



MELANIE LEE
ARIF RAFHAN

Imaginary Friends is a collection of modern fables for adults, unlikely morality tales that are humorous and great fun to read!

In this crazy world, you'll meet characters such as Annie the Ambitious Apple, Elly the Egotistical Eraser, and Herman the Hopeless Hippo – all captured through quirky illustrations.

While they may not exist in real life, these imaginary friends are all too relatable and you will be chuckling along as you recognise your friends, family members and colleagues in them.



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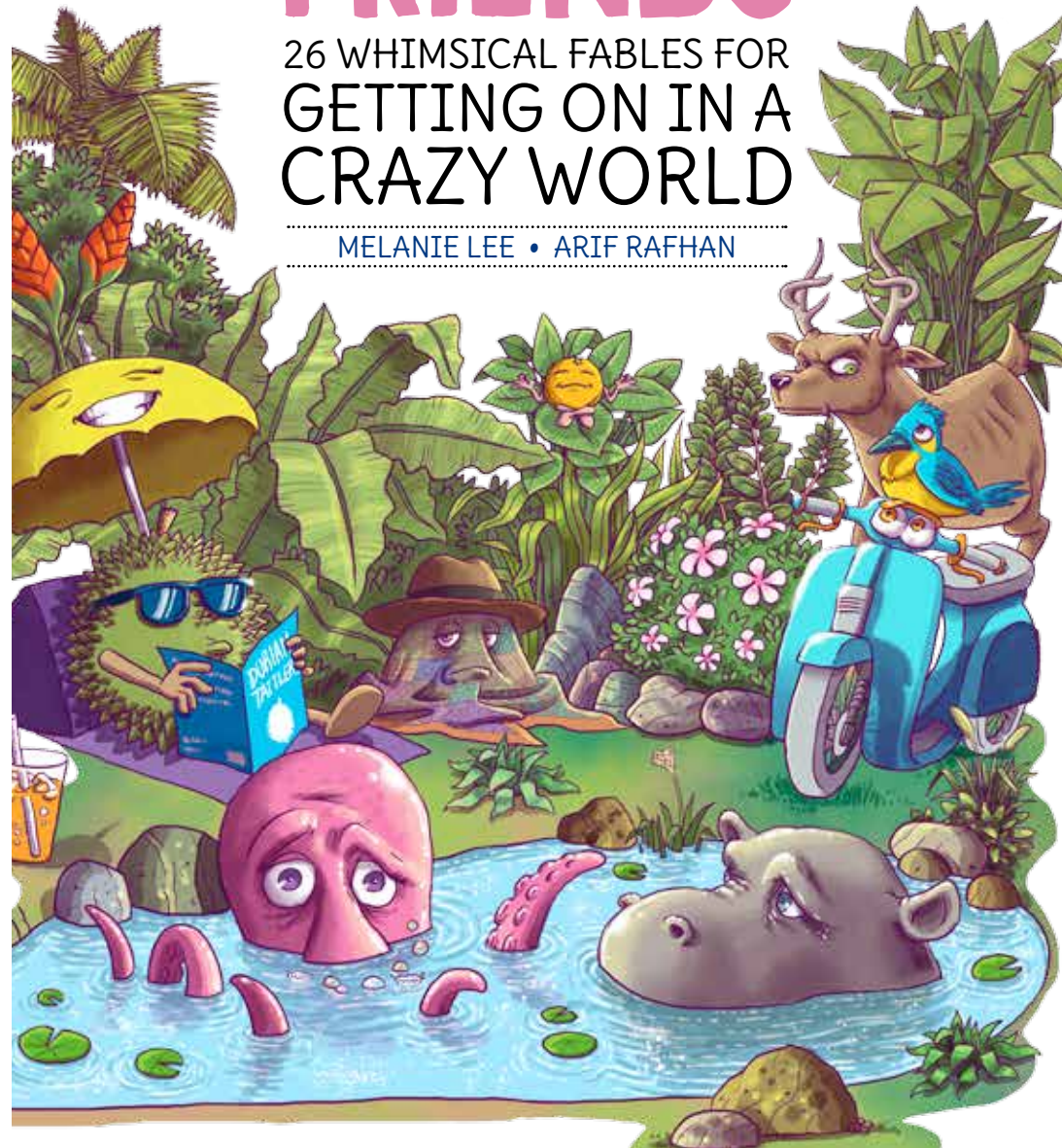
IMAGINARY FRIENDS

Marshall Cavendish Editions

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26 WHIMSICAL FABLES FOR
GETTING ON IN A
CRAZY WORLD

MELANIE LEE • ARIF RAFHAN



For Review only

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Text © 2018 Melanie Lee

Illustrations © 2018 Arif Rafhan

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To Darren and Christian,
my biggest encouragers in telling stories
— Melanie

To my bandmates; Suhana, Mya, Hamka and Avicenna.
Thank you for expanding my one-man band.
— Arif

For Review only

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FOREWORD

Dear reader,

As a child, I was convinced that toys, stationery and even food led secret, dramatic lives that unfolded when humans were not around. I refused to eat vegetables because they were family members of my secret alien friend Captain Veggie, who was planning to rescue them at any minute. The pink Little Twin Stars water bottle I brought to school was a prim and proper lady called Janet. My pencil box, with multiple compartments that could be snapped open by pressing colourful buttons, provided safe refuge for my flag erasers that a class bully stabbed incessantly with a mechanical pencil.

I wrote these stories when my son was just an infant, and I was waking up every three hours to feed him. During those bleary moments in the wee hours of the night, I started to think about what my earliest childhood memories were. This inevitably led me to nostalgically revisit this motley crew of colourful companions that contributed towards many a school teacher describing me as “dreamy” and “absent-minded”.

I realised how much I missed being able to whip up a back story of any object that came my way. I suddenly developed a burning desire to come up with “imaginative

stories”, the kind of far-out fiction that I had not really written since I was ten. In my hyper-sleep-deprived-state, I churned out these trippy tales which ended up featuring my childhood imaginary friends in modern-day PG-rated fables in adulting.

This is not a book for children, but it is definitely inspired by my childhood. While these fables are meant for grown-ups, it is my hope that they also remind you to see the funny and the whimsy in this crazy adult world through child-like lenses.

Yours imaginatively,
Melanie



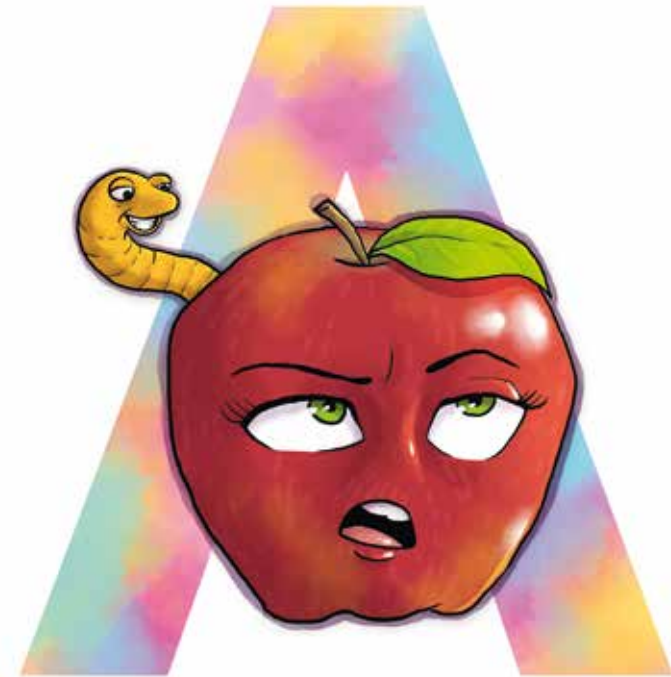
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A

is for

ANNIE THE
AMBITIOUS APPLE



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Annie the Ambitious Apple was a shiny red apple from Rosy Creek Orchard. She outshone all the other apples in Mr Farmer's apple basket.

Mr Farmer was sending her to compete in his town's Best Apple Competition in a few days. It was an honour that Annie was pleased, if not a little smug, about. After all, she had beaten over a hundred ripe apples to represent Rosy Creek!

Because Mama Tree had always told her she was the prettiest one in the orchard, Annie was quite sure she would win first prize. She smiled at the thought of all the farm fruits fawning over her blue ribbon.

The day before the competition, as Annie sat beaming inside a wooden bowl in Mr Farmer's kitchen, she suddenly heard a squeaky "Hello" coming from below her. She looked down and saw an orange worm smiling at her.

"What a slimy stalker," Annie thought to herself as she pretended not to notice the worm.

However, the worm would not stop saying "Hello". She had no choice but to acknowledge its presence.

"Do I know you?" asked Annie, annoyed.

The worm bowed politely. "Oh, don't mind me, Miss Annie. I just wanted to thank you for your cosy hospitality while I was just a wee little hatchling."

Annie had no idea what the worm was talking about. Maybe he had caught some bug from the mad cows at the neighbouring farm.

"I don't think you should stick around the kitchen too long. Mrs Farmer doesn't like your kind around here," Annie said dismissively, and pretended to focus her attention

on a motivational fridge magnet so she would not have to continue the conversation further. She sighed in relief as she saw the worm crawl out the kitchen window.

The next day, as Mr Farmer was about to place Annie into a Styrofoam box, he noticed a small black hole at her bottom.

"Oh blimey, not another bad apple," Mr Farmer muttered as he threw Annie into the trash bin. He hastily went back to the orchard to grab the next shiniest apple from the basket. This time round, Andrew the Annoying Apple, Annie's brother from the same tree, was selected.

Andrew was absolutely gleeful about becoming the last-minute replacement. He stuck his tongue out at the remaining apples in the basket, who were doomed to oblivion at cut-throat supermarket aisles.

"So long, suckers! Now it's my turn to shine," he sneered at them.

Andrew performed pretty well during the Best Apple Competition. In fact, he snagged third place for Rosy Creek Orchard and the yellow ribbon was pinned on the kitchen fridge. After that, Mrs Farmer sliced Andrew up and made a crusty apple pie.

MORAL OF THE STORY

Never be too smug about success or good fortune for you'll never know when the shit will hit the fan.

B

is for

BERTIE THE BURNT-OUT BUTTERFLY



When an unremarkable caterpillar transforms into a beautiful butterfly, this metamorphosis is typically regarded as a positive change.

However, such a drastic transformation from a blob-like cocoon to a fluttering kaleidoscope of colours could also be a bit overwhelming for introverted creatures such as Bertie.

Bertie was burnt-out from the sudden human praise and admiration for his newfound beauty. He found all this meaningless and hollow. It disturbed him that his peers had appeared to forget their humble beginnings and seemed more interested in flirty fluttering and posing with pollen.

Bertie also wasn't a fan of the daily groups of screeching schoolchildren who visited the butterfly enclosure he lived in. They always gave him migraines. He longed for those uninterrupted days of cruising along a dewy leaf in the silence of dawn, or meditating within the warm solitude of the old cocoon.

One day, a particularly loud group of schoolchildren visited the butterfly enclosure. The noise became so unbearable that Bertie had to find the nearest resting spot to catch his breath. This was how he ended up being on the nose of 10-year-old Willie.

All of Willie's classmates screamed in delight. All of the butterflies screamed as well (but you wouldn't be able to hear them if you were human). They had been warned never to make any physical contact with humans unless they wanted to risk getting smashed like a mosquito or pinned down as a specimen.

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Despite all the commotion, Bertie didn't want to move from Willie's nose because he was just so exhausted. He just didn't care anymore.

Willie gently picked Bertie up by his wings and placed him in a small plastic container with holes on its cover.

"Hey Mr Butterfly, I'm going to sneak you out of here," Willie whispered to him as he slipped the plastic container into his bag. Bertie liked the fact that Willie wasn't as loud as the other kids and he made little effort to resist such comfortable captivity.

After a restful three-hour nap in Willie's bag, Bertie was finally released. He found himself in a small garden with a small bush of flowers, an apple tree and a vegetable patch. Living in the garden were a few bees, ladybirds, fruit flies and Bessie the Bashful Butterfly, who generally preferred not to talk more than 10 minutes a day.

Bertie lived happily ever after.

MORAL OF THE STORY

Being a social butterfly is not for everyone.

C

is for

CHUCKY THE CLEVER CALICO CAT



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Life was good for Chucky the Clever Calico Cat. Every morning and every evening, Mrs Lim fed him cat food, and the rest of the day he was free to roam around other people's houses in the neighbourhood.

It was a wonderful anthropological study, these domestic visitations. It fascinated him to no end how each home had a specific smell and feel, so much so that he felt like he was flitting in and out of different worlds.

The house he enjoyed visiting the most was the grey, cube-shaped bungalow five doors down from Mrs Lim's place. Inside, everything was black or white. Chucky appreciated the clean structural lines of the place. Most of the other homes he visited were cluttered and had no sense of aesthetic consistency.

The owner of this tasteful house was Mr Grey, a semi-retired angel investor who only ever wore a) a black turtleneck with white pants or b) a white turtleneck with black pants.

In the middle of this living room sat a beautiful white Steinway grand piano. Chucky loved to sit by Mr Grey's feet while he played selections from the *Great American Songbook* – George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin – all the greats of yesteryear.

In fact, Chucky spent so much time listening to Mr Grey that he eventually figured out how to read music notes and play the piano himself. On the days that Mr Grey went to the city for business meetings, Chucky would practise playing the piano with his nimble paws. He was fond of the catchy beats of bossa nova and began to compose his own samba ditties to amuse himself.

Meanwhile, Mr Grey was puzzled as to why there were scratch marks on his piano. At first, he told his cleaner off for over-polishing the ivory keys, but when the scratch marks persisted despite the cleaner using a soft flannel cloth, Mr Grey decided to install a security camera in his living room. Imagine his shock when he viewed the footage of Chucky improvising on the piano with *The Girl from Ipanema!*

But instead of loading this video onto YouTube and earning a lucrative revenue from a video that was sure to go viral, Mr Grey became gripped with a jealous rage over Chucky's obviously superior musical talent.

He took a knife to give himself multiple (but superficial) cuts on his arms and face, and marched over to Mrs Lim's house.

"Your cat is psycho! He attacked me for no rhyme or reason," Mr Grey yelled.

Horrified, Mrs Lim brought Chucky to a vet to have him euthanised. She didn't want to risk having Chucky hurt anyone else.

The week after Chucky was buried in Mrs Lim's backyard, Mr Grey bought himself a new black grand piano.

MORAL OF THE STORY

Sophisticated people with good taste do not necessarily have good hearts.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MELANIE LEE is a writer and educator from Singapore. She is the author of *The Adventures of Squirky the Alien*, a picture book series which won the Crystal Kite Award (Middle East/India/Asia division) and Second Prize in the Samsung KidsTime Authors' Award, both in 2016. Beyond book publishing, Lee specialises in content related to arts, heritage, and lifestyle, and has worked with clients such as the National Museum of Singapore, National Arts Council and RedMart. She is also Associate Faculty at the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) overseeing media writing courses.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

ARIF RAFHAN is a multi-platform visual artist based in Malaysia and provides services to both corporate and online audiences. He specialises in illustrations, comics and murals. His works can be seen in government and corporate offices, business areas and schools. They are also used by online businesses to promote products. Arif is a regular live guest artist for events and seminars where he provides live drawings and graphic recordings. When he's not busy with work, he runs doodle classes for the children in his neighbourhood.