

Iman's Magic Baobab Tree



WRITTEN BY
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ISBN Paperback: 979-8395798299

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Book Formatting: Molo Global Consulting, LLC

Illustrations: Cee Tayi

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DEDICATION

A dedication to my sister Iman, may your love live on endlessly
With special thanks to Nisan Abdulkader and Muna Hussein



My name is Iman Hussein. Some people tell me it means faith, while others say it means belief and beauty, or goodness. My mom says it just means I can be whoever I want to be and do everything I dream of. I've thought a lot about it and I've decided I want to be an explorer.



Meow



I spend a lot of time in our backyard exploring with my best friend Chewey. He's our cat and has been with my family since I was a baby. I'm an explorer so I can understand everything he tells me, and every trusted explorer needs special friends to take with to discover new things.



I've been exploring our backyard for a very long time, but I discover something new all the time.



My mommy doesn't like it when I go too far beyond the treeline. She says it's not safe without an adult because there are lots of animals hidden in the trees that could hurt me. I'm not afraid though, I'm an explorer and I know Chewey will always protect me.



Last week, we had a huge storm with lots of thunder that shook the whole house. When it ended, the trees in the backyard had fallen everywhere! The only tree still standing was the huge baobab tree towards the end of our backyard. My Baba says it's been standing there for over one hundred years, planted by my great-great-great (lots of greats) grandfather who came here from Yemen a very very long time ago.



Now that all the trees around it have fallen, I noticed a carving on the sides and in front of the tree that I had never seen before.

Chewey was super excited and growling all around the tree, he could sense something special was hidden there. I tried to read the carvings, a little bit like the explorers who use maps and clues to discover new things and places.





It was really hard though; I'm still learning to read and write but I'm an explorer and explorers never give up.

I kept going back to try, and after a few days, I noticed that the first letter of my name was written all over, and Chewey's too. Whenever I'd put my finger on the letter I, the tree would shake a little bit. I asked Chewey to put his paw at the spot with the first letter of his name C. At the same time, I put mine on the letters I and H, for Iman Hussein.



We heard a distant rumbling and the tree started shaking really hard. I was really scared but I'm an explorer and explorers are fearless so I stayed right there to see what would happen next. And you know what? While we were standing there with all the shaking and the noise, the bark in the middle of the tree split open down the middle! There was a magic door hidden in there! It looks like only Chewey and I could open it together, using our name's initials.





We went inside and found a little hollow room that was filled with all the things explorers dream of for their adventures. There was a compass, a telescope, and even stuff for snorkelling and exploring underwater. There were also charts and maps for magical places all over the world that we could take cars and trains and planes to get to.



There were books about numbers and mathematics, and something called banking and finance. I'm not sure what that means but I do like Maths, it's one of my favourite subjects at school and I'm always helping others understand it better.



There was also a space with a huge mirror and all kinds of makeup you can imagine - lipsticks, eyeshadows, eyeliners, and weirdly shaped things to apply them with that I wasn't sure how to use. In one corner, there was a huge poster on the wall. It showed a beautiful woman with a mass of curly hair, wearing a red bubu, and gold jewellery, belly-dancing. It had all the instructions for how to belly dance.



And get this! The little images of the lady moved on their own to show the steps! I can already dance a little bit; I won last year's belly dance competition at school so I'm excited to try out all these new steps!



My favourite discovery in the special room was a big book. On it, written in gold cursive, was “**Magical Book of World Recipes**”. It was filled with lots of drawings telling the stories of explorers and their adventures discovering, tasting, and cooking different foods from around the world.



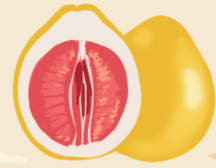
The book talked about how food was something explorers used to share love with their friends and family.



Ingredients



Pandan



Pomelo



I was really excited to find this book today, because my extended family is coming for dinner tonight. Can you imagine how amazing it would be if I could cook a special recipe filled with love from this magical book for my entire family?

I looked through the recipes at the beginning of the book, many seemed really complicated and with ingredients I had never heard around from faraway places in the world. There were ingredients like **amchur**, **candle nuts**, black sesame, **pandan**, and **pomelo**; items that didn't really grow in our part of the world and were very expensive in the supermarket.





I ended up choosing a chicken biryani recipe from India that seemed easy to make for my little hands, but especially filled with all the things my family loves to eat. I copied it down neatly into my notebook (turns out that magic book of recipes cannot leave the secret cave!) and ran back home with Chewey to begin preparing. I washed my hands and began to set ingredients aside, while my Mama and Baba looked on curiously.



Mama even asked me if I wanted any help, but I promised her I could manage all of it on my own, with the help of Chef Chewey! I set aside some rice, butter, onions, bay leaves, cardamom, cinnamon, turmeric, chicken, curry paste, raisins, coriander, and even some toasted almond flakes. I also had to find some yogurt, ginger and garlic paste, chili powder (*atchoooo*, that one made me sneeze!).



My cousin Muna came into the kitchen at that moment to grab some water and added some lemon juice to the table for me to use. Two of my brothers, who were kneading flour to make some bread; added some garam masala, cloves, star anise and caraway seeds as well. This recipe was turning into a very big and busy task, so I was glad to have all the help from my family including Mama's help to grab the big cast iron pot we sometimes use to make rice dishes for many people.



Halfway through the process, my third brother came into the kitchen to ask what was going on, and after looking through my notebook added some mint leaves to the mix! I guess that's okay because the recipe in the magic book did say at the beginning that the recipe and the ingredients used only became magical if they were made **together and with LOVE**. I wasn't sure what that meant but I think now I'm starting to understand.



Do you know how long chicken biryani takes to cook? FOREVER! Everything had to be layered in the pot, and my special book did say that - **together** and with **LOVE**, all family members had to do the layering. Mama said it only took a few minutes to complete this, but it felt like hours and hours to me!



Anyway, finally, a lovely smell started coming in from the kitchen, just as all my other family members arrived for the meal. My aunts, uncles, and cousins (I have a pretty big family and when we get together it can be quite noisy); all settled in so we could have some dates and warm goat soup to start us off. I couldn't sit still; I was so excited to have everyone try my special recipe.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, it was time for the piece de resistance (this is just a fancy word I heard my cousin Nusa use once from her French class, I think it means the most important thing). Everyone was so silent as they ate, it made me nervous because we are usually such a loud family always telling jokes and laughing. My Baba was the first person to begin sniffing and come around the table to give me a big hug. Suddenly everyone was smiling and laughing and patting me on the back and asking for seconds. **My recipe was a success!**





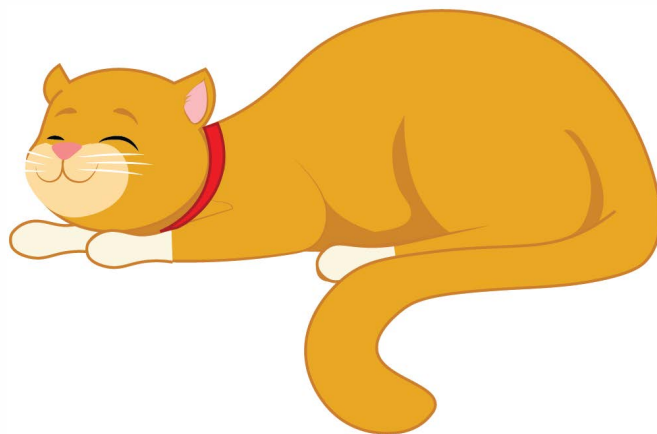
The magic book was right after all, food does become magical if it's made **together** and with **LOVE**. I really cannot wait till I'm big enough to travel the world and discover new foods in the recipe book to share love with my friends and family. But in the meantime, I hope you can keep my secret about where the magic comes from.



Together,

and with

LOVE

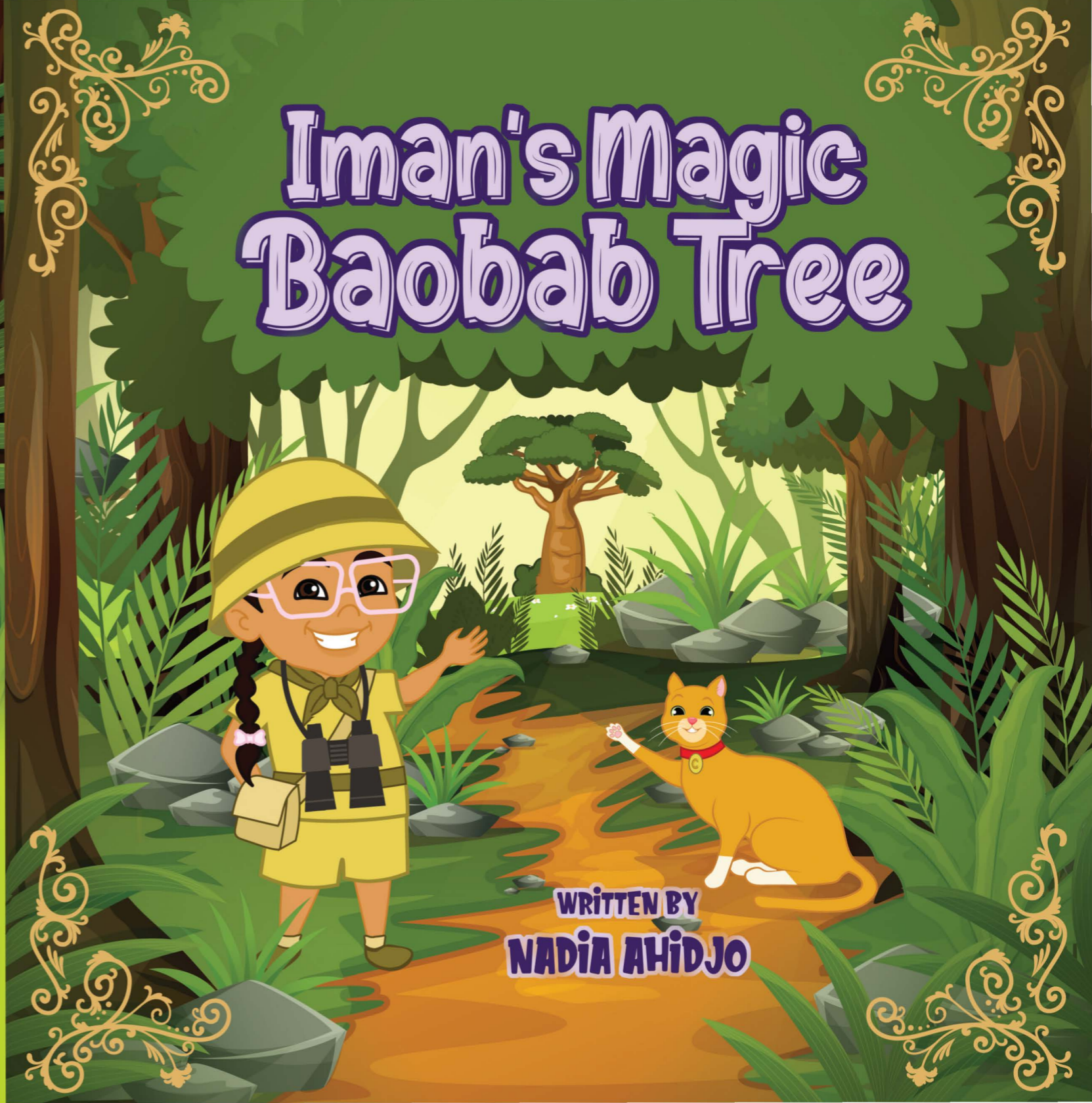


THE END



In Iman's Magic Baobab Tree you will follow the journey of Iman, a spirited young girl and explorer. Accompanied by her best friend and cat Chewey, she stumbles upon an unexpected surprise hidden in her backyard. As she explores, she finds a deeper connection to food, family, friends and more. She learns that wherever her adventures take her she will always prioritize coming together and with love.

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