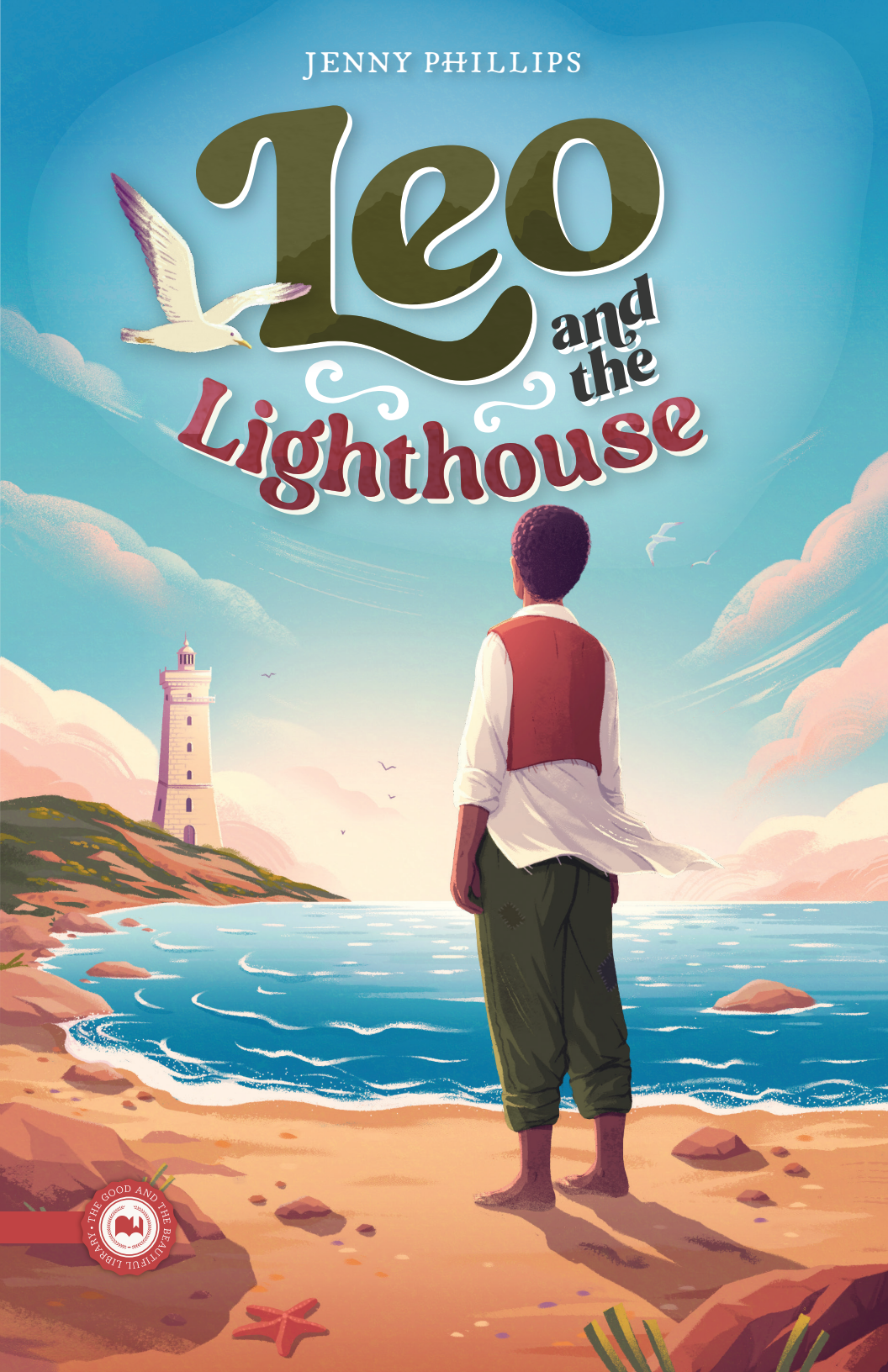

JENNY PHILLIPS
Leo
and the
Lighthouse
THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

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Part 1

Chapter 1

Golden shafts of light crept down the mountainside and danced around the yellow wildflowers lining a wide blue river. Flickering onward, the light reached a cottage and crept up its walls. It then filtered through the windowpane until it fell across the pillow of a sleeping boy.

Leo opened one eye as he felt the first rays of the new day land on his face. Just after he realized that dawn had arrived, he remembered the events of the prior night. With a contented sigh, Leo closed his eye again and turned over, letting the morning light warm his back.

Five more minutes, he decided. *Then I'll go milk the goats.*

Replaying the events of just twelve hours ago in his mind, Leo pictured the castle before him, blue-and-yellow flags waving nobly in the wind. He remembered the castle guards opening the heavy iron gates to let his wagon pass through and the castle head of staff greeting him with a group of well-dressed attendants.

"You have the golden harp?" the head of staff had inquired, his words formal and refined.

"Yes, sir," Leo had replied softly, aware of his plain country clothing.

With excitement racing through him, Leo had jumped out of the wagon, ready to help the attendants unload the harp from the back of the wagon and carry it into the castle.

Leo had helped carry the harp through the high, arched corridors lined with exquisite tapestries. Never had he seen such sights. Then there was the king's throne room . . .

With a startling creak, Leo's door opened. The memory vanished as his mother, Vivian, entered

the room, carefully holding a lumpy cloth bundle. "Good morning, my dear Leo."

"Good morning." Leo sat up, offering his mother a sheepish smile. "I know—the goats are waiting."

Vivian shook her head, and when she spoke again, her voice was soft and strained. "Leo, I have something I need to show you. The goats can wait a little longer." She knelt by Leo's bed with a sad smile, reaching out to brush a curly lock of sandy-brown hair from Leo's forehead. Then she kissed her hand and pressed it lightly on the skin she had cleared.

"You've been doing that for as long as I can remember," Leo said, leaning into his mother's smooth palm.

"All of your life," Vivian responded, in disbelief at how quickly fourteen years had passed. "You are growing like a weed these days," she noted. "You're so grown up that you are even taking journeys to castles all on your own!"

Leo beamed, his heart light as the sunshine pouring into his room, but then he detected the sadness that shadowed his mother's face. Cocking his head, he studied her light brown eyes. "Is something wrong?"

Slowly, Vivian nodded, and her smile disappeared. "It's not good news. You know the lute that you have been making with Pastor Hill?"

Leo sat up straighter in bed and nodded, alarm sparking through him. "Of course! It's the first instrument Pastor Hill has taught me to make. It's finally almost done. It just needs to be stained, and I'm doing that with him today."

Looking down into her lap, Vivian was silent.

Leo touched her arm. "What about the lute, Mother? I left it in the chest before I went to the castle yesterday," he said, looking over at the chest in the corner of his room.

Exhaling slowly, Vivian laid the large lumpy bundle on Leo's lap.

Holding his breath, Leo folded down the edges of the cloth. There before him lay a pile of broken wood and tangled strings. Leo gasped so loudly that a little yellow bird perched on his windowsill startled and flew away.

"Is this my lute?" Leo cried.

Vivian nodded.

In disbelief Leo shook his head. "It can't be. This

makes no sense." With growing anger he pushed the bundle off his lap and flew to the chest in the corner.

"It's not in there," Vivian whispered as Leo lifted the lid.

Instantly, Leo saw that her words were true. He let the lid slam shut. Then he jumped to his feet and whirled toward his mother. "What happened? Who would do this? I can't even understand this. I have spent five months making this lute. Who did this, Mother?"

A single tear trickled down Vivian's cheek and landed on the cold stone floor. "It was . . . Fern."

"Fern!" Leo erupted. "My own sister would do this? Why?"

"Because you deserved it," Fern declared in a loud but little voice as she appeared in Leo's doorway. She was still clad in her nightgown, a messy, curly mop of blond hair framing her six-year-old face. "All you care about is that lute!" She stood with her arms folded and her chin lifted defiantly, but Leo could see that her lip quivered, and her big brown eyes were quickly pooling with tears. Leo didn't care; he was aghast. His mind raced, trying to conjure up

anything that he might have done to deserve such a cruel act. Nothing came to mind.

"Fern, I don't understand! I have done nothing to you!" Leo exclaimed in a pained voice. "What a wretched, wretched thing to do!"

With a sob Fern fled from the doorway. Vivian rose from her place next to the bed, her face full of sorrow as she hurried to follow the little girl. At the door she paused, her eyes met Leo's, and the grief in her gaze went straight to his heart. Then she turned and followed Fern out of the room.

Looking around wildly, Leo grabbed an empty satchel and stuffed it with the strings and broken wood of his lute. Then, with anger flooding his veins, he threw on clean clothes and yanked on his boots.

Leo stomped to the kitchen, where Fern lay on a rug in a sobbing heap. Leo's older sister, Joana, and Vivian were both trying to comfort her.

It's me that Mother and Joana should be comforting, Leo thought bitterly before flinging open the back door.

Fern raised her head, her big eyes pleading. "I'm sorry, Leo."

Time stood still. Then Leo looked away from his sister. "Mother, may I go to Pastor Hill?" he asked.

Vivian nodded, anguish still darkening her face.

Leo flew out the door, leaving behind him a heavy silence.



Leo and the Lighthouse

Leo's life is simple—he makes instruments with Pastor Hill and helps on his family's goat farm. The last thing Leo expects when he wakes up on a seemingly ordinary morning is to be thrust into a devious scheme that leads to an unexpected adventure. Through it all Leo learns to do the right thing, rise to new challenges, and trust in God. With a focus on the power of family, unity, and resourcefulness, *Leo and the Lighthouse* will inspire young readers at every turn.



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