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Opening extract from

Willard Price: Leopard Adventure

Written by

Anthony McGowan

Published by

Puffin Books

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DEEP in the remote forests of Siberia a mother Amur leopard, one of the rarest big cats in the world, senses danger. Something faster than any human and deadlier than any tiger.

MEANWHILE Amazon Hunt, aged twelve, is recruited from England by the mysterious TRACKS organization in America, ready to take off at a moment's notice to rescue wild animals under threat – no matter how great the danger.

NOW Amazon and her thirteen-year-old cousin Frazer must brave the Russian wilderness to save the Amur leopard before a blazing forest fire wipes out the species – for good . . .

LEOPARD ADVENTURE

ANTHONY McGOWAN

Illustrated by Nelson Evergreen



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PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, Block D, Rosebank Office Park, 181 Jan Smuts Avenue, Parktown North, Gauteng 2193, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

puffinbooks.com

First published 2012
001 – 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Set in Baskerville MT Std 13 / 16pt by Palimpsest Book Production Ltd, Falkirk, Stirlingshire
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–141–33945–0

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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ALWAYS LEARNING PEARSON


Siberia
Vladivostok
Long Island, USA

1

A Big Beast in a Bad Mood

The giant forest hog was a quarter of a tonne of angry pig you really wouldn't want to mess with. Two great tusks curved up from its top jaw, and two more jutted out from the bottom. A giant forest hog in a good mood could be a dangerous beast. In a bad mood it was lethal: those tusks could open up and empty out a human stomach like a tin of beans.

And this giant forest hog was in a very bad mood. Its little piggy eyes were staring short-sightedly at Amazon Hunt. It snorted twice with a noise like a backfiring car, and then it charged.

What on earth am I doing here? thought Amazon, not for the first time over the past few days. She was a long way from home, and her only chance of survival lay in the hands of her thirteen-year-old cousin who, quite frankly, couldn't shoot to save his own life, never mind hers.

2

The Climb

Amazon's adventure had begun three days earlier and thousands of miles away.

She was craning her neck to look up at her open bedroom window, on the third floor of the dormitory block of Millbank Abbey, an English boarding school deep in the Sussex countryside. A tough climb, she thought, but not impossible.

Unless, of course, you had a secret fear of heights.

Amazon had missed her curfew again. She had been in the woods next to the school grounds, watching a family of badgers playing outside their sett. She was so engrossed in the way the little ones had fought and rolled in the dry leaves that she had completely lost track of time. She'd thought about making a dash for it through the ornate front door of the school, but if she were caught again it would be the end. The headmistress, that sour-faced old dragon, Miss Pettifer, had said that one more 'episode', and she would be confined to the creepy

old building for the whole summer, and that she really couldn't bear. An 'episode' could be anything from wearing a skirt that was too short to blowing up half the chemistry lab, even though that had been an accident. Sort of . . .

It was bad enough that she was the only girl spending the summer holidays at Millbank. She'd had to wave off all her friends as they were collected by their parents, and then go back alone to the empty, echoing dorm. Sometimes she wished her parents' lives were a bit less . . . interesting, then hers might not be quite so boring.

So she started to climb. The first part was easy enough – there was an old iron drainpipe attached to the wall by thick brackets, which made excellent hand and footholds for her strong fingers and nimble feet. Soon she was up to the first-floor level.

Then she looked down.

Mistake.

Instantly her head began to spin. She thought for a moment that she might actually puke, which added a whole layer of grossness on top of the wobbling jelly of her fear, making the world's nastiest trifle. She breathed deeply, swallowed hard and got a grip on her insides before reaching for the next hold. A minute later she reached the second floor. Her arms were beginning to ache, so she took a rest. This time she didn't look down. But she did wonder what

would happen if she fell.

Sprained ankle?

Broken leg?

Broken neck?

She knew that this was reckless, but also that it would now be just as difficult to climb back down as to go on. Hadn't she read somewhere that most mountaineering accidents happen when the climbers are on the way down?

She gulped, and climbed again. She was there, so nearly there. The open window called to her in a sweet, soft voice. But it was now that the fatal flaw in her plan became evident: somehow she had to get from the drainpipe to the window ledge.

She stretched out her hand. She could just touch the corner of the ledge with her fingertips. It wasn't enough. She was going to have to jump. She thought again about the drop; about the horror as she fell through the air; about the agonizing crunch at the bottom.

But Amazon, despite her phobia, was no coward. She tensed her muscles and leapt sideways across the face of the wall.

It was a good jump.

She was going to make it.

Her fingers found the window ledge, and gripped. But the plaster was old and crumbly. To Amazon's dismay she found that her fingers were slipping. She scrabbled vainly at the ledge. She was falling.

She tried to dig her nails into the very wall itself, but it was no good. It flaked away and took her hopes with it.

She thought, briefly, about screaming. But she wasn't a screaming sort of a girl.

Her final thoughts were of her mum and dad, how she wished that she could see them again, one last time . . .