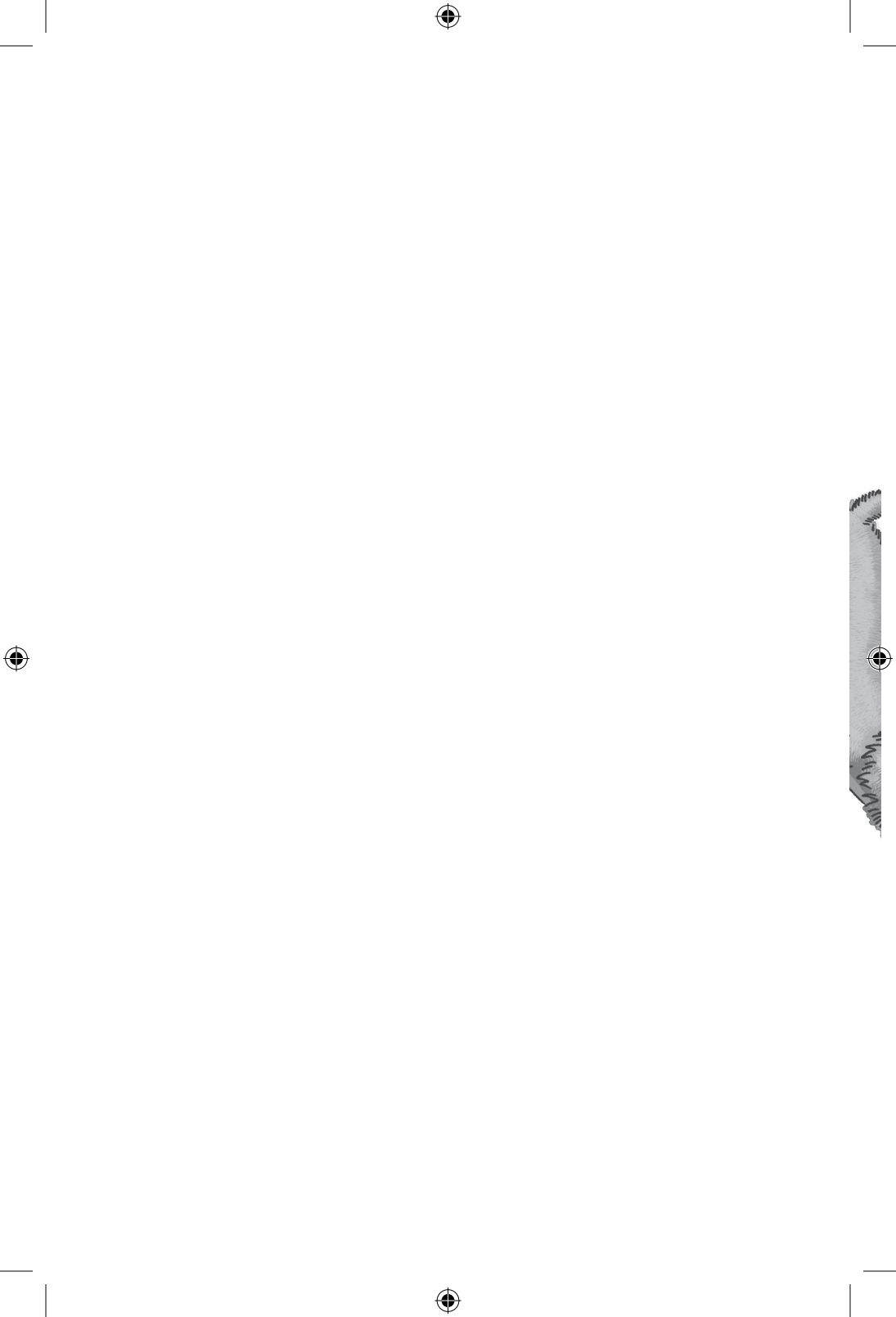




WILD MAGIC

The title 'WILD MAGIC' is rendered in a large, bold, stylized font. The word 'WILD' is in a blocky, uppercase font, while 'MAGIC' is in a more flowing, cursive-style uppercase font. A paw print is integrated into the letter 'I' of 'WILD'. The text is surrounded by numerous small stars and dots, creating a magical, sparkling effect.

LEGEND OF THE
BLACK LION



WILD MAGIC

LEGEND OF THE
BLACK LION

ABIOLA BELLO

ILLUSTRATED BY EMMA McCANN

SIMON & SCHUSTER

London New York Amsterdam/Antwerp Sydney/Melbourne Toronto New Delhi

First published in Great Britain in 2025 by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
1st Floor, 222 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8HB

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The authorised representative in the EEA is Simon & Schuster Netherlands BV, Herculesplein 96, 3584 AA Utrecht, Netherlands.
info@simonandschuster.nl

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

PB ISBN 978-1-3985-2048-6
eBook ISBN 978-1-3985-2050-9
eAudio ISBN 978-1-3985-2049-3

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Typeset in the UK by Sorrel Packham

Printed and Bound in the UK using
100% Renewable Electricity at CPI Group (UK) Ltd





To my magical nephew, Akorede.
May you continue to shine bright x





CHAPTER ONE

The Next Big Adventure

Misha lay on the sofa and wrapped her long braids into two buns on the top of her head. It was the first day of the



summer holidays. She flipped through her comic book, ignoring the grey Bengal cat with green eyes that was purring next to her.

‘One second, Fergie,’ she said.

Fergie rubbed his head against her arm and Misha laughed. ‘I’ll get you a snack. Let me just finish this part, okay?’

The cat **purred** loudly.

‘I know, you told me yesterday. I’ll get you the white fish treat this time.’

Fergie jumped from the sofa and walked over to the Staffordshire Bull Terrier called Blue, who was curled up asleep in her bed, her red plastic balls by her feet. Fergie pushed himself onto the bed beside her. Misha shook her head, smiling. Fergie had said Blue’s bed was comfier than his, and luckily Blue didn’t



mind sharing as long as her toys weren't moved.

The other grey cat, identical to Fergie, **MEOWED** loudly from the chair across the room.

Misha ignored it and the cat meowed again even **louder** as if he wanted all of the neighbours to hear.

'Shh!' Misha said. 'And, no, it's not my problem that you're bored.' Loud footsteps pounded down the stairs and Misha looked at the closed door.

'Quick, Ziggy!'

The grey cat **LEAPED** into the air and when it landed, in its place was her eight-year-old twin brother with his curly high-top haircut. Ziggy quickly sat on a chair and flicked on the TV, trying to act like he'd been a human all along.

'Ziggy?' Misha said, and when he looked at her, she pointed to her nose.





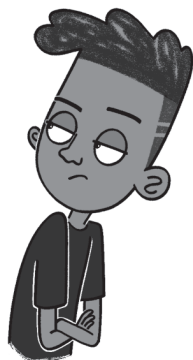
Ziggy touched his own nose and felt the **whiskers**. He shook his head and they disappeared just as the living-room door opened.

‘Hi, Dad,’ Misha and Ziggy said in unison.

‘JINX!’ Misha said, like they always did when they spoke at the same time. Which happened a lot – it was a **twin thing**.

‘Ah, man,’ Ziggy groaned.

‘You know the rules,’ Misha responded, and she mimed zipping her



lips. Ziggy pouted and crossed his arms over his chest.

‘Hi, kids,’ Dad said. He was a tall, slim, dark-skinned man with a neatly trimmed black beard and black-framed glasses. ‘How’s the comic, Misha?’

‘It’s really good! It’s about a girl whose big sister is a superhero.’

‘Are you reading anything fun, Ziggy?’ Dad asked, and Ziggy pointed at his mouth.

‘I jinxed him. *That means he can’t talk,*’ Misha said proudly.

Dad laughed. ‘Well, do you mind un-jinxing him so he can answer me?’

Misha sighed. ‘I guess.’ She knocked her knuckles on the wooden table, like they always did when they had to reverse a jinx, and Ziggy **WHOOPED**



loudly as if he had been silenced for days.

‘It’s the summer holidays, Dad! I’m not doing any reading for the next six weeks!’ Ziggy said. Dad frowned, but as he was about to respond, Ziggy shouted, **‘DAD, IT’S YOU!’** Ziggy excitedly turned up the volume on the TV and the familiar theme song of Dad’s wildlife show filled the room.



Misha closed her comic book and sat up. The twins loved watching their dad on TV. He was a wildlife TV presenter and his job took him all over the world, where he got to see the most amazing animals up close and personal, from **BOISTEROUS BABOONS** to **CHEEKY CHEETAHS**. But sometimes Dad and the film crew couldn't find the animals they were searching for – Dad always says, '*There are no rules in the wild!*' – and so the big bosses of the TV channel would ask him to travel to the same country again to try to find them. This meant that Misha and Ziggy wouldn't see their dad for weeks on end.

But the twins knew if they were with Dad, they could help him find the animals he was looking for. Because the twins had **special powers**. Gifts that



they had inherited from their mum when they turned six years old. **MISHA COULD TALK TO ANIMALS,** and **Ziggy could shapeshift into them.** The problem was, Dad didn't know about their powers, or Mum's. Grandma Yinka had warned Misha and Ziggy to keep their powers a secret because when their mum was a teenager, people from the Nigerian village she grew up in were scared of her when they found out about her gifts. It was better to be safe than sorry.





But their mum seemed to prefer being around animals than humans. Whenever she would take the twins on trips to the park or the cinema, she would speak to the birds flying above them in the sky or shapeshift into a squirrel they saw on the street. Mum made Misha and Ziggy keep this a secret, which they did because their mum's powers made her **cool!** Then, one day, just after their



eighth birthday, the twins came home and Mum had vanished. They found the shedded skin of a chameleon on their Mum's favourite chair and knew she had left to live in her animal form. They both wondered if Dad would ever find her in the wild on one of his many film trips, and they hoped that they would see her again. But they tried not to miss her too much because they still had their dad, and he was the best.

So, every time Dad went on his next trip, the twins were left behind at their grandparents' house. Not their cool Grandma Yinka, who lived in a hut in the deep Nigerian forest, casting **magical spells**. It would be amazing to be around someone who they didn't have to hide their powers from.

No. They had to stay with Grandma Joy and





Grandpa Tunde, Dad's parents. Grandma Joy and Grandpa Tunde lived across the road from Misha and Ziggy's house and were *so* strict. Grandpa Tunde made Misha and Ziggy do their homework during the school holidays! Plus, Grandma Joy **HATED** animals! She always had her broom ready to swipe

at any animals that came close to her house. It was no fun for the twins, though. Misha loved it when animals came to visit – she finally had someone else to talk to other than her brother. But when Grandma Joy shooed them away, Misha sometimes felt lonely. And Ziggy was always at risk of one of Grandma Joy's broom swipes when he was in animal form. One time, Grandma Joy hit him when he was with a group of badgers, sitting on her dining table and nibbling apples, pears and plums from the fruit bowl.

Now that Dad was about to go on another work trip, this meant staying with Grandma Joy and Grandpa Tunde once again.

'Do you think you're going somewhere hot or cold on your next adventure?' Ziggy asked.

Dad put a finger to his chin. 'I think hot.



Hopefully, with a beach and clear-blue water, so I can see all the tropical fish.'

'Why can't we go?' Misha moaned for the hundredth time.

The beach sounded great, but really Misha wanted to speak to the wild animals. She only got the chance to speak to her pets, the neighbours' rabbits, and Ziggy, when he transformed into random animals. She dreamed of being up close to a leopard or a dolphin and hearing their stories. Plus, she could wipe the smug smile off Cassie Evans, a girl in her class who always boasted about her amazing summer holidays to every exotic place imaginable. Cassie found it hilarious that their dad travelled the world, but the twins were stuck in London.

Ziggy was desperate to travel with Dad because



he wanted to see what new animals he could shapeshift into. With his powers, he could only transform into the animal that he was physically close to in real life, but once he had done it the first time, he could do it again at his command. So far, he only shapeshifted into small- and medium-sized animals that he usually saw in London. If he were to travel to all the wild places with Dad, imagine what animals he could transform into? Could his power make him as **BIG AS A WHALE?** As **TALL AS A GIRAFFE?** Maybe he could become a shark and swim up behind Misha when she was playing in the ocean and make her jump.

The thought made Ziggy **laugh out loud**. Misha and Dad looked at him and he quickly put his hand over his mouth to control himself.



Dad's phone rang in his hand. 'That's the TV producers now. I'll just be in my office and then we'll go out for dinner.'

As soon as their dad left, the twins walked over to the globe that sat beside the bookshelf. Dad had bought it for them so they could always see where he was. Ziggy spun it so fast that it tilted even more to the side. Misha quickly straightened it up before it fell.

'Okay, I bet you *two cinnamon pretzels* that he's going to India,' Ziggy said, pointing at the globe. 'They have loads of cool animals like tigers, elephants and the Indian cobra!'

'Hmmm maybe,' Misha said, turning the globe more gently. 'I bet you **THREE CHOCOLATE-CHIP COOKIES** that he's going to Australia. He can see the kangaroos, koalas and crocodiles!'



‘If you could speak to any animal, which one would you pick?’ Ziggy asked.

‘There are so many! Maybe a lion? I would love to hear what it’s like to be the king of the jungle. What animal would you want to shapeshift into?’

Ziggy didn’t think she would appreciate his shark fantasy, but suddenly that was all he could think about!

‘Oh, anything really,’ he mumbled.

Before Misha could question Ziggy further, the familiar footsteps of Dad raced up the stairs. He opened the door with a massive smile on his face.

‘Kids, I’m going to **ETHIOPIA!**’





CHAPTER TWO

The Legendary Black Lion

There was a moment of silence. Dad looked excitedly at the twins.

‘Where’s Ethiopia?’ Ziggy asked.

‘It’s in **Africa**, isn’t it, Dad?’ Misha asked.

‘That’s right. Let me show you.’ Dad joined them at the globe and bent down so he was at eye level with it. He spun it so Africa was facing them. ‘So,



we come from Nigeria, which is in West Africa, but **Ethiopia is in East Africa.**' Dad pointed to Ethiopia, which was beside Sudan and Kenya.

'What's in Ethiopia?' Misha asked.

Dad's eyes widened. **'The legendary black lion.'**

Misha and Ziggy looked at each other with the same wide eyes.

'The black lion has only been seen in Ethiopia, and we finally located it. I'll be travelling there next week.' Dad rubbed his hands together and smiled. 'It's going to be amazing.'

A black lion? Misha and Ziggy had never heard of it before, but it was definitely something they wished they could see in person too. It just wasn't fair!





‘I’ll take loads of pictures,’ Dad promised when he saw the sad looks on their faces. ‘Come on, guys, you’re going to have loads of fun at your grandparents’. Look, let’s call them now!’

Before they could object, Dad whipped out his phone to video-call Grandma Joy and Grandpa Tunde. ‘Come on, scoot in, Zig,’ he said, and Ziggy reluctantly joined his dad and sister.

But when Grandma Joy answered the video call, they didn’t see her cream-coloured floral living room, but instead a sparkling blue ocean.

Dad frowned. ‘Mum? I can’t see you?’

The video went dark and then Grandma Joy appeared with sunglasses on.

‘What in the world?’ Dad said. ‘Where are you?’

‘The Caribbean!’ Grandma Joy said. ‘Oh, hello,



babies.' She waved at Misha and Ziggy, who waved back.

Dad's frown went even deeper. 'The Caribbean? Why?'

'I'm on my cruise! Don't you remember? Look, I'm here with your dad. Say hello, Tunde.'

Grandma Joy turned the camera and Grandpa Tunde was lying on a sun lounger with his hands clasped on his belly, fast asleep.

'Mum!' Dad said, his voice rising. 'When are you back?'

'In a month,' Grandma Joy sang.

'*A month?*' Ziggy mouthed to Misha.

Misha didn't want to get too excited, but if Grandma Joy and Grandpa Tunde were away on holiday, then they couldn't stay with them. Could



they be meeting the black lion after all?

‘You know I have to travel next week for filming. I just found out that I’m going to Ethiopia. You’re meant to be watching the kids!’

‘Oh, I’m sorry, darling,’ Grandma Joy said, taking a sip of her drink, not looking sorry at all. ‘I got the dates mixed up. Can’t you take them with you?’

‘Take them with me? Mum, you need to come back! Mum? Mum?’

The video froze. Dad tapped his phone screen impatiently, but Grandma Joy and her big smile just stared back at them.

Misha and Ziggy **FIST-BUMPED** each other behind their dad’s back. They were going to Ethiopia!



As soon as he hung up the video call, Dad called everyone he knew and asked if they could look after Misha and Ziggy, including their neighbour Esther, who lived two doors down and was definitely older than Grandma Yinka and Grandma Joy combined! Misha and Ziggy didn't want to stay with her because her house was *very* **boring!** She almost said yes, until she remembered Misha and Ziggy's cat, Fergie, and dog, Blue, who she would also have to look after but couldn't because she had terrible allergies to animal fur.

Finally admitting defeat, Dad told the twins they would be joining him. Dad's work trips usually occurred during the school term, so Misha and Ziggy had plenty to do to keep them occupied when he was away. This time, his work trip was



in the summer holidays, and they had been extra disappointed that they wouldn't get to spend time with him. But not any more! They couldn't wait to get on the plane, arrive in Ethiopia, see all the amazing animals and share the best experiences with Dad. What a way to spend their summer holidays!

That will definitely beat Cassie Evans's summer vacation, Misha thought, with a sly grin.

'There will be ground rules,' Dad said sternly. 'You will have a chaperone at all times. No running off, no being on the film set and no being alone around the animals. They are wild and it will be very dangerous.'

No alone time with the wild animals? Misha huffed. How was she supposed to speak to them? That was a big reason why she wanted to go.



‘When you say, no wild animals, do you really mean, *no* wild animals?’ Ziggy asked, and Dad glared at him.

‘I’m serious. This is a work trip and you both need to be on your best behaviour. I know you’ll get excited seeing the animals, but you cannot wander and you cannot be alone. Got it?’

‘Yes, Dad,’ the twins mumbled.

But once their dad’s back was turned, they winked at each other. There was no way they were going to miss the black lion. Not in a **BAZILLION** years!

