

LLAMA
OUT
LOUD



EGMONT

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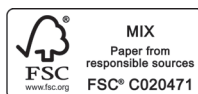


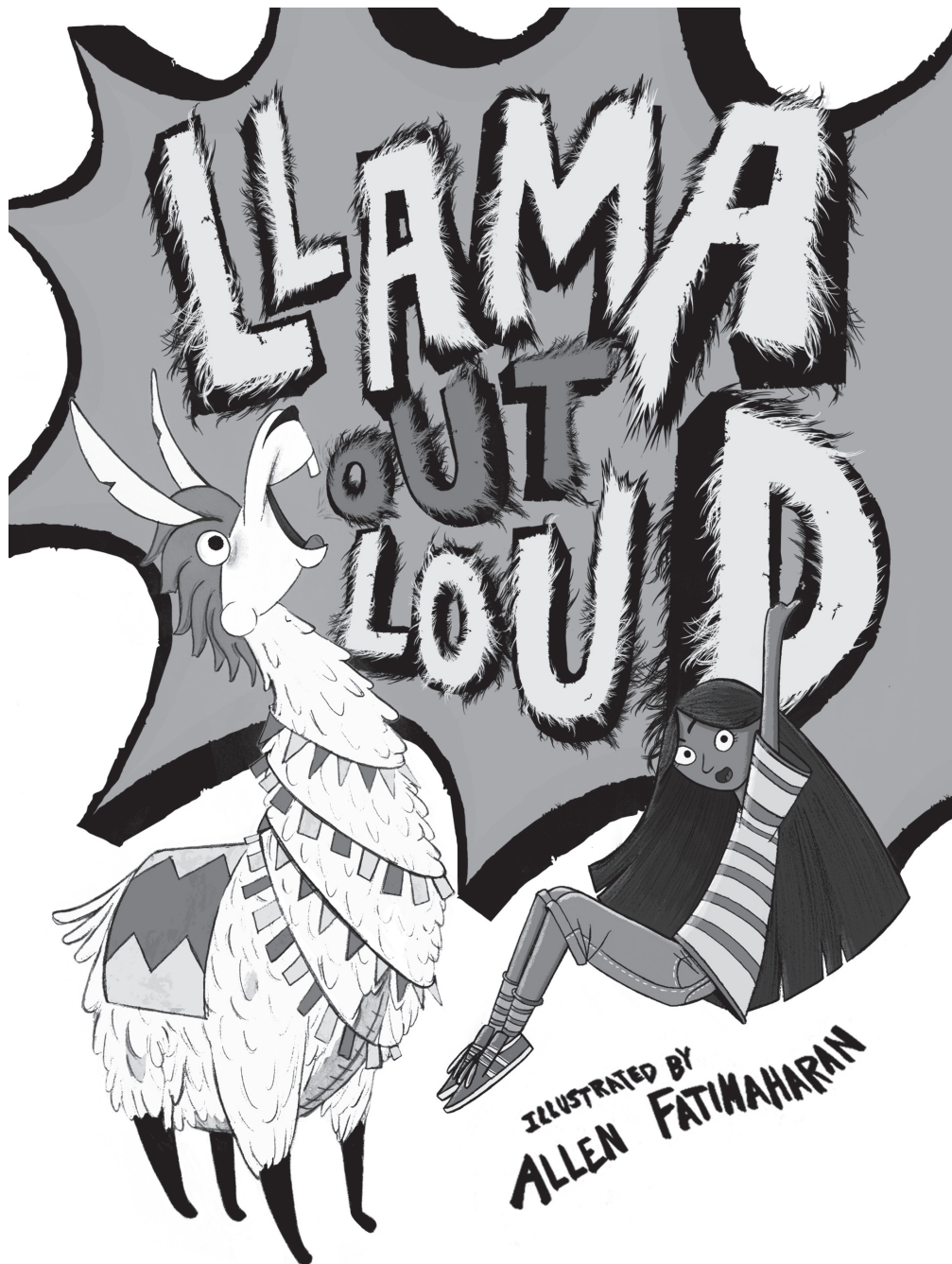
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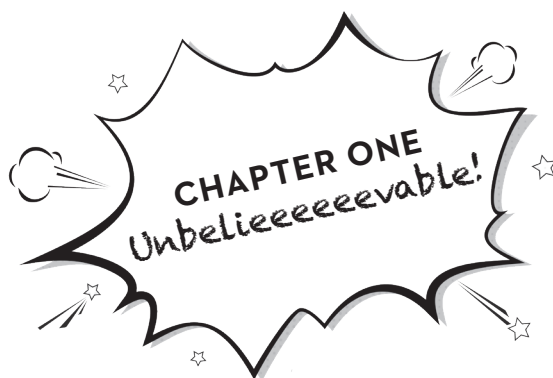


ANNABELLE SAMI

EGMONT



To my very own loud and loving family:
Mum, Dad and Chloe. This book would
not exist without you. Love you.



There are some stories that are hard to believe. If you're smart (which I can already tell you are, dear reader) then you won't believe everything you're told. For instance, I've never trusted fairy tales. I mean, come on. Do they expect us to believe that you can survive being eaten by a wolf? I'm also pretty sure that a house made of gingerbread would melt in the rain, or at least attract a few flies.

Since you're clever, I'm sure you've always questioned those horror stories about kids that lost all their teeth eating too many sweets. Maybe you've watched a film and annoyed your friends by saying, 'That would never happen in real life!'

Well, I'll be honest with you. This story is hard to believe. But unlike a fairy tale, it doesn't take place

in a faraway kingdom. Instead, we'll be travelling to the streets of Whitechapel in East London – a place you might hear the locals call 'The Ends' – where you can buy a samosa for a pound or a rainbow-coloured bagel from the many street vendors on Brick Lane. People from all around the world live under this one postcode, and even more come to visit on Sundays when the market is in full swing. It's a small corner of London, but there's a *whole world* inside it. And, despite what you might be thinking, the hero of our story isn't some cockney geezer. It's a girl – Yasmin.

Oh, and a llama. A toy one, of course, not a real one. That would be weird.

By now you must be thinking, that *does* sound unbelievable!

I know. But believe me. It's *real*.

P.S. There's one more thing you should know about Yasmin. You see, her parents haven't stopped talking since 1991 and her brothers might as well be



in training for the Most Annoying event at the Olympics. Not to mention Yasmin's aunties, who always think they know best. Of course, Yasmin still loves them, but all the hubbub results in Yasmin making a very particular choice. A choice she upholds even to this day . . .

Actually - I can't be bothered to do a flashback yet. Let's just get to the story, hey? I'm sure you'll find out what you need to know soon enough.

So where were we . . .? Oh yes. (Cue dramatic music.)

Life as Yasmin had known it, for a whole nine years and 363 days, was about to change.

Forever.



CHAPTER TWO Bargain Hunt

Yasmin was staring at the ugliest toy llama she had ever seen. It was in the £2.99 bargain bucket in Old Spitalfields market, with one dodgy eye that bulged out and wonky ears. A few tattered pieces of cloth hung around its neck as decoration. The stains all over its back legs were a worrying brown colour. Even £2.99 seemed way too expensive to Yasmin. You would have to pay HER to take the thing home.

And yet she couldn't stop staring at it. It was one of those situations where something is just so disgusting that you *have* to look - like a squished snail on the garden path (and Yasmin had been guilty of quite a few snail casualties). The llama held her with its beady little glass eyes and it was starting to give her the creeps.



Yasmin didn't usually come to the market after school. It was a crowded, covered square filled with everything you could ever need, from tablecloths to teapots. Yasmin often thought it was worrying that most of her clothes were bought from the same stall that sold toilet brushes. Walking around, it was easy to get confused in the maze of tables and the noisy, bellowing yells of the vendors. Today, just like any other busy afternoon, it was teeming with people who swarmed like ants around the colourful



stalls. Actual ants also swarmed around the back of the food tents, trying to find falling crumbs to feast on.

It was noisy, smelly and definitely *not* the place that Yasmin would have chosen to spend the afternoon. But as usual, she had no choice. Even though it was her tenth birthday.

As the chosen School Representative, Yasmin had just made her weekly visit to the local elderly daycentre as part of a community programme.

(More on that later.) But instead of taking her home, Auntie Bibi had cheerily grabbed her hand and yanked her in the direction of the market.

‘I thought we might do some shopping, Yassy! What do you think?’ she chirped. ‘I knew you’d be pleased. You love shopping, just like your auntie!’

Yasmin sighed and patted her auntie’s hand. She actually hated shopping. But if it would make her auntie happy, then she would grin and bear it. Yasmin was good at keeping other people happy.

As soon as they were through the gates, Auntie Bibi made a beeline for a stall selling an array of brightly coloured scarves.

‘There’s the one I saw earlier!’ she chimed. ‘Isn’t it beautiful?’

Yasmin thought the scarf looked like a giant feather duster.

‘You’re right. I *should* get more than one,’ Auntie Bibi agreed, as if Yasmin had suggested it. Yasmin always marvelled at her auntie’s ability to hold a

conversation entirely by herself.

Deciding to make the best of things, Yasmin pointed to the small arts-and-crafts stall nestled in the centre of the market. There was a big wooden box filled with high-quality colouring pencils for sale, the kind Yasmin dreamed of owning for her sketches.

Her auntie pushed her hand aside. 'Who wants boring pencils when you could have a pretty scarf?' she said. 'Come now. Doesn't this look pretty?!'

Whilst her auntie tried on scarves for the fifty millionth time (she couldn't choose between the fluorescent yellow or the sickly green), Yasmin had wandered towards the arts-and-crafts stall - and come across the previously mentioned llama.

Against her better judgment, she reached out and picked it up. It was soft and surprisingly warm, which made Yasmin feel a bit sick.

The market trader rubbed his hands together, sensing a sale. 'You want it, sweetheart?'

Yasmin dropped the llama back in the box and sprayed her hands with the antibacterial gel she always carried. Her parents had told her not to talk to strangers. Especially ones selling low-end stuffed toys at unreasonable prices.

‘Oh, how cute!’ Auntie Bibi’s voice came ringing over Yasmin’s shoulder. ‘It reminds me of a toy donkey I had when I was a little girl. Do you want it, Yassy?’

Yasmin shook her head vigorously. But Auntie Bibi had already taken out her purse and was handing the market trader two shiny pounds.

‘Wonderful! You’re going to have so much fun together.’ She plopped the toy into Yasmin’s schoolbag, already directing Yasmin towards the exit. ‘Your Auntie Bibi always gets you the best presents. Now we need to get home. Dinner is almost ready.’

‘It’s £2.99, love,’ the trader called after them.

‘You’re lucky I even gave you two pounds!’ Auntie

Bibi smiled sweetly and continued walking away.

Yasmin blinked. Within the space of what felt like a few seconds, she had managed to become the owner of what looked like a failed science experiment that she definitely *did not want*.

And things were only going to get stranger .



