

ED MASESSA

WANDMAKER



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To Mom and Dad,
for setting the course and
making sure I never strayed
far from the path



PART ONE

CHAPTER
ONE

Henry Leach the Eighth held the wand between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand with a delicate touch. *The Wandmaker's Guidebook* lay open beside him on his bed, propped against a pillow. The moon-and-stars pattern of his sheets framed the book, forming a natural extension of the page on which the constellations were illustrated.

He frowned as he focused, a pair of tiny thought lines bunched at the bridge of his nose. The book and bedsheet became one as his concentration intensified. It would work this time! He knew it would . . .

"Whatcha doin', Henry?" Brianna's shrill voice cut right through his concentration.

Henry yelped as he jumped off the bed, instinctively tightening his grip on the wand, afraid of dropping it.

"Get out, Brianna. This is my room." He squeezed the words out in a hush. At eight years old, Brianna was like a loose tooth that would never quite fall out—attached by an invisible thread, useless for doing anything, yet refusing to go away.

“Try and make me.” She folded her arms across her chest. Henry looked down and imagined roots sprouting from her bare toes, embedding themselves in the carpet.

He relaxed his grip on the wand and gazed at it, wondering, *What if it really is capable of doing amazing things?* For all his practice, he’d seen no evidence that the wand was anything more than a fancy-looking stick, but maybe—just *maybe*—there was a little magic in it. All he needed was a little bit, and he could make her disappear.

“Let me see that,” Brianna demanded as she reached for the wand.

Contamination!

His guidebook had explained the consequences of letting the wand out of his possession. Contaminated wands did bad things. And while he wasn’t certain exactly what it took to contaminate a wand, he was pretty sure his sister could do it.

Henry quickly snatched the wand out of her reach and hid it behind his back.

“I’ll tell Mom you’re not sharing.” A devilish smirk teased the corners of her mouth.

If there was anything more annoying than the way she snuck up on him, it was her tattletale voice, always threatening him with some parental punishment for crimes he didn’t commit.

Henry wanted so much to believe there was magic in the world. What harm could it do to try?

The first full moon of spring hovered outside the window in a country-clear night sky. Henry focused on his wand and waved it over Brianna's head.

*"Brianna is a pain in the rear.
Make Brianna disappear!"*

He finished with a flourish and snapped his wrist, hoping to give the spell extra power.

Nothing.

Well . . . not nothing.

Brianna's smirk disappeared.

Her bottom lip puffed out.

Her blue eyes slowly sank into rising puddles of tears.

"Don't, Brianna," Henry pleaded. "Please?"

Too late. She inhaled deeply, and Henry knew he was in for a good one. He often thought of her as a volcano, gathering steam below the surface and . . .

"WAAA!"

There she blows.

"Henry!" his mother yelled from the bottom of the staircase.

"You brat!" he hissed, which served only to crank up her volume even higher.

Heavy footsteps tromped up the stairs toward Henry's room. They were not the footsteps of a small woman. Henry shoved the wand into his pocket.

“What’s going on in here?” their father asked sternly from the doorway.

“Daddy!” Brianna squeezed out a few fresh tears before running to him. “Henry won’t share.” She flipped her long chestnut hair back and fluttered her eyes at him—the full look-at-poor-little-me treatment.

Henry cringed and braced for the worst.

Their father didn’t say anything for a long moment, though. Instead, he sniffed the air from the doorway and gave Henry a curious look before finally turning his attention to Brianna. “Okay, Breezie. Why don’t you go see Mommy for a minute?”

Brianna blinked. Henry could just about imagine her bewilderment—her time-tested tactic of getting him into trouble hadn’t worked! Even stranger, no one had called her Breezie since she had come home from school in first grade and said it made her sound like a baby.

“Go on,” their father urged. “Mommy has something for you.” If he had mentioned what the “something” was, she might not have gone. But Brianna never could contain her curiosity. She left without another whimper, sticking out her tongue at Henry as she turned the corner.

Henry prepared to plead his defense. “Dad, she—”

“I know,” his father said calmly. He grabbed a comic book from Henry’s dresser and casually flipped through it as he looked around Henry’s room. His nose twitched and continued to sniff the air. As he sat on the edge of the bed, he took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes, something Henry had noticed him doing a lot lately—as if he were constantly tired.

“Come here, Henry,” he said, patting a place on the bed next to him.

There were times when Henry imagined he had a sixth sense like Spider-Man and could tell when something bad was about to happen. Not this time—his Spidey-Sense wasn’t tingling.

But he wasn’t quite ready to let his guard down. Brianna’s tears had always brought him misery.

Seeing Henry’s hesitation, his father smiled. “No lecture tonight. We just need to talk for a minute.”

Henry hopped onto the bed. Side by side, Henry was struck, as he often was, by how much more he took after his mother. His light brown complexion and short-cropped black hair, courtesy of his mother’s Navajo roots, were in sharp contrast to his father’s fair Irish skin and reddish mop of curls.

“Dad, Brianna was—”

“How is your wand coming along?” his father interrupted.

Henry was surprised by the question. Since his father had gifted him the guidebook some weeks ago, he hadn’t shown much interest in whether Henry was reading it or not, much less whether he was following its instructions for crafting and personalizing a wand. In fact, Henry had taken the task very seriously—but he knew adults had a tendency to dismiss such things as flights of boyish fancy.

He pulled the wand from his pocket, holding it lightly in his fingers—like the conductor of an orchestra with a baton—just as the book had instructed.

He'd taken steps over the last several weeks to infuse it with his personality. The bottom third of the wand was hollow, allowing him to insert several objects that reflected his interests:

A feather from a blue jay, his favorite bird.

A gray rock with a vein of pink quartz running through it—quite extraordinary.

A small vial of water from the fish tank in which he'd raised tadpoles into frogs. He reasoned that there must be something special about the water where such an amazing transformation had occurred, and he wanted to capture that quality in his wand.

He had also stained the wand, quite cleverly. From his room, he sometimes watched blue jays eating chokecherries in a tree tucked into the far corner of the backyard. He had gathered some berries that had fallen to the ground, mashed them into a paste, and rubbed the juice into his wand. He thought that this would form a further connection with the blue jays. And after all, purple was his favorite color. A good thing too, since it took weeks for the color to wash off his skin.

"It's looking fine, Henry." An odd gleam flashed in his father's eyes, for only a second. "In fact, it's looking better every day."

Henry twirled it delicately between two fingers, thinking about all the work he'd put into personalizing it. He was pleased with how it looked. He just wished that it would *do* something.

A quick spark prickled his fingers, like a shock from static electricity. He jumped, and for the second time that night almost dropped the wand. A curious smell drifted up—somewhat like the scent of charred wood.

“Careful, son,” his father whispered in a strange voice. “You have something very special there.”

Henry wanted to reply, but he was mesmerized by the tingling sensation in his hand.

Yes, thought Henry, my wand is very special.

His father’s voice continued to drone, murmuring sounds like musical notes. Henry’s vision became fuzzy around the edges, while the wand remained in perfect focus. From the blurred edges, his father’s hand emerged, slowly reaching toward the wand.

Henry frowned. Something was not right.

The musical vibration of his father’s voice changed to a lower, ominous pitch.

This time his Spidey-Sense did tingle. *Contamination!*

Something in his subconscious mind reacted, and a feeling like pins and needles raced down his arm and into the wand. A single spark jumped from its tip, and Henry was suddenly aware of his surroundings again. In one fluid motion he whipped the wand out of his father’s reach and stared at him in surprise.

For a brief instant, Henry caught a glimpse of a swirling cloud—a miniature galaxy of spinning stars and vapor—that had replaced the whites of his father’s eyes.

A gasp, or possibly a hiss, escaped his father's lips, and he rose quickly from the bed. Three long strides and he was at the window, his outline framed in moonlight.

Henry was frightened. But the fear was laced with curiosity.

"What was that?" he asked his father. "Was that . . . magic?"

From the day he'd been given the guidebook, Henry had dreamed of making a wand that would give him exceptional power. Things like transforming Billy Bodanski into a toad for bullying him on the school bus. Like turning Mary Cooper's tongue into a frying pan when she stuck it out at him for getting a higher score in math. Like changing toilet paper into enough money to buy his mother a new car, or at least a better one. And if there was still enough magic left, he'd poof a few dozen comic books for himself.

But things like that didn't happen for people like Henry. They happened in movies.

Theatrical special effects. Computer wizardry.

Yet maybe not.

Henry's father stared at him from across the room, holding his glasses in his hand. His eyes were soft and caring—and normal. Henry could easily have imagined the whole thing. If there was one thing he had an abundance of, it was imagination.

He looked down at his wand again.

"Henry." His father nudged him with an elbow.

Henry shifted his eyes from the wand to his father, who was sitting beside him on the bed. How had he gotten there from across the room so quickly?

And as he gazed into the swirling mass of stars that had reemerged within his father's eyes, an answer formed within Henry's eleven-year-old mind.

It never happened . . .

Musical intonations of his father's voice played softly in Henry's ear.

It never happened . . .

His father was smiling and nodding his head as if to confirm Henry's thought.

It never happened . . .

The music stopped.

Henry blinked as if he had just awoken from a midday nap.

He looked around the empty room, his eyes coming to rest on the wand, which was tucked neatly into *The Wandmaker's Guidebook*.

Someday he would get it to work.