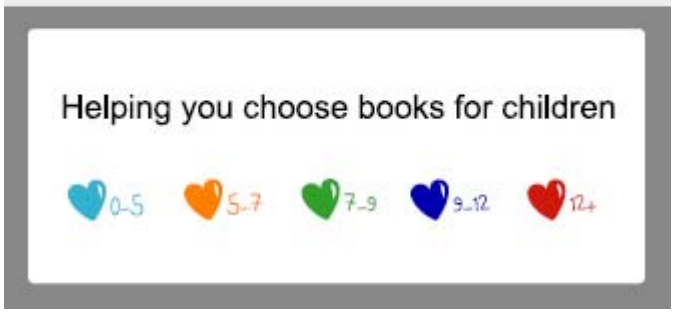
Lovereading4kids.co.uk




opening extract from

# Charlie Bone and the Hidden King

written by

## Jenny Nimmo

published by

## Egmont

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.



# The children of the Red King, called the endowed

Naren Bloor — Adopted daughter of Bartholomew Bloor, Naren can send shadow words over great distances. She is descended from the Red King's grandson who was abducted by pirates and taken to China.

Asa Pike — A were-beast. He is descended from a tribe who lived in the Northern forests and kept strange beasts. Asa can change shape at dusk.

Billy Raven — Billy can communicate with animals. One of his ancestors conversed with ravens that sat on a gibbet where dead men hung. For this talent he was banished from his village.



Lysander Sage — Descended from an African wise man. He can call up his spirit ancestors.

Tancred Torsson — A storm-bringer. His Scandinavian ancestor was named after the thunder god, Thor. Tancred can bring rain, wind, thunder and lightning.

Gabriel Silk — Gabriel can feel scenes and emotions through the clothes of others. He comes from a line of psychics.

Emma Tolly — Emma can fly. Her surname derives from the Spanish swordsman from Toledo, whose daughter married the Red King. He is therefore an ancestor to all the endowed children.

Charlie Bone — Charlie can travel into photographs and pictures. He is descended from the Red King through his father, and through his mother, from Mathonwy, a Welsh magician and friend of the Red King.





Dorcas Loom — Dorcas can bewitch items of clothing. Her ancestor, Lola Defarge, knitted a shrivelling shawl whilst enjoying the execution of the Queen of France in 1793.

Idith and Inez Branko — Telekinetic twins, distantly related to Zelda Dobinsky, who has left Bloor's Academy.

Joshua Tilpin — Joshua has magnetism. His origins are, at present, a mystery. Even the Bloors are unsure where he lives. He arrived at their doors alone and introduced himself. His fees are paid through a private bank.

Una Onimous — Mr Onimous's niece. Una is five years older and her endowment is being kept secret until it has fully developed.

Olivia Vertigo — Descended from Guanhamara, who fled the Red King's castle and married an Italian Prince. Olivia is an

illusionist. The Bloors are unaware of her endowment.

The endowed are all descended from the ten children of the Red King; a magician-king who left Africa in the twelfth century, accompanied by three leopards.

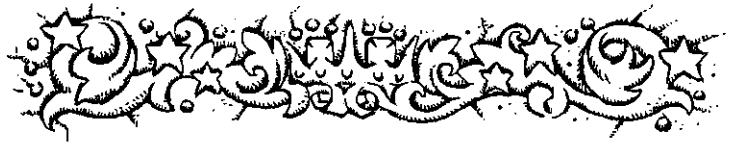


# PROLOGUE

The Red King and his friend walked together through the forest. It was a golden autumn and leaves fell about them like bright coins. The king was tall, his black hair showed not a trace of grey and his dark skin was unlined, but the sorrow in his eyes was centuries old.

Mathonwy, the magician, was a slighter man. His hair and beard were silver-white and his back bent from years spent in the forest. He wore a cloak of midnight blue, patterned with faded stars.

Ten paces behind the men came three leopards; they were old now and not so quick as they had once been, but their gaze never wandered from the figure of the king.



He was their master and their friend and they would have followed him through fire.

Mathonwy was troubled. He knew that this was not one of those companionable walks that he was used to taking with the king. Today their pacing had a deeper purpose. Each step took them further from the world of men, and closer to the forest's heart.

They came at last to a glad where even the dead leaves were silent. The grass was the colour of honey and the hawthorn trees heavy with crimson berries. Mathonwy rested on a fallen tree but the king stood looking up through the bare branches. The sky had turned a burning red but, in a high band of deepest blue, the first star showed.

'Let us make a fire,' said the king.

Mathonwy delighted in bonfires. He sang in Welsh while he gathered the kindling, and the merry song hid the dread in his heart. The dead twigs were tinder dry and soon they had a small blaze going. A thin column of smoke lifted through the trees and the king declared it to be the sweetest scent in all the world.

Now, thought Mathonwy. Now, he is going to ask me.

But it was not yet.

'First the cats,' said the king. 'They cannot survive for much longer in a land of cold winters and callous hunters.





Come here, my good creatures.'

The leopards walked up to the king. They purred as they brushed their heads against his hand.

'It is time for you to wear new coats,' the king told them. 'Find a master who is good, for this one has to leave you now.'

It was said. Mathonwy shuddered. The king was leaving. How empty the forest would be without the companion who had filled his mind with wonders, who had shared his thoughts, answered his doubts, conversed from sunrise to moonset.

The king walked round the fire with long measured strides and the leopards followed him, around and around and around.

'Watch my children,' the king commanded them. 'Seek out the descendents of the children who are lost to me; sons and daughters of brave Amadis and bright Petrello, children of gentle Guanhamara and clever Tolemeo, descendants of my youngest child, Amoret. Help them, my loyal cats, keep them safe.'

When the king stepped away from the fire the big cats continued to circle it. They were running now, leaping and bounding.

The king raised his arm. 'Bright flame, burning sun and

golden star,' he chanted. 'Guard my children with your wild hearts. Live safely in the world of men, but remain forever what you are.'

Mathonwy had seen such spells as these before, but tonight the king's magic had a special beauty. The bounding leopards had become a ring of fire. Sparks flew into the trees and glowing streams festooned the branches, bathing the glade in ever-changing rainbow colours. When the king let his hand fall, the ring had faded; the leopards had gone. Mathonwy rose to his feet. 'Where are they?'

The king pointed to a tree behind the magician. On a low branch sat three cats. One was the colour of copper, one as orange as a flame, the last like a pale gold star.

'Behold! Aries, Leo and Sagittarius. Their coats have changed, but I still know who they are.' The king laughed contentedly, pleased with his spell. 'And now it is my turn.'

Mathonwy sighed. From the folds of his cloak he drew out a slim ash stick; his wand. 'What would you have me do?'

The king looked about him. 'The forest has become my home. The guise of a tree would suit me well.'

'You don't need my help for that,' said the magician. 'Shape-shifting comes as naturally to you as flying to a bird.'



The king regarded his only friend. 'Shape-shifting is not what I need, Mathonwy. I crave an everlasting change. If I am doomed to live forever, then I want to discard my human form, and take on a more peaceful aspect.'

'You want to live forever as a tree?' Mathonwy asked. 'A tree without speech, without movement. What if they come and cut down the forest?'

The king considered this. 'Perhaps I shall learn to move,' he said with his mischievous smile. 'Don't grieve, my friend. Last night I saw a boy in the clouds and I knew that he was one of mine. A future child. And, listen to this, Mathonwy, I know that he was from your line too. This knowledge gave me a moment of great happiness. Now I feel the Red King can leave the world.'

'The world and me,' said Mathonwy without bitterness, for he was pleased to know that one day his blood-line would be joined with the king's.

'Don't begrudge me this favour,' begged the king. 'If I do it alone, then I will be tempted to return. Only you can make my transformation permanent. I am so weary, my friend. I cannot carry my sorrows any further.'

Mathonwy gave a gentle sigh. 'I will do as you wish. But forgive me if I do not compose the tree in a way that you imagine.'

The king smiled, but although he fought his sorrow with all his strength it began to overwhelm him and his eyes were clouded with tears.

The magician was filled with compassion for the king and began to work quickly. He touched his friend's shoulders with the tip of his ash-wand, then reached for the crown. But the thin gold band was so embedded in the king's black curls Mathonwy let it rest where it belonged.

The king wore the robes of coarse hemp that he had worn ever since he had come to live in the forest. As he lifted his hands the rough sleeves fell back and beneath his arms slim green shoots sprouted from his body. Mathonwy tapped the shoots with his wand and they began to thicken. The king's head rose, his body stretched, taller and taller, wider and wider. Leaves began to cover the branches; like tiny mirrors they reflected the colours of the autumn forest and the red-gold fire.

The cats watched the transformation of their master with glowing eyes. They watched the magician leap around the king, his wand a streak of sparks, his dark cloak flying, his hair a drift of thistledown. And now the cats began to howl, for their master had all but vanished; only his head remained atop a tree of dazzling splendour. And,



as his dear features gradually faded, the tears that fell from his dark eyes ran a deep berry red.

'Oh, my children!' sighed the king. And then he was gone.

But the tears flowed on, coursing down the furrowed trunk, red as blood.

Mathonwy stared at the tears in dismay. He tried to stem them with his wand, but on they flowed. So, summoning all the wit, the poetry and the magic that was in his soul, Mathonwy cast a spell. 'One day, my friend,' he said, 'your children will come to find you, and oh, what a day that will be!'