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The Magnificent Mulligans



LEAPIN' LEOPARDS

Bill Myers

The Magnificent
Mulligans

BOOK ONE

LEAPIN' LEOPARDS

Bill Myers

FOCUS
ON THE FAMILY[®]

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The Magnificent Mulligans: Leapin' Leopards

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For Jesse Florea:

*Whose commitment to kids over the decades
is a stellar example for all of us.*

*“Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving
one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

—EPHESIANS 4:32

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Just for Starters

JANELLE WOKE UP, TERRIFIED. This wasn't that unusual. Janelle was terrified over lots of stuff . . . spiders, hamsters, people. As a little girl, she once called 911 to report that her shadow was following her.

But this time she had a good reason to be frightened—because she heard something that sounded pretty scary.

K-CRASH . . . SLAM . . . K-BANG!

It sounded like the noises people might make when they break into your house.

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"Jessica!" she whispered to her twin sister sleeping in the bunk above her.

No answer. Jessica was apparently too busy winning the World Series or Superbowl or whatever sport she was dreaming about. I guess you could say she was a super jock.

"Jessica!" Janelle whispered. "Downstairs! A burglar!"

"That's nice," Jessica mumbled. "Put him in the penalty box with the other skaters."

Janelle threw off her covers and leapt to the floor, quickly sliding her feet into her slippers. Who knew how many germs come out and sneak around the floor at night?

"Jessica!"

"Wha . . . What!?" Now her sister was awake. And she didn't seem happy about it. How could she be happy when, just moments ago, she'd been climbing the podium to receive a gold medal? But she was awake.

"Downstairs," Janelle whispered. "Listen!"

There was more

K-BANG, SLAM and ***K-CRASH***-ing

And then a little

K-TINKL-ing

thrown in at the end.

"A burglar!" Jessica whispered.

"That's what I've been saying. Let's get Dad!"

Jessica hopped down from the bed. She stopped. “Wait a minute. He’s in Sacramento. At that adoption agency.”

K-CRASH . . . SLAM . . . K-BANG

“Then Mom!” Janelle whispered. “She’ll know what to do!”

“Right!”

They started for the door—but not before Jessica grabbed her baseball bat by the dresser.

“What’s that for?” Janelle asked.

“With a batting average of .321, it doesn’t hurt to be ready.”

Janelle rolled her eyes.

They raced down the hall into their parent’s room and Janelle switched on the light. “Mom!”

But Mom wasn’t there.

“The calving shed,” Jessica said. “Guinevere is giving birth, remember?”

“Oh, right. Now what do we do?” Janelle whispered.

Jessica turned back to the hallway. “It’s just you and me, kiddo.”

“What about Nick?” Janelle said. “He’s the oldest and smartest?”

Jessica gave her sister a look, as if to say “Seriously?”

“Right,” Janelle agreed. “It’s just you and me.”

Jessica tapped the bat against her hand and started down the hall. “Time for a little grand slam.”

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"I don't think that's such a—"
"Come on!"



Welcome to a day in the life of the Mulligans, a crazy family with a bunch of cool kids—and a wild animal park they're trying to run at the same time. I'll be your tour guide through all of this wonderful weirdness. My name is Winona, and I'm a... Well, we'll get to me in a minute. As Jessica and Janelle investigate what's going on in the kitchen, let's check in on Mom and how she's doing in the calving shed with Guinevere.



"This isn't fair," complained Hector. (When you think "Hector," think "Grumpy old man trapped in a ten-year-old's body.")

Mom watched as Hector climbed the ladder with an armful of acacia branches. "If you're going to be suspended three days for bullying," she said, "then you're going to make yourself useful around the park."

"I wasn't *bullying*."

"Making fun of someone for having crooked teeth?"

"I just said I knew a good orthodontist."

"Which you don't."

"It was funny."

"Which it isn't."

“Everyone laughed.”

“Except him.”

Hector gave a heavy sigh (one of his specialties) as he dumped the branches in the feeding trough for Guinevere. The fourteen-foot-tall giraffe was slowly pacing the sawdust floor, ready to give birth.

“We’ve been up forever,” he complained. “How long is this going to take?”

“Last time it took several hours,” Mom said, keeping a careful eye on Guinevere.

“She’s done this before?” he asked as he started back down the ladder.

“Two years ago,” Mom said. “She lost that one, but this one is going to be different.”

“Even though the ultrasound shows the thing is deformed.”

“He’s not a thing, Hector. He’s a calf—a baby giraffe.”

“A deformed giraffe.”

“Yes, he may have some problem.”

“That’s what I said.”

She chose to ignore him and looked back to Guinevere. “Come on, girl,” she whispered. “You can do this. I know it hurts, but you can do it.”

“She’s in pain?” Hector asked, “She’s so quiet. People on TV always scream when they have kids.”

Mom motioned to the tall, stately animal walking past them. “Yes, giraffes handle pain differently.”

“And how do they handle sleep?” Hector asked, giving a healthy yawn to make his point.

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“Believe it or not, many giraffes can get by on thirty minutes of sleep a day.”

“Seriously?”

She nodded. “And sometimes they even sleep standing up.”

Hector yawned again—and for good measure, threw in another one of his sighs.

“It shouldn’t be long now,” Mom said, pointing to the feeding trough. “And she’s eating a little. See?”

But the only thing Hector wanted to see was the inside of his closed eyelids. The truth was, he wasn’t very fond of animals. Actually, he wasn’t very fond of people, either—after the hard life he’d once lived on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. That’s where Dad first found him. After he did a lot of paperwork, he brought him home to live with us. He’d only been here a couple weeks and, to be honest, none of us were sure he’d fit in. But that never stopped Mom and Dad from trying and reaching out. That was kind of their specialty.



“See anything?” Janelle whispered as Jessica peered around the kitchen corner.

“Too dark,” Jessica said. “Sounds like he’s . . . in the cupboard?”

“Maybe he’s just looking for food?” Janelle whispered hopefully.

“You don’t break into someone’s house to look for food.”

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“We need a plan,” Janelle said.

Jessica patted her bat. “We’ve got a plan.”

“I’m not so sure that’s—”

“We count to three, turn on the lights and I’ll run in swinging.”

“That’s really not such a—”

“One . . .”

“I don’t think—”

“Two . . .”

“*Jessica* . . .”

Suddenly, someone screamed.

HAI! Hoo-Yaaa!

HAI-YAAAAAaaah!

Which, of course, caused the girls to scream:

AHHHHHH!

But only for a moment, until Jessica got to the lights and flipped them on.

In front of them was their 16-year-old brother, Nick, in his boxers and tee-shirt, kicking, spinning, and throwing punches at imaginary foes. (Imaginary as in there was no one else in the room.)

“Nick . . .” Janelle cried, “What are you doing?”

Coming to a stop, Nick looked around and lowered his

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fists. "Karate," he answered calmly. "Mixed with a little kung fu, jujitsu, and wonton."

"Isn't wonton a kind of soup?" Janelle asked.

"You don't know any of those things," Jessica said.

"Well, I watch a lot of movies," Nick said.

Janelle looked cautiously around the kitchen. "Where'd the burglar go?"

Stretching his neck from side to side and then giving a little flex, Nick answered, "Looks like I scared him off."

"Good point," Jessica said. "Crazy scares lots of people."

Janelle looked at the floor, then the counter, and then the sink. Everywhere there were dozens of cans, ripped food boxes, and destroyed baking goods—all covered in a thin layer of white from the ten-pound, torn-open bag of flour.

"Ah, there we go," Jessica said.

"What?" Nick asked.

She pointed to the cupboard above the sink. Two racoons sat huddled together, covered in white flour and looking very much like powdered doughnuts. Only their little masked eyes were visible as they stared down at the kids, blinking innocently.

"Rocky and Roxie," Janelle scolded. "How'd you guys get out?"

Jessica turned to Nick. "Isn't this your week to check their pens?"

"Crafty little fellas," Nick said, changing the subject. "They sure are smart."

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Jessica agreed. “More than their human caretaker.”

“Right,” Nick said. “More than their... Wait, what?”

There was no need to answer.

With heavy sighs, all three dug in and began cleaning up the mess.