

LEGEND OF THE
ANIMAL HEALER

The
Elephant's Tale

LAUREN ST. JOHN



Dial Books for Young Readers
an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.



Walden Media

DIAL BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

A division of Penguin Young Readers Group

Published by The Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) • Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England • 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, North Shore 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd) • Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa • Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

This book is published in partnership with Walden Media, LLC. Walden Media and the Walden Media skipping stone logo are trademarks and registered trademarks of Walden Media, LLC, 17 New England Executive Park, Building 17, Suite 305, Burlington MA 01803

First published in the United States 2010 by Dial Books for Young Readers

Published in Great Britain 2009 by Orion Children's Books

Copyright © 2009 by Lauren St. John

All rights reserved

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

Designed by Nancy R. Leo-Kelly • Text set in Miller Text

Printed in the U.S.A.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

St. John, Lauren, date.

The elephant's tale / Lauren St. John.

p. cm.

Summary: A fourth prophecy, this time involving elephants, comes true for eleven-year-old Martine, an orphaned South African girl with mystical healing powers over animals, when she and her grandmother are faced with losing the Sawubona Game Reserve forever.

ISBN 978-0-8037-3291-9

[1. Elephants—Fiction. 2. Wildlife conservation—Fiction.

3. Human-animal relationships—Fiction. 4. Prophecies—Fiction.

5. Orphans—Fiction. 6. Namibia—Fiction. 7. South Africa—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.S77435E1 2010 [Fic]—dc22 2009009285

1

The first time Martine saw the car, she was high up on the escarpment at Sawubona Wildlife Reserve tucking into a campfire breakfast. She didn't take much notice of it then because Tendai, the Zulu game warden, distracted her by saying something to make her laugh, and because she was too busy savoring the smoky-sweet taste of her bacon and fried banana roll, and also because the car—a black limousine with blacked-out windows—turned around before it reached the distant house and went away, so she just thought it was someone lost.

It wasn't until the following day, when the black car came again while she was tending to the sanctuary animals, that she remembered the strange, slow circuit it had made, as if it were in a funeral procession. This time she had no choice but to pay attention to it, because it glided up to the runs housing Sawubona's injured and orphaned animals as if it had a right to be there. The rear door opened and a tall bald man wearing an expensive navy suit and a watch that could have been hand-crafted from a gold ingot stepped out. He looked around as if he owned the place.

“Can I help you?” she asked, trying not to show how

annoyed she was that he and his big car had frightened the sick animals. She was prepared to bet that he wouldn't dream of driving into a human hospital and disturbing the patients, but a lot of people didn't feel that animals deserved the same consideration.

"Oh, I think I've seen all I need to see," he said. But he continued to stand there, a pleased smile playing around his lips. He reached into his pocket for a lighter and a fat cigar, and began puffing away as if he had all the time in the world.

"We're not open for safaris on Sunday," Martine told him. "You'll have to make an appointment and come back during the week."

"I'm not here for a safari," said the man. "I'm here to see Gwyn Thomas. And who might you be?"

Martine smothered a sigh. She had three very hungry caracals to feed and an antelope wound to dress, and she wasn't in the mood for small talk. Added to which, her grandmother had given her all the usual speeches about not speaking to strangers, although she hadn't said anything about what to do if a stranger who'd come to Sawubona on official business started plying her with questions. "I'm Martine Allen," she said reluctantly. "If you want to see my grandmother, she's at the house."

"Allen?" he repeated. "How long have you lived here, young Martine? You don't sound South African. Where are you from?"

Martine was getting desperate. She wished Tendai or Ben, her best friend in the world apart from Jemmy, her

white giraffe, would show up and rescue her, but Tendai had gone into Storm Crossing to buy supplies for the reserve, and Ben was at the Waterfront in Cape Town seeing off his mum and dad. They were leaving on a Mediterranean cruise. She wanted to tell the bald man that her name and where she came from were none of his business, but she was afraid to be rude to him in case he was an important customer.

“A year,” she replied. “I’ve been at Sawubona for nearly a year.” She could have added, *Ever since my mum and dad died in a fire at our home in Hampshire, England, last New Year’s Eve*, but she didn’t because she was not in the habit of sharing her private information with nosy strangers. Instead she asked, “Is my grandmother expecting you? I can show you to the house.”

“A year is a good long time,” remarked the man. “Long enough to become attached to the place.”

Then he said something that sent chills through Martine. He said: “Shame.”

Just like that. Just one word: “Shame.”

He said it in a way that made Martine want to rush home and take a shower, she was so creeped out, even though he had in fact been perfectly polite and kept his distance throughout. His only crime had been polluting Sawubona’s wildlife hospital with his cigar.

Before Martine could come up with a response, he continued briskly: “Right, then, I think it’s time I had a word with your grandmother. Don’t trouble yourself, I know the way.”

He climbed back into his shiny black car and was chauffeured away, leaving the sickly smell of cigar smoke and that one weighted word hanging in the air.

“Shame.”