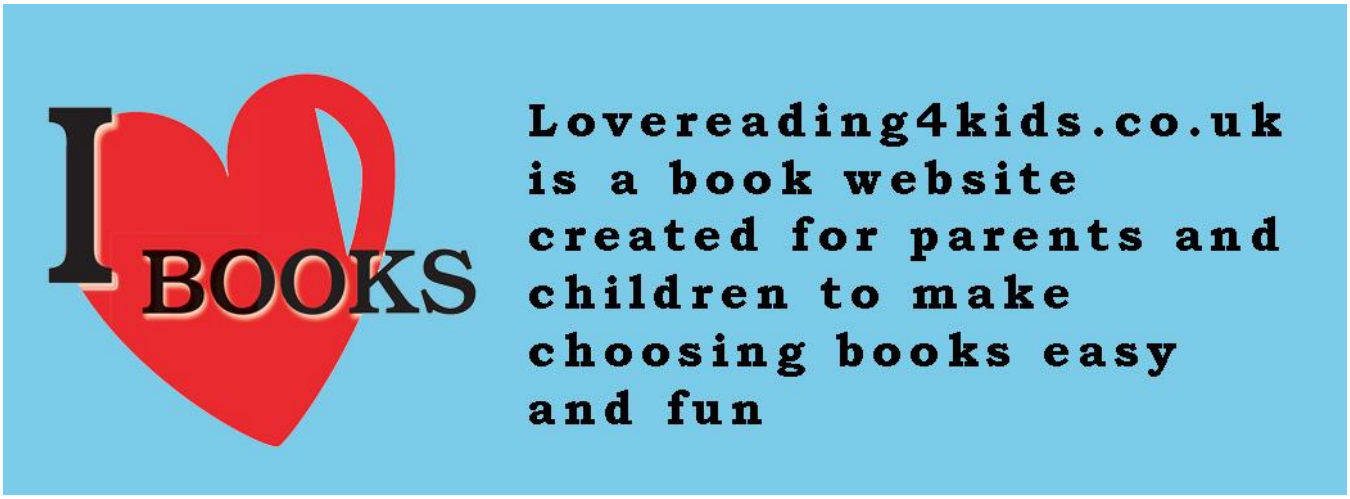

Opening extract from

Beaky Malone: The World's Greatest Liar

Written by

Barry Hutchison

Illustrated by

Katie Abey

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Please print off and read at your leisure.

For Moira – for all the babysitting and Boxing Day dinners … and for not shouting at me when I made your lights explode ~ BH

For The Guy with the Hat and our furry son, Baron Francis Squiggleface (the third) ~ Katie Abey

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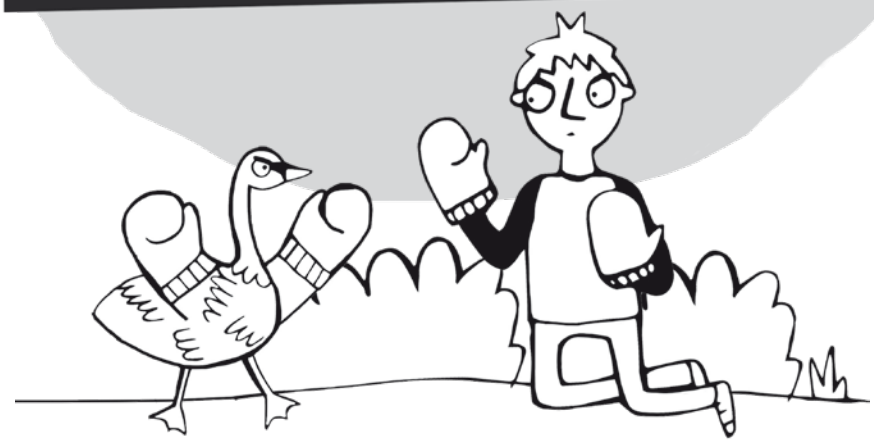
BEAKY MALONE

WORLD'S GREATEST LIAR



BARRY HUTCHISON

ILLUSTRATED BY KATIE ABEY

Stripes

CHAPTER 1

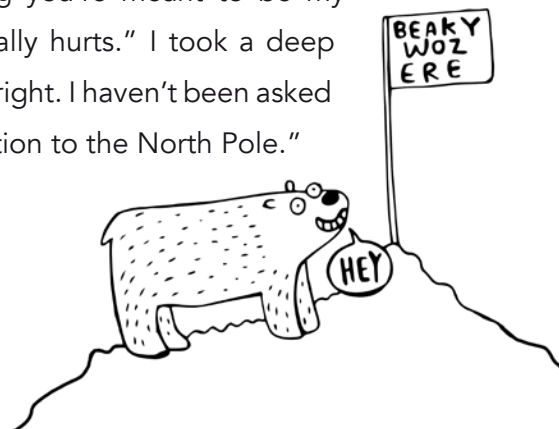
MEET BEAKY

Theo heaved his bag higher on his shoulder and shot me a doubting look.

"You don't believe me, do you?" I said.

He shook his head. "That you've been asked to go on an expedition to the North Pole?" he snorted. "No, Beaky, not really."

I pulled a wounded face. "That hurts, Theo," I said. "Considering you're meant to be my best friend, that really hurts." I took a deep breath. "But you're right. I haven't been asked to go on an expedition to the North Pole."



"Knew it," Theo said.

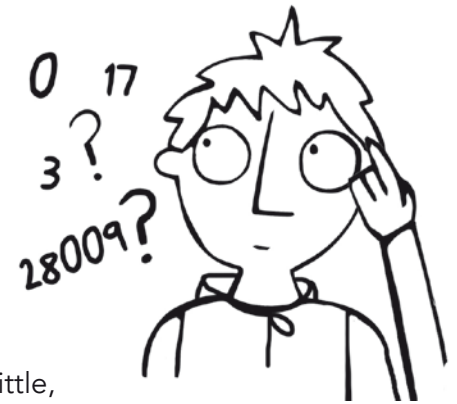
"I've been asked to *lead* the expedition."

"Oh, *right*," Theo replied. "Well, that's much more believable."

"Apology accepted," I said, as we rounded the corner leading on to our street. Theo lived three doors down from me, and we'd walked to and from school together since Reception class. We'd been the same height when we'd started, but these days he towered above me like a beanpole.

"I didn't apologize!" Theo grumbled.

"You apologized in your mind," I said. "Trust me. I'm moderately psychic."



"Course you are,"

Theo laughed. "What number am I thinking of?"

I tapped the side of my head with a finger. "Four."

Theo's eyes widened a little, then he shook his head. "Lucky guess."

"I knew you were going to say that," I told him. He grinned. "You're such a liar, Beaky."

"How dare you, sir!" I said, raising my fists. "Do you know what happened to the last person who called me a liar?"

"Yeah, nothing," Theo said. "It was me earlier this morning when you said that eating jam made dogs explode."

"It does!" I protested. "I read it in a book."

We stopped outside Theo's house. "Anyway, what about you?" I asked. "What are you up to this weekend?"

"Well, I can't compete with visiting the North Pole," Theo admitted. "So I'll probably just play Xbox and eat crisps."

I nodded. "Usual, then."

He vaulted over his gate and into his garden. "Pretty much. Enjoy the snow, Beaky. Watch out for polar bears."

"Oh, I'm not doing it," I said. "They wanted me to wear a jacket, so I said no. I never wear jackets."

"You're wearing one now," Theo pointed out.

"This is a waterproof coat," I said. "They're two very different things, Theo. Everyone knows that."

Theo laughed. "I stand corrected. See you tomorrow, then?"

"You provide the Xbox, I'll bring the crisps," I said. We did our complicated farewell handshake, which neither of us really knew how to do properly, then said our goodbyes. I grinned the rest of the way home. Xbox and crisps. This was going to be a brilliant weekend.

Or so I thought.

"So," said Mum, looking round the dinner table. "How did everyone's day go?"

Mum was smiling at us far more enthusiastically than usual. That, combined with the fact she'd made us a massive fry-up – which she only did on special occasions – told me something was up. I watched her closely, trying to figure out what it might be, but Mum could be pretty cagey when she wanted to be.

Dad smiled. "Today, I wrote a song about…"

He did a drumroll on the table with his fingers. "Toilet paper," he announced. He dipped a chip in his fried egg and sat back. "I know, I know, I can tell you're very impressed, but please … no autographs."

"Toilet paper? I bet it stinks," I said, grinning proudly at what was clearly an excellent joke. No one else seemed to get it, though.

"You take that back, Dylan," said Mum, using my real name as always. "Your dad works very hard writing his silly little tunes to put food on this table."

"Silly little tunes?" said Dad, gasping and clutching at his chest. "I've never been so insulted!"

Mum waved a hand dismissively. "You know what I mean."

Dad shrugged. "Yeah, fair enough."

She had a point, I suppose. Still, I wasn't convinced Dad worked *that* hard. The last jingle he'd written had been for a dog-food advert, and just went "Woof, woof, woof, woof, woof, woof," over and over again.

"Sorry, Dad," I said. "I'm sure your song's great."

Dad shook his head. "Oh, it isn't. It's terrible. But thanks, anyway."

"What about you, Jodie?" said Mum.

All eyes went to my sister who was slowly shoving beans around her plate with her fork. She looked up and tugged an earphone out of her ear. "What?"

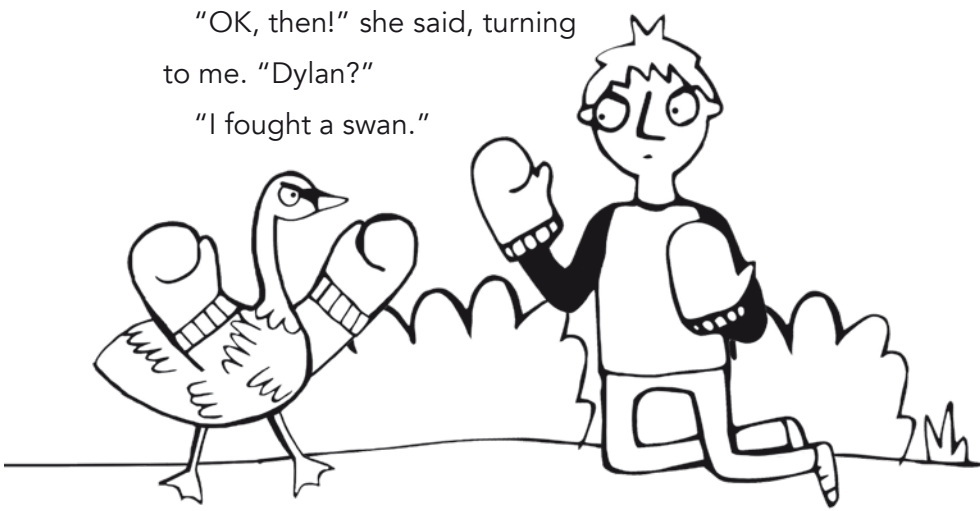
"How was your day?" said Mum.

"All right," she shrugged, then she put the earphone back in.

Mum kept smiling at her, expecting more. It didn't come.

"OK, then!" she said, turning to me. "Dylan?"

"I fought a swan."



Mum blinked. Clearly, she hadn't been expecting that. She glanced across to Dad, who rolled his eyes in response.

"Right, well. A productive day all round then," Mum said. She cleared her throat nervously, then reached over and tugged Jodie's earphones out.

"Hey!" Jodie protested.

"I got a bit of good news today," Mum announced, smiling far too broadly for it to be natural now. "Aunt Jas is coming to visit!"

Dad gasped.

Jodie groaned.

I spluttered into my glass, spraying orange juice up both nostrils. It was surprisingly refreshing.

"*What?*" asked Dad. "What do you mean, "Aunt Jas is coming to visit'?"

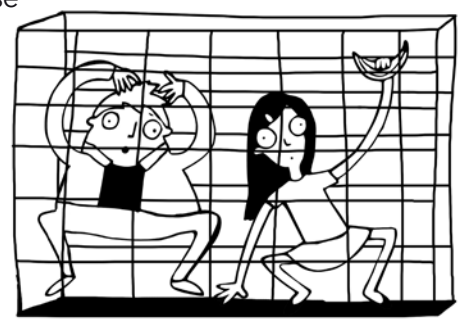
Aunt Jas is my aunt. The clue's in the name, really. She's Mum's sister, and a bit like Mum, only younger, darker-haired and much, much louder. The last time she'd visited had been over a year ago, and we were only now starting to recover from the ordeal.

Aunt Jas is a little bit … full on. She speaks at 100% volume all the time, and has a way of screaming when she laughs that sounds like fingernails being dragged down a blackboard. She and Mum always manage to rub each other up the wrong way, and are constantly trying to outdo one another. Her last visit had ended in them having a full-scale screaming match in the cinema. In front of 200 people. During the film.

I doubted Mum was looking forward to the visit, but she was doing her best to put a brave face on it. She popped a chip in her mouth and gave a shrug as she chewed. "I mean Jas is coming. For the weekend. Her and Steve and—"

"Not the kids," said Dad, his eyes widening in horror. "Please, not the kids."

"Of course she's bringing the kids," Mum tutted. "What else would she do with them?"



"Sell them to the zoo?" muttered Jodie.

"That's no way to talk about your cousins," Mum snapped. She was getting annoyed. Any minute now she'd start tapping her foot. Any minute after that, she'd explode. The tension needed to be defused and fast. Time to deploy some Beaky charm.

I blew the juice out of my nostrils and set my glass down on the table. "Well, I think it'll be nice having them here."

Dad and Jodie stared at me in disbelief. Even Mum blinked in surprise. "You've told some whoppers in your time, Beaky," said Jodie. "But that's got to be the biggest yet."

"Stop calling your brother 'Beaky'," said Mum.

"Everyone calls him Beaky."

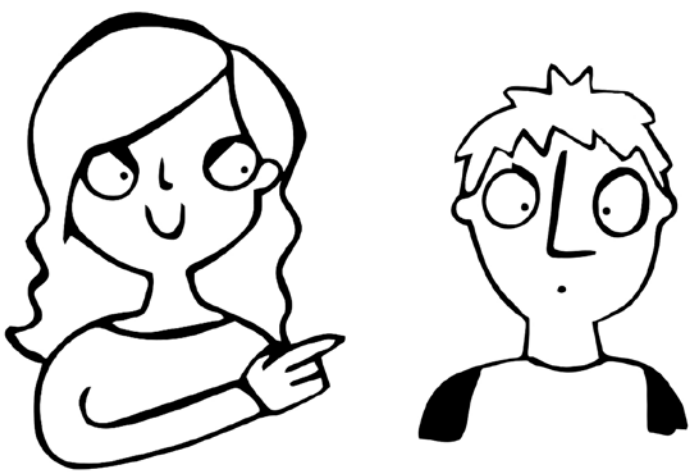
"Well, they shouldn't," Mum said, leaning over and giving my hand a comforting squeeze. "It's not his fault he's got a massive nose."

"I wouldn't say it's massive," I protested.

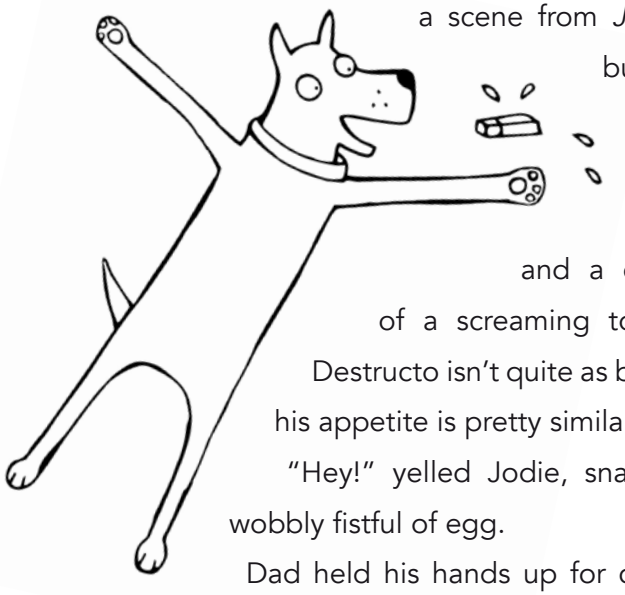
Jodie nodded. "It is. It's proper massive."

"It's statuesque," I said.

"It's *elephant*esque, more like."



I flicked my fork, firing a ketchup-coated chip in Jodie's direction. She ducked at the last moment, and our Great Dane, Destructo, leaped up from the floor and snatched it out of the air. It was a bit like a scene from *Jurassic Park*, but with a dog instead of a dinosaur, and a chip instead of a screaming tourist. While Destructo isn't quite as big as a T-rex, his appetite is pretty similar.



"Hey!" yelled Jodie, snatching up a wobbly fistful of egg.

Dad held his hands up for calm. "Cut it out, you two," he cried. "Everyone just calm down. Stop throwing food. Stop going on about Beaky's massive great nose and let's deal with the problem at hand."

He waited for Jodie to put her egg back on her plate (which she did, much to Destructo's disappointment), then took a bite of sausage. "Now," he said, chewing thoughtfully. "When are they coming?"

"Tonight," said Mum.

Now it was Dad's turn to choke. He seemed to inhale the sausage in one sharp breath. His eyes went wide and he frantically thudded at his chest, coughing and spluttering in panic.

"Stand back, I know the Heimlich manoeuvre," I announced, leaping up from the table. I didn't really know the Heimlich, obviously, but I'd seen someone do it on telly once and it didn't look all that difficult.

Wrapping my arms round him from behind, I heaved my dad to his feet. It turns out he's heavier than he looks, though, and I immediately toppled backwards, pulling him down with me. We hit the

ground with a *thud* and an *oof*. The sudden impact launched the lump of sausage high into the air, where it was immediately caught by a delighted Destructo, who had no trouble swallowing it at all.

Jodie leaned over the table and peered down at us. "So, that was the Heimlich, was it?"

"Advanced Heimlich," I wheezed as Dad rolled off me. "Just something I invented."

"Tonight?" Dad yelped, finally finding his voice. "Why are they coming tonight?"

"Wasps," said Mum.

Jodie, Dad and I all looked at one another.

"Everyone else heard her say 'wasps' there, right?" I asked.

"They've got a wasps' nest," Mum explained.

"They're not bringing it, are they?" I asked.

Mum tutted. "Don't be silly, Dylan. It's in their house. They can't get anyone to deal with it until Monday."

Dad's face went a funny shade of purple. "Monday? They're not staying until Monday, are they?"

"Of course not," said Mum. Dad seemed to relax a little, but it didn't last long. "They're staying till Tuesday."

"WHAT?!" cried Dad.

Mum smirked. "Not really. They're going home on Sunday."

Dad sat down in his seat and shifted uncomfortably. He looked at the rest of his sausage, then pushed the plate away. I knew how he felt. Aunt Jas's visit meant I could kiss goodbye to Xbox and crisps with Theo.

"I suppose it might not be that bad," Dad said. "It's only a couple of days."

"That's the spirit," said Mum, but she looked just as ashen-faced as Dad did. "And who knows? It might even be fun," she added.

"Fun?" Dad spluttered. He forced a smile. "I mean … fun. Yeah. Fun. You might be right."

As it turned out, though, she wasn't.

CHAPTER 2

AUNT JAS

We had cleared away the dinner plates and were all chipping away at slabs of a Wall's Viennetta (the minty one) when the doorbell rang. Destructo sprang to his feet and began barking his head off. Dad looked across at Mum and managed a thin smile.

"Here goes, then."

"Here goes," said Mum. She reached over and squeezed his hand.