

Ruby Wishfingers

Skydancer's
Escape

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PO Box 1519,

Capalaba QLD 4157

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Sample chapter.

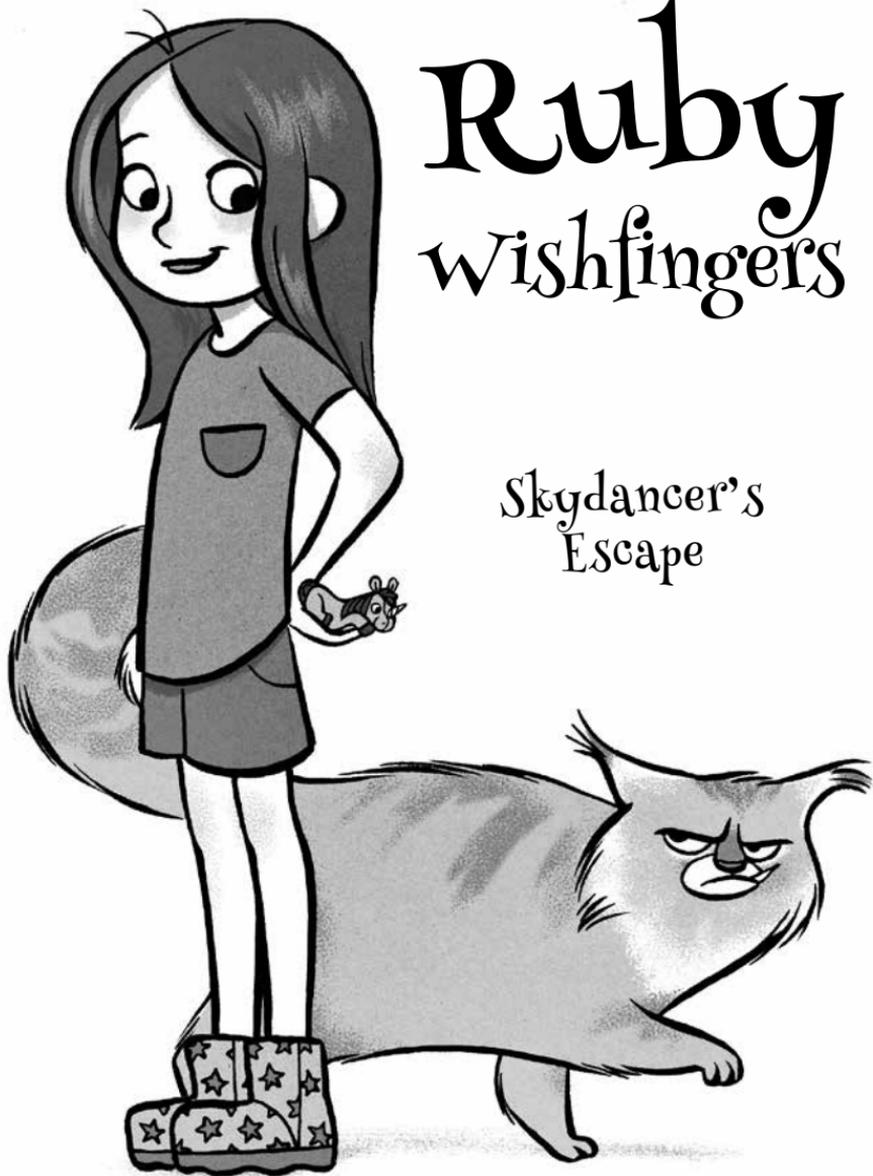
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Deborah Kelly

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For Sakura

...

Always believe in magic!



Chapter One

Ruby Wishfingers was an ordinary girl.

She lived with her ordinary family on an ordinary street, in an ordinary suburb of an ordinary town.

She went to an ordinary school and ate ordinary strawberry jam sandwiches at lunchtime.

She was *so* ordinary, she was almost *extra-ordinary*.

Except for one small thing.

I bet you know plenty of Johnsons and Williams and Thompsons and Cooks. You might even know a *Ticklepenny* or perhaps

a *Rowbottom*.

But do you know *anybody* with the last name of *Wishfingers*?

Being curious as most nine-year-olds are, and having a vivid imagination as most nine-year-olds do, Ruby spent much of her time dreaming of *extraordinary* things.

She marvelled at the oddness of her name. *Where had it come from? What did it mean?*

It sounded like a *magical* name.

‘Nonsense,’ snorted Ruby’s father. ‘A name is a name; nothing more, nothing less.’

Ruby asked her teacher. She asked Mrs Cottesloe next door. She even asked Mrs Cottesloe’s gardener, Henry. But none of them seemed to think there was anything remarkable about the name *Wishfingers*.

Ruby’s father made her promise to stop wasting time thinking about *extraordinary* things like the name *Wishfingers* and spend

more time thinking about *ordinary* things like school and homework and strawberry jam sandwiches.

This is not an easy thing to ask of a nine-year-old. Nevertheless, Ruby tried very hard to keep her promise.

Until one Saturday morning in spring when Ruby May Wishfingers woke up in her ordinary pink pyjamas, in her ordinary bedroom ... but with an *extraordinary* feeling in the tips of her fingers.





Chapter Two

Ruby's fingertips didn't hurt exactly, but neither were they very comfortable.

They buzzed and hummed. They tickled and wriggled. They niggled like an itch *begging* to be scratched.

But even as Ruby scratched them—against her quilt, against each other, against her *teeth*—the feeling *still* wouldn't go away.

She tried washing them with soap and warm water. She tried rinsing them in cold. She even tried sucking them, but that didn't work either.

'Ruby Wishfingers!' scolded her mother,

who was busy folding and re-folding her prized collection of antique lace tablecloths. 'Get those fingers out of your mouth and finish your porridge!'

After breakfast, Ruby went back upstairs to her bedroom to get dressed. She sat down on the edge of her bed and gazed down at her fingertips, wondering what on *earth* could be wrong with them.

The tingling and itching were getting worse. Waves of prickly heat were spreading from the very tips of Ruby's fingers, all the way down to her knuckles.

'I wish this feeling would go away,' Ruby sighed, pressing her palms together tightly. Then, hoping to cool them down a bit, she blew on her fingertips with all her might.

And all of a sudden, it did.

Ruby's fingers and thumbs were now as cool and as calm as cucumbers.

Ruby gazed around her bedroom feeling somewhat bewildered.

Everything seemed to be in its usual place; Norman the goldfish, picked at the brightly coloured pebbles on the bottom of his tank. Ruby's drawings of unicorns, giants and other imaginary creatures hung in their usual bunches from the pin board over her desk. Even Skydancer, her cuddly unicorn, stared back blankly from his place between the pillows.



Had she imagined the whole thing?

Ruby pinched herself hard on the arm.

Ouch! She certainly wasn't dreaming.

And then slowly, one by one, Ruby's fingers began to grow warm again.

They tingled. They prickled. They niggled and wriggled. They buzzed and hummed and *itched*.

Suddenly, Ruby knew *exactly* who she needed to talk to.



Chapter Three

Granny Wishfingers lived in a caravan at the bottom of the Wishfingers' garden.

Dad said it was because Granny was old and cranky and didn't like the sound of Mum's piano playing.

Mum said it was because she didn't like Dad.

But Ruby knew it was because she liked to think, and the caravan was the perfect quiet place to do so.

Squeezing her fingers into fists, Ruby trotted down the back steps, along the pebbled path into the sunshine. The crickets

had already begun to chirp. She ducked under the washing line and zigzagged around the old apple tree. She ran along the length of the vegetable patch until she reached the bottom of the garden where a small yellow caravan stood neatly under a eucalyptus tree.

Ruby knocked three times and peered through the window.

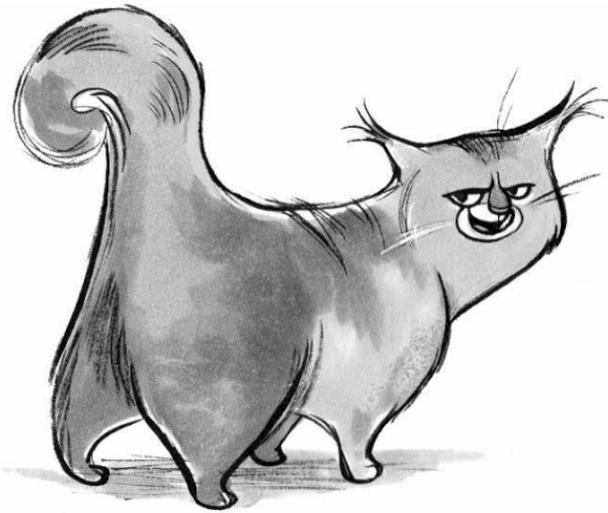
Granny was sitting in her usual spot, swathed in a blanket and with a scarf wrapped tightly around her neck. A possum fur hat slipped down over her eyes. She looked up from her crossword and waved a gloved hand at Ruby.

Ruby pushed open the door and was greeted by an icy blast. Granny had the air-conditioner on again.

'Here,' called Granny, tossing Ruby a jacket. 'Jupiter's running hot again.'

Jupiter was Granny's cat. He was a Maine

Coon, which was one of the largest cat breeds in the world. It was also one of the hairiest. Unfortunately for Jupiter, solidly built cats with long, thick fur weren't designed for hot climates. Perhaps it was because of this that Jupiter was also the *grumpiest* cat in the world. Probably even the universe.



'I tried to turn it off but he bit me on the ankle,' explained Granny, waving at the air-conditioner. 'And it's not even summer yet!'

Ruby finished buttoning up the jacket

and edged around Jupiter, who regarded her with an icy stare. She knelt beside her grandmother and stretched out her fingers.

‘I think there’s something wrong. When I woke up this morning they felt funny. And now they’re itching like mad!’

Granny Wishfingers examined her granddaughter’s hands carefully.

She sat quietly for a long time.

When she finally looked up her eyes twinkled behind her glasses. ‘Ruby, my dear, there is much more to being a Wishfingers than having a funny name.’

She took off her spectacles and patted the arm of the chair.

‘I think you had better sit down.’