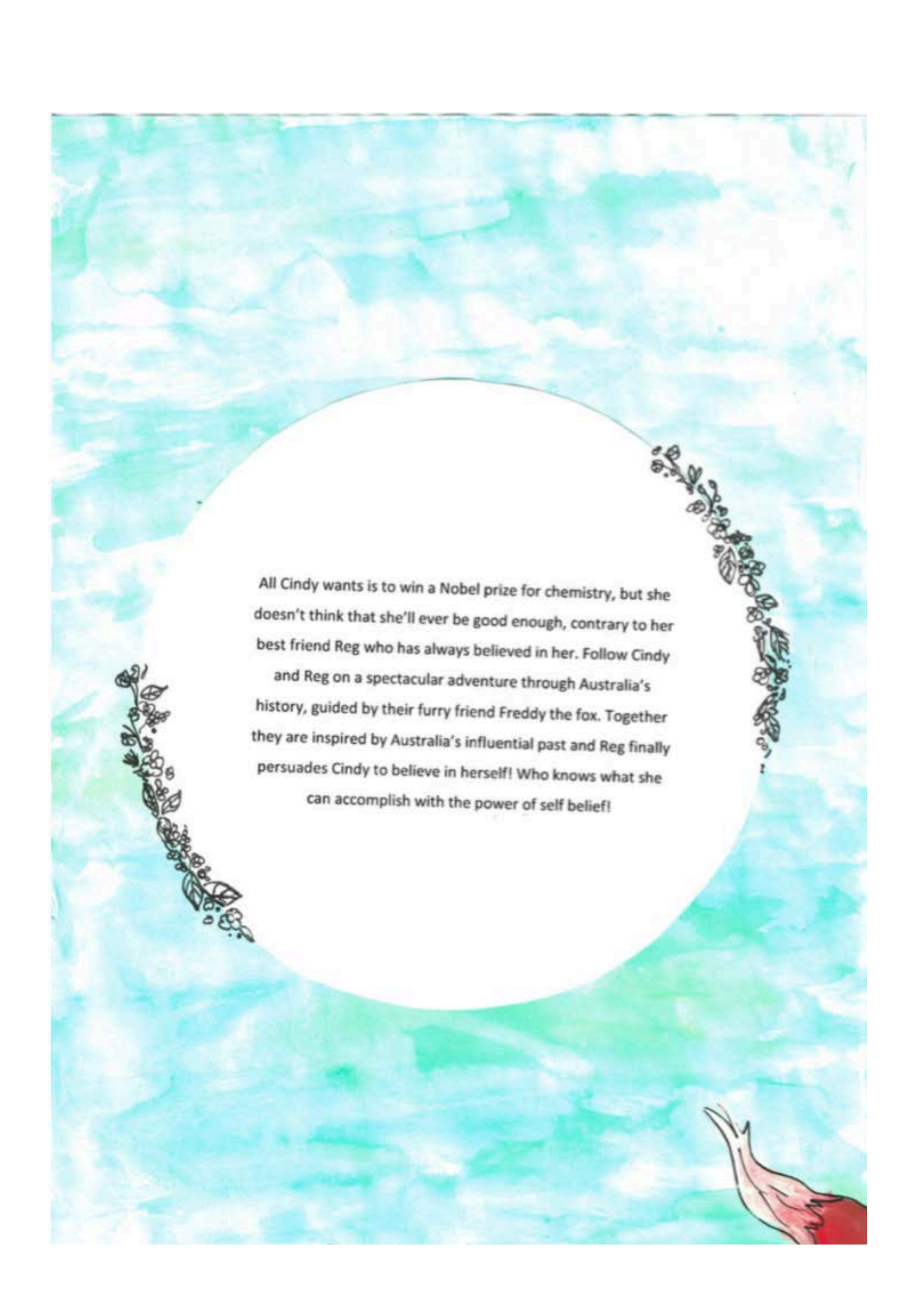
“Wow. I am honoured and humbled to receive this prize tonight. Who could ever believe this would happen? Well, my best friend Reginald Watts Junior did. Thank you for your never ending support, constant belief in the impossible and your faith in me.

“I want to give a shout-out to my pet chameleon, Cleo. Without you, who knows what may have happened. We might still be stuck in the Gold Rush, in canvas tents and beds made of leaves!

“And can I thank my friend Freddy. We may have not seen each other for a while, but I do appreciate that little bit of guidance you provided us with 10 years ago. I bet you’re looking great, considering 163 years have passed. That must sound really confusing to the rest of you! I’d explain, but it’s a really long story, and I don’t think I have enough time.”

Cindy winks. Reg smiles back at her. And out of the corner of her eye, though she could have imagined it, she swears she sees the tip of a white tail disappearing out the door.





All Cindy wants is to win a Nobel prize for chemistry, but she doesn't think that she'll ever be good enough, contrary to her best friend Reg who has always believed in her. Follow Cindy and Reg on a spectacular adventure through Australia's history, guided by their furry friend Freddy the fox. Together they are inspired by Australia's influential past and Reg finally persuades Cindy to believe in herself! Who knows what she can accomplish with the power of self belief!