MACICACION CRYSTAL CHAOS

To my brilliant editors Mattie Whitehead and Karelle Tobias who have both added so much to Magic Keepers and who have made writing it so much fun! – L. C.

To the child who believes in magic – H. G.

STRIPES PUBLISHING LIMITED

An imprint of the Little Tiger Group 1 Coda Studios, 189 Munster Road, London SW6 6AW

Imported into the EEA by Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A paperback original First published in Great Britain in 2022

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ISBN: 978-1-78895-440-2

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

Printed and bound in the UK.



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LITTLE TIGER

LONDON

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CHAPTER ONE







Ava pushed open the heavy door and peered into the enormous room. It had a high, domed ceiling with huge, old-fashioned windows that were framed by dusty velvet curtains. The October sun shone in through the dirty glass, casting patterns on the wooden floor and on the faded blue sofa at the far end of the room. There were bookcases crammed with leather-bound books, a large oak desk and a set of shelves filled with strange objects.

Pepper, Ava's Tibetan terrier, trotted inside,

her ears pricked.

"Stay close, Pepper," Ava said. Pepper ignored her and bounded straight to one of the windows, where she put her front paws on the windowsill and looked out. Ava grinned. She had taken Pepper to training classes when she'd been a puppy, but they'd been asked to leave because she wouldn't do as she was told. Ava didn't care though, she loved Pepper to bits and didn't mind

> that she was naughty – Ava wasn't always very good at doing what she was

> > told either!

The door creaked

"It's seriously creepy in here, isn't it, Pepper?" Ava said, looking round at the vast room.

Ava's mum's great-aunt Enid had been a famous archaeologist who had worked all over the world and this room held her private collection of curios – unusual objects that she'd been given or had found over the years. When Great-Aunt Enid died, she had left the house to Ava's mum on the condition that the collection was to remain in the house and not be sold. In her will, she had said that although the curios were not particularly valuable she hoped one day one of her relatives would



When Ava had asked her mum what they were going to do with the curios, her mum had just shrugged. "Heaven knows! I think I'll just leave them for now. There's so much else that needs sorting. The whole house needs redecorating and re-wiring."

Ava agreed that the house definitely needed a makeover. It was huge, with eight bedrooms spread over two upstairs floors, but the wallpaper was peeling off, the paintwork was chipped, and the rugs covering the wooden floors were threadbare. The kitchen hadn't been updated in a long time and outside was just as neglected. The garden was overgrown with rusty metal gates and a crumbling brick wall separating it from the street.

Ava, her mum and Pepper had moved into Curio House just a few days ago during Ava's half-term break. It was two hours away from their cosy, terraced house in Nottingham and Ava still felt like they were on holiday and would be going home soon.

It might start to feel more real when I go to school tomorrow, she thought. Ava was a little nervous about starting at a new school in Year Six when everyone already had their friends but she liked meeting new people so she hoped it would be OK.

Her footsteps echoed in the silent room as she approached the shelves that held the curios. The air was very still and she suddenly had the feeling she was being watched. Ava glanced over her shoulder but of course there was no one there. She smiled to herself. The room was really creeping her out!

The curios were all different shapes and sizes and each had a handwritten label. There was a chipped stone plaque carved with an ugly face, and an ornate metal goblet with strange markings; a fan with greying ostrich feathers; dusty figurines; pieces of old jewellery and a large, crouching stone gargoyle, among other

things. Ava couldn't help feeling puzzled. Why had Great-Aunt Enid said the curios were special? They just looked old and broken to her.

Curiously, she picked up an object that was wrapped in old brown bandages. It was about fifty centimetres long with a flat dark snout poking out of one end. What was it? She was about to read the label when she heard a muffled noise behind her and swung round.

A-CHOO! Pepper backed out from behind one of the dusty curtains, sneezing.

Ava's shoulders relaxed. "Pepper! You made me jump!"

Pepper sneezed again, shook her head and trotted over to the desk. With her heart gradually slowing to normal speed, Ava read the label of the bandaged object she was holding: *Baby crocodile mummy. Ancient Egypt.*

A mummified crocodile – ick!

Hastily putting it down, she picked up a figurine with a human body and a cat head

wearing a very stern expression. Ava grinned and waggled it from side to side. "What's the matter with you then?" she said. "Cat got your tongue?"

A pulse like a heartbeat throbbed through her fingers and she almost dropped the figurine in

She stared at the figurine, waiting to see if the strange pulsing would happen again.

surprise. What had just happened?

Nothing.

A shiver crossed her skin and she glanced uneasily at the rest of the curios. She had the sensation that they were

watching her, waiting for something to happen.

Don't be a doughnut, she told herself firmly.

It's just one of your odd feelings. Ignore it.

Ever since she'd been little she'd had strange

feelings about things. If she was in a forest she would feel as if the trees were trying to talk to her, or if she touched an animal she would instinctively know whether it was hurt or not. Her mum said it was because she was imaginative and intuitive but other people seemed to think it was weird so she'd learned not to talk about it.

CRASH!

Ava swung round but saw it was just Pepper again. The dog had jumped on to the desk, knocking a leather-covered box on to the floor. Putting the figurine down, Ava went over. "Oh, Pepper, you're such trouble!"

Pepper gave her a doggy smile, her fringe flopping over her face and her tongue hanging out.

Ava lifted her off the desk. "Come on, down you get."

Pepper licked Ava's chin and then wriggled out of her arms and trotted over to the curios.

Ava picked the box off the floor. There were some words in gold writing stamped into the leather lid.

"Mag..." she said, attempting to sound out the first word. "Mag-yck." Did it say *magic*? Ava was sure the word *magic* was spelled differently but she wasn't great at reading. She continued on. "Magyck Crystals for..." It looked like there had been some more words after 'for' but they had rubbed away.

A flicker of curiosity ran through Ava. Magyck crystals sounded interesting. *Though of course they won't really be magic*, she told herself quickly. *Magic isn't real. It must be some kind of game.*

Wondering why the box had been on the desk and not with the other curios, Ava opened the lid. Inside there was a grid of square compartments, each with a round, shiny crystal inside, nestling on a bed of purple silk. On the right-hand side of the grid there was a single, larger compartment of red silk with a big, oval stone – one side black

and one side white – on the left-hand side there was a compartment of white silk that contained a gold necklace with a pendant, and below the grid was a compartment with a long, slim, clear crystal shaped like a pencil in it.

Someone had written notes on the inside of the box lid but the writing was tiny and Ava quickly gave up trying to read it. Instead, she picked up one of the crystals, a dark one with red patches. As her fingers closed on it, a powerful surge of energy rushed through her and when Pepper made a snuffling noise behind her, she found herself leaping high into the air. "Whoa!" she exclaimed, blinking in surprise. She was being seriously jumpy today!

Putting the crystal down, Ava felt the energy fade. Picking up another crystal, a glossy green one with a dark purple stripe, a wave of calm instantly fell over her. Her muscles relaxed, her breathing steadied and she found her chin lifting and her shoulders dropping.



It's the crystal. Ava's thoughts suddenly became clearer and more certain than they'd ever been before. It's making me feel like this.

She put it down, wondering what was going on. How could crystals change the way she was feeling? Her gaze fell on the black-and-white stone in the single red compartment.

What would happen if she picked that one up?

The second Ava touched it, a chill prickled down her spine and she felt as though an army of spiders was running over her skin.

The sensation was so horrible that she dropped the stone and it thudded to the floor.

Ava was just steeling herself to pick it up so she could put it back in the box when she noticed Pepper going round in circles nearby with something in her mouth. Her shaggy tail was curled over her back and she was wagging it slowly from side to side, looking very pleased with herself.

"What have you got—?" Ava broke off as she saw a bandaged shape sticking out of Pepper's mouth. Oh no! It was the crocodile mummy!

"Pepper, you can't have that! Drop it!" she said in alarm, forgetting about the crystals for the moment.

Pepper gave her a look as if to say, No, it's mine!

"Pepper, I'm being serious. Come here," warned Ava, stepping towards her.

Brown eyes sparkling with mischief, the little terrier darted away!

CHAPTER TWO







"Pepper!" Ava called, chasing after the dog. "That's not a toy. Give it back!"

Pepper stopped in a play bow at the far end of the room, bottom in the air, her tail wagging.

Ava skidded to a halt too. She knew that if she charged, Pepper would race off again, thinking it was a game.

"Stay!" Ava said firmly, edging closer and wishing she'd worked harder on practising the obedience commands they'd learned in puppy training.