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Opening extract from

The Unlikely Adventures of Mabel Jones

Written by

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CHAPTER ONE

The Kidnap

Mabel Jones was woken by a sudden quiet. She sat upright.

'What wasn't that noise?' she wondered.

The city outside was strangely soundless.

The neighbours weren't listening to the TV.

The cars weren't driving up and down the busy road.

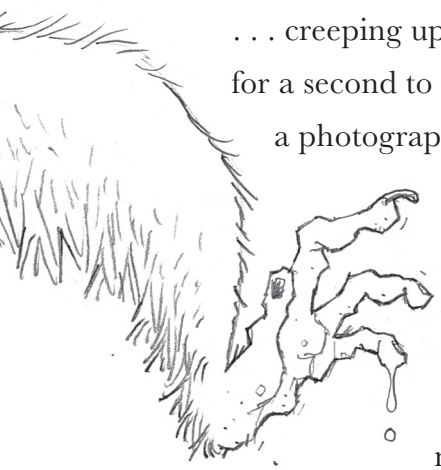
Even the mice that scuttled under the floorboards observed the eerie silence. A most suspicious silence . . .

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Mabel listened very carefully, but even with her eyes closed really tight she couldn't hear where the silence was coming from.

Little did she know that the source of the silence was squeezing through the cat flap with a cutlass in its teeth . . .

. . . tiptoeing through the lounge, leaving wet pawprints on the carpet . . .



. . . creeping up the stairs, pausing for a second to **shudder** in fear at a photograph of Mabel's great-grandmother . . .

. . . crouching outside Mabel's room with a large, specially designed child-sized sack and, at that very moment, pushing open her bedroom door ready to –

STOP! WAIT!

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Before we witness the terrifying sight of young Mabel Jones being skilfully bagged in the dead of night, I believe it is time to reveal the identity of the creature that has invaded her home in such a deafeningly silent fashion.

Let us shine a light into the shadows and reveal the sly beast that lurks in the corner.

Who are you, creature? And what's with the sack?

The creature's whiskers twitch.

Some fur that grows in the wrong direction on top of its head is anxiously straightened with a licked paw.

A pause, then it fixes us with its saucery eyes and blinks nervously, whispering:

'I? I is Omynus Hussh.'

It speaks!

And to which species do you belong?

'I is a silent loris.'

A dastardly breed: quiet as a peanut and

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sneaky as a woodlouse in a jar of raisins.

What brings you to the bedroom of the poor, unfortunate Mabel Jones?

'I is the bagger on board

THE FeROShUS MAggOt!'

The bagger?

'The bagger what bags them children! I gots the proper fingers on me paws that ties the proper knots that keeps the wriggling little snuglet safe inside.'

Surely not young Mabel Jones?

'It performed the sacred **DEED**. **THE DEED** that seals the deal! **THE DEED** that binds it to the captain for a lifetime's service aboard the **Feroshus Maggot**.'

The creature leans close and whispers.

'The Deed that shows it's a pirate in the making.'

She didn't?

Not **THE DEED**?



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'It did! It did! We saws it through the captain's telescope!'

Goodness me! **THE DEED** was performed!

What's that, reader?

You know not of which **DEED** we speak?

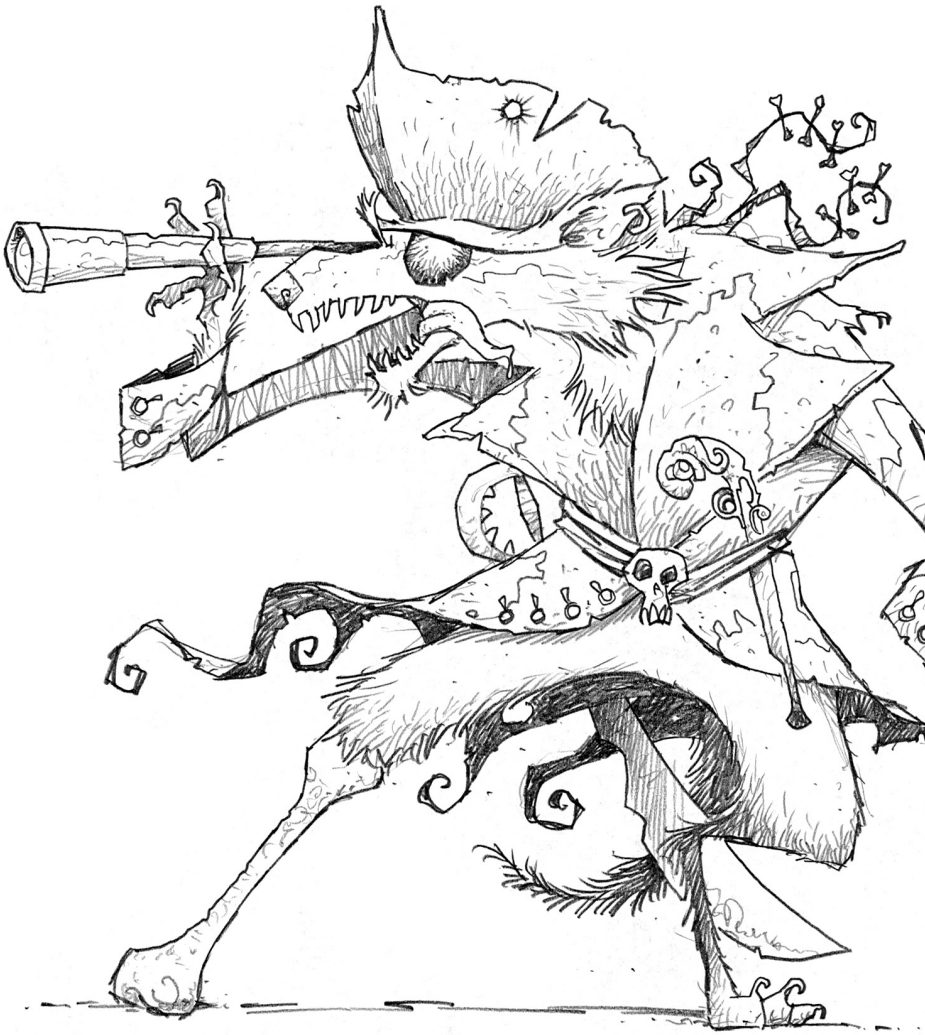
Of course not – how silly of me. You probably haven't spent years aboard a pirate ship. You probably haven't ever sat round a fire on a tropical beach finishing the last morsels of a freshly grilled parrot. Then, after the rum has run dry, heard the talk turn to whispered tales of the unfortunate children recruited to piracy after unknowingly performing **THE DEED**!

So let me take you back an hour, to the deck of the pirate ship

THE FEROSHUS MAGGOT

on which stands one **CAPTAIN IDRYSS EBENEZER SPLIT**.

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Split is a wolf.

A wolf with a pirate hat and a false leg carved from a human thigh bone. He has a rusty cutlass hanging from his belt and a loaded pistol hidden in his underpants, with no fear of the consequences! His left eye has long since been lost – burnt from his skull by a stray firework. His right eye is pressed to the end of a telescope. The telescope is focused on a strange hole in the thick fog that envelops the FeROShUS MAggOt – a hole through which he observes a different world from the one he knows.



A *hooman* world.

A world where young Mabel Jones is about to perform THE DEED: the ceremonial picking of Mabel Jones's nose by Mabel Jones's nose-picking finger.

'Has it been eaten yet?' the crew ask eagerly. 'Is THE DEED complete?'

'Not yet, lads. Not yet!'

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Mabel's fate is to be decided by the final destination of the bogey currently sitting on her finger. The finger that now pauses precariously between mouth and wall as Mabel makes the decision whether to eat or wipe.

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Will she eat it?

Finally she makes the decision. The very same decision that any person believing they were unobserved would make. The same decision being made across the world at this very moment by head teachers, policemen, dinner ladies and parents (but especially by head teachers).

She eats it!

Split allows himself a toothy grin. An extra pair of hands aboard ship could come in useful. At the very least, the child might fetch a modest sum at the next port.

He turns to Omynus Hussh and claps the loris on the back, laughing wickedly.

'Fetch your sack. For tonight you go child-bagging!'



In the bedroom of 23 Gudgeon Avenue, Mabel Jones climbed out of bed to find the source of the suspicious silence.

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Looking out of her window, Mabel could see the city was wrapped in thick greeny-grey fog. Only the tops of the tallest tower blocks could be seen.

What an odd night! She wasn't normally woken by a strange quiet. The city wasn't usually –

OUCH!

She had trodden on something.

A peanut!

Why would there be a peanut on her bedroom floor?

I don't even like peanuts, thought Mabel Jones. *Apart from the chocolate-covered ones, of course . . . And even then I only like the chocolate part.*

Oh! There was another.

And another.

This is strange!

Someone had left a trail of peanuts leading to the darkest corner of her room.

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She picked them up one by one.

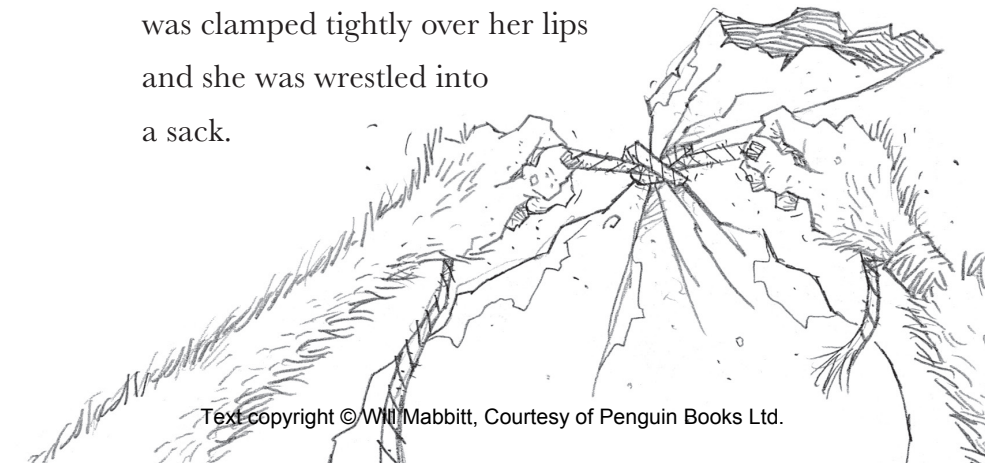
It's almost as though someone WANTS me to follow them.

Mabel scratched her armpit thoughtfully.

It's almost as though there is somebody in my room.

THERE IS SOMEBODY IN MY ROOM!

Mabel Jones turned to run for the door, but a strong, spindly hand grabbed at her from behind. She opened her mouth to call for help, but only got as far as the 'D' in 'Dad' before another hand was clamped tightly over her lips and she was wrestled into a sack.



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Skilful fingers tied a neat knot at the top.

The sack was lifted to the window, where a large pair of hairy arms grabbed it eagerly and pulled it deep into the fog. Then, pausing only to examine a Mabel-Jones-sized bite on his hand, Omynus Hussh climbed up on to the sill and leapt into the night.

Shortly afterwards the silence was broken. Above the usual noise of the busy street in the middle of the busy city, far away from the nearest port or shore, the tuneless singing of a rude sea shanty could be heard drifting on the last wisps of the clearing fog.

The neighbours turned up their TVs accordingly.

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