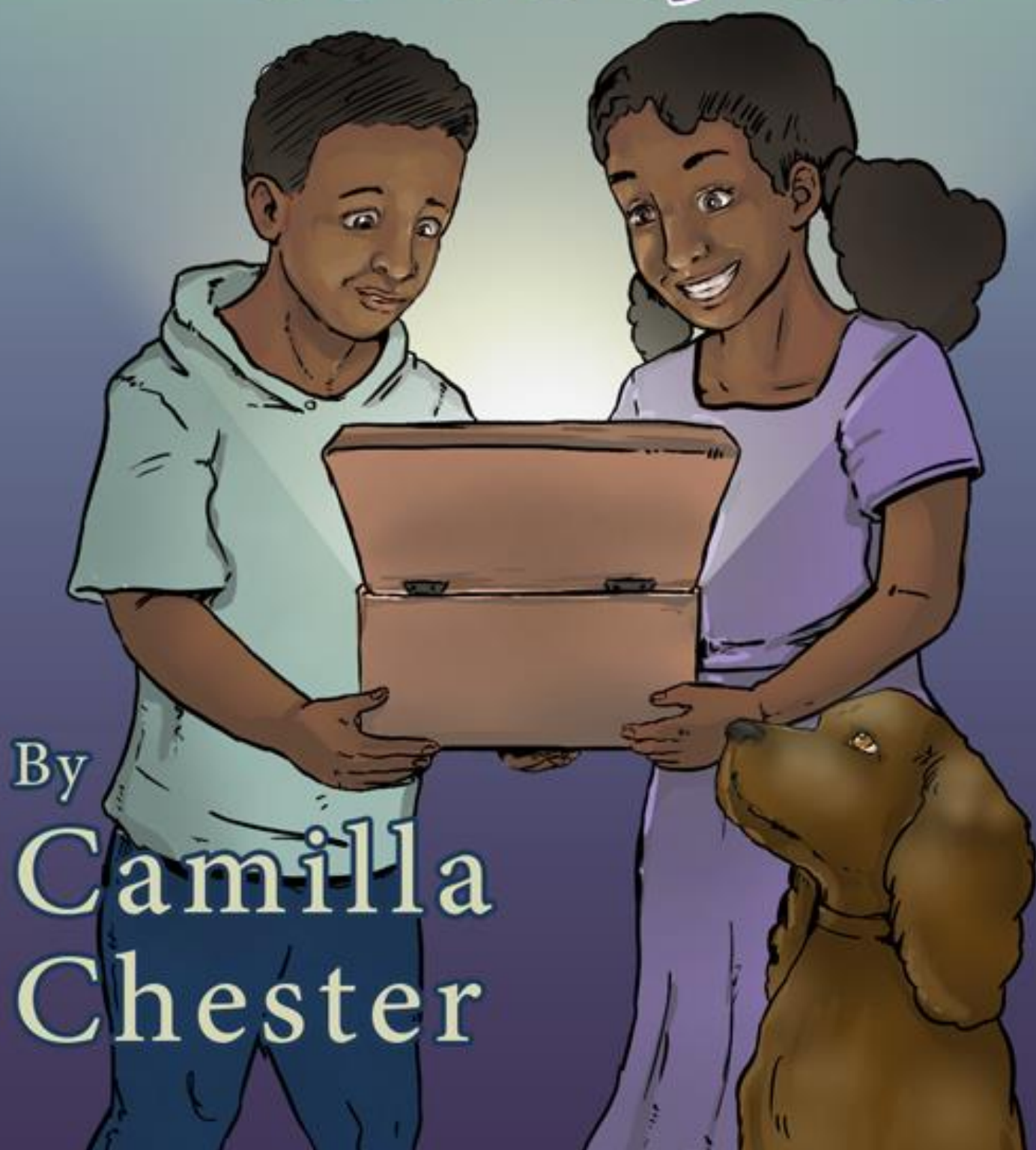


Neves Wishes



By
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Chapter 1

Frisk was nosing through the torn pieces of birthday wrapping paper, his tail swinging so fast that the whole of his back hind was wagging to its beat. He emerged with a doggy grin and a gift tag stuck to one ear.

“You’re not helping, Frisk,” moaned Jess, stuffing paper into the recycling bag.

“He’s looking for sweets,” said Joe, one socked foot hanging lazily off the top bunk. “But we didn’t get any this year. All these presents,” he muttered as he rummaged through the piles of gifts that were strewn across his bed, “and not one sweet. Maybe they think eleven is too old for sweets.”

“You’re doing the hoovering, Joe,” said Jess, ignoring her twin. “I’m not even joking...” She stopped suddenly and fell to her knees. “What’s this?” she murmured, flinging the debris to one side and once again exciting Frisk, who started pouncing on the pieces of gift paper. ““We missed a present!” she cried out triumphantly, lifting her discovery up before quickly showing it to her brother “Don’t open it without me!” Joe urged adamantly, jumping neatly off the top bunk.

“It looks like a parcel,” said Jess, turning over the unmarked brown box in her hands. “It has to be for us, though, doesn’t it?”

Joe didn’t bother answering; he and his sister were too busy tearing at the paper, the same way they had with all their shared presents that day.

It was a wooden box, about the size of a shoebox. A beautiful thing, with tiny bronze hinges and delicate carvings. The words NEVES WISHES were inscribed in fancy lettering across the top, framed by an intricate border. It looked handmade and loved. There was a smell to it, too, like a spice used in cooking; something sweet and familiar. When Jess touched the sides of the box it felt warm, as if it had been kept on a mantelpiece above a fireplace.

Jess opened it carefully; the hinges were smooth, regularly used. She was tentative, almost expecting something to whoosh out.

“There’s nothing in it,” said Joe, disappointed. “What did it say on the front?”

Jess closed the box and traced the words with her finger. “Neve’s wishes,” she repeated, a gentle murmur to her tone. “Who’s Neve?” she asked, turning to face Joe.

Joe shrugged.

“Maybe Neve put her wishes inside,” suggested Jess, her voice rising slightly in excitement.

Joe almost snorted. “How?”

“Like... like... she whispered them? I don’t know! Or maybe she’s a genie who can grant wishes? Like in Aladdin!”

“What are you on about? It’s just a box.”

“No, Joe. Feel it. It isn’t just a box. It’s warm.”

Joe took the box from his sister. She was right; it was warm. Had Frisk been sitting on it? He looked over at the spaniel, who had his head tilted to one side, his brown eyes fixed on the box.

“It would be brilliant if it was a wishing box,” said Jess, **a mischievous glint in her eye.**

Joe instantly noticed that she had that look on her face: the one where she would believe anything. He shrugged. “Even if it is, they’re not our wishes, Jess; they’re Neve’s.”

“Then there should be an apostrophe.” Jess pointed to the words on the front again.

“What?”

“I just thought... between the ‘e’ and the ‘s’... oh, forget it. It’s probably just a present from somebody like—”

“Mad Auntie Linda,” interrupted Joe.

“Yeah,” agreed Jess, nodding her head. They both knew that this particular aunt was just the sort of relative who might get them an empty box as a birthday present. “And it’s been forgotten and mixed up in all this mess.” Jess sighed as she looked at the sea of paper they still had to clear up. “If I did have a wish, it’d be that I never have to tidy up ever again.”

“Mine wouldn’t,” said Joe, still clutching the box. He lifted the lid and spoke theatrically into it. “I’d wish for a lifetime supply of sweets.”

Frisk whined.

Joe turned to his sister and a grin spread across his face, a grin which lessened as his hands began to tremble. It was gentle at first, then stronger; a rumble that ran from the box, into his hands and up his arms.

He dropped the box onto the paper, where it started jumping about as if alive. Then, a strange ripple effect shot across the bottom of the box, and a yellow toffee bonbon magically appeared inside. A real sweet, quickly followed by three or four pieces of pink coconut ice, and a large liquorice swirl. More sweets appeared, as the box slowly filled up. A strawberry bootlace wriggled its way like a snake through the materialising wrapped sweets; black jacks and fruit salads, refreshers, tiny packets of Parma Violets and toffees.

Sweets without wrappers, the kind from Reynolds Sweet Stall, joined in; cough candies, aniseed balls, sour cherries and sherbet pips. Faster and faster they came, piling on top of one another, filling the box, making it overflow. The smell of rich fudge and strawberries and candy floss filled the air of their bedroom. Everywhere the twins looked there were hundreds—no, thousands—of every kind of sweet you could possibly imagine just begging to be eaten.