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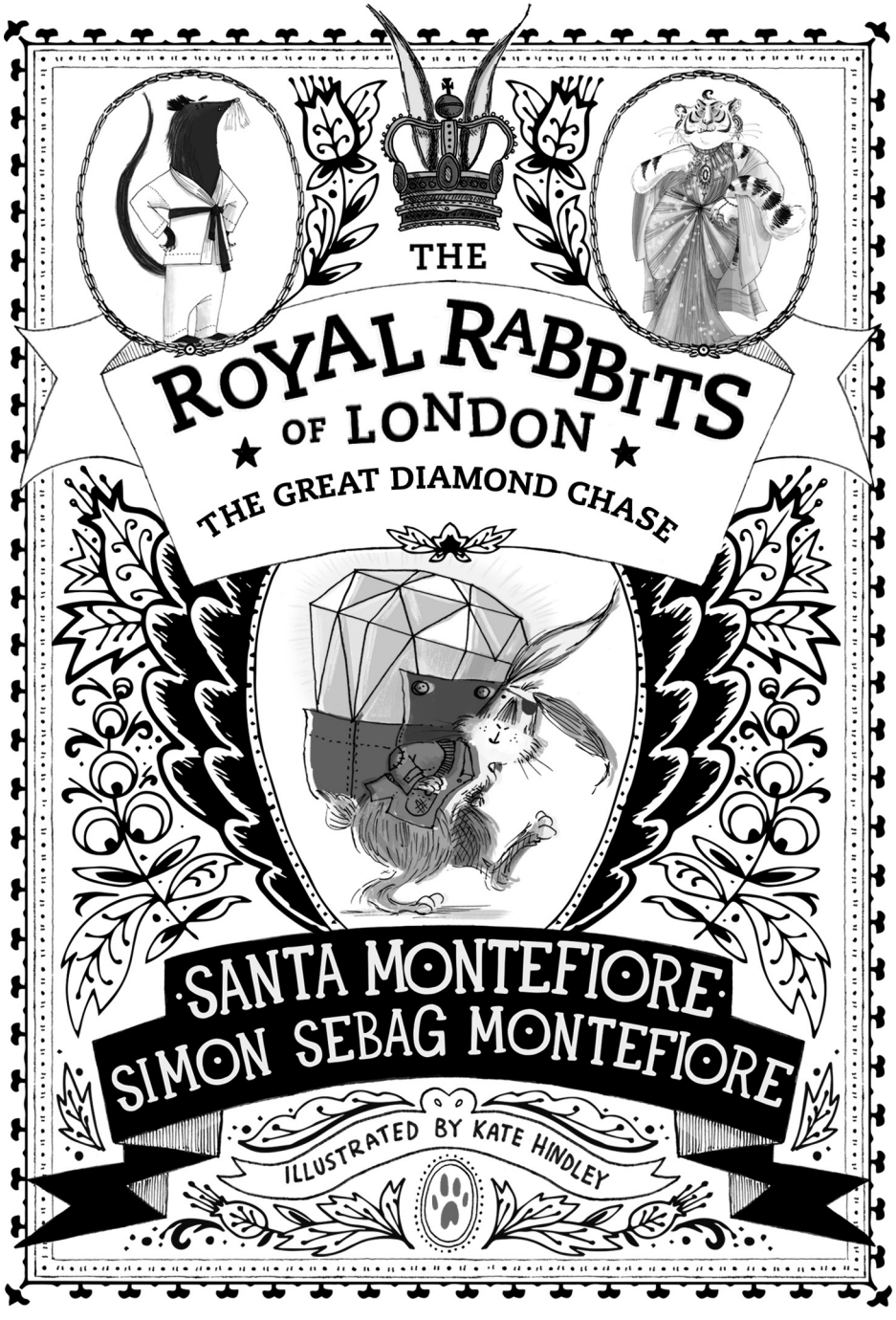
THE ROYAL RABBITS OF LONDON

THE ROYAL RABBITS OF LONDON:
ESCAPE FROM THE TOWER



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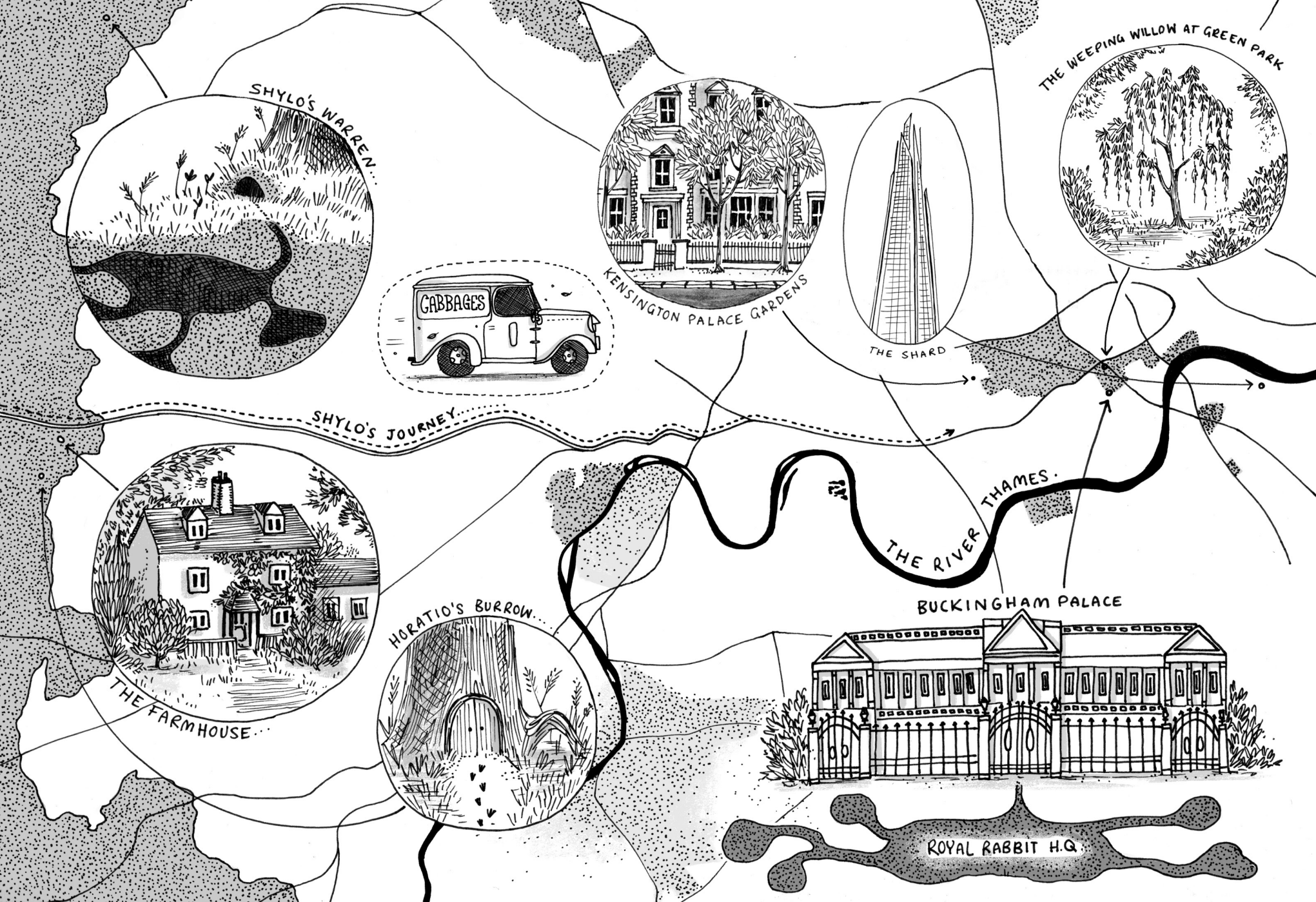
To Tara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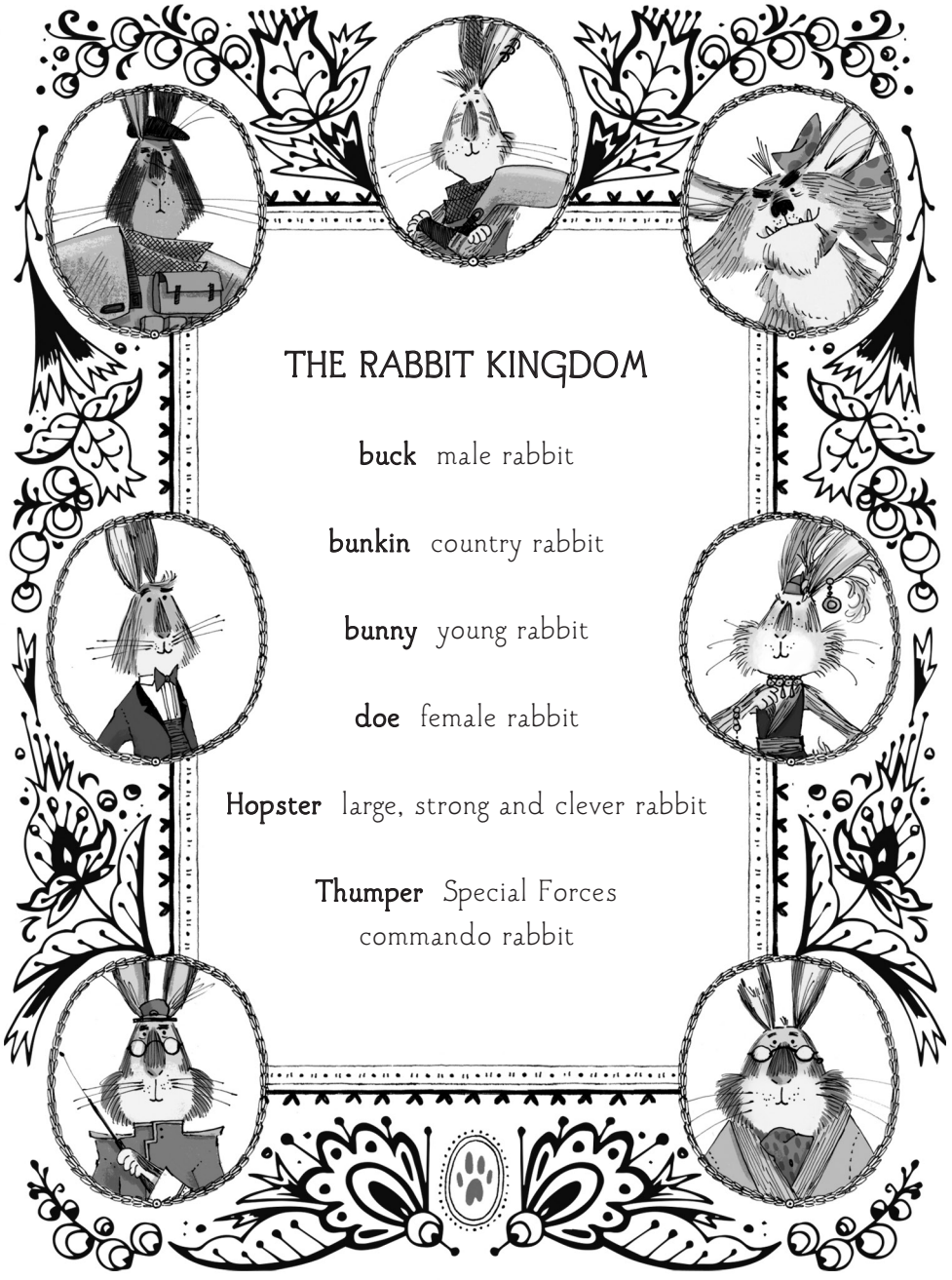


THE RABBIT KINGDOM

buck male rabbit

bunkin country rabbit

bunny young rabbit

doe female rabbit

Hopster large, strong and clever rabbit

Thumper Special Forces commando rabbit

CHAPTER ONE

An alarm screamed and lights flashed! Footmen ran and maids squawked! Royal corgis barked and police in black hurried to the scene! Blue lights flickered . . .

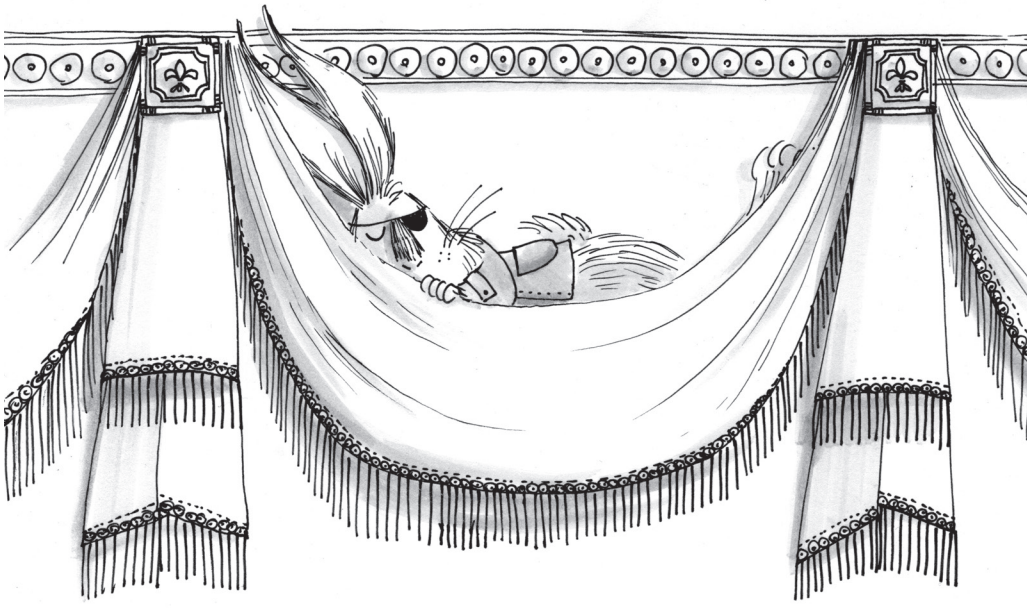
Buckingham Palace was in uproar!

But Shylo Tawny-Tail, the smallest of the Royal Rabbits, who was meant to be protecting the palace, was asleep on duty. He heard the faint sound of alarms and shouts in his dream, but didn't stir. Shylo had made himself a

snuggly cocoon up in the velvety pelmet of one of the royal curtains which had made a perfect hammock, and was having a lovely dream about a weak and feeble country bunny who had helped save the Queen of England from a vicious plot by the fearsome Ratzis. As a reward, that small bunny had been invited to join the Royal Rabbits of London, a secret society devoted to protecting the Royal Family and fighting evil across the world.

Shylo had eaten far too much at lunch - how could he say no to a third helping when cabbage was one of his favourite foods? - and with a belly full of delicious cabbage he'd become very sleepy indeed. So, even though he had only meant to close his eyes for a moment, he had been napping for most of his guard duty . . .

Now, stirred by all the rumpus, the little rabbit slowly began to wake up. 'Turn that horrible alarm off,'



he grumbled as the noise made his sensitive ears ache. Then he sat bolt upright and peered down from the curtain with his one good eye (the other, remember, was covered by a red eyepatch to correct his squint). Shylo's stomach cramped with panic as he watched the manic activity going on through the double doors at the opposite end of the state room. He realized something big had happened.

From his hiding place in the pelmet, he could see the King and Queen being escorted by police officers

into the Diamond Room on the other side of the corridor. Now you may already know that the Crown Jewels are kept under guard at the Tower of London - *everyone* does! What you may not know is that the Siberian Diamond, being so very valuable, is kept in a special room in the palace, near the Queen's private apartments.

Shylo gasped in dismay. *Oh no*, he thought, ears flopping over his forehead. *Not the diamond . . .*

Realizing it was his duty to investigate, he jumped from one pelmet to the next. He paused a moment as more panicking footmen and Secret Service agents ran past, then he slid down the curtain to the floor and hopped across the crimson carpet to hide behind the door frame. He looked across the corridor into the Diamond Room where the full horror of the drama was unfolding.

The King was scowling; the Queen was frowning;

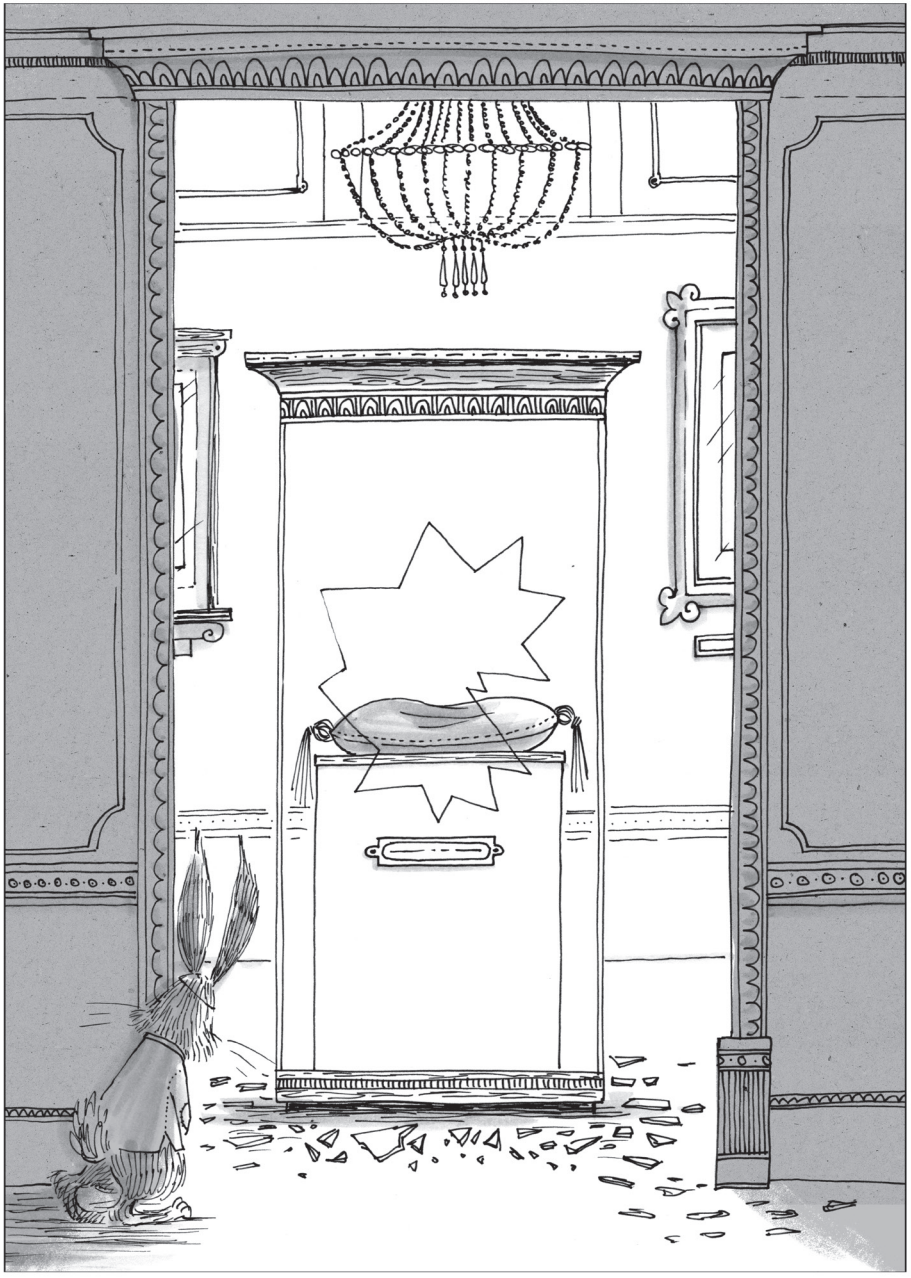
police officers were gravely shaking their heads; the Private Secretary, Sir Marmaduke Scantum, was wringing his hands; Lady Araminta Fortescue, the Queen's lady-in-waiting, was pointing . . . Shylo looked in the direction of her finger and finally saw what the commotion was all about. A display case stood surrounded by shattered glass; a small cushion in the centre lay empty . . . the Siberian Diamond was GONE!

Shylo blinked. Surely he was still dreaming. He *hoped* to the Great Rabbit in the sky that he was and he pinched himself just to make sure.

Ooooh! That hurt!

He wasn't dreaming. Someone had crept in and stolen the famous Siberian Diamond and he had been asleep the whole time . . .

The Siberian Diamond, dear reader, was not just any diamond, it was the biggest, most beautiful one in the



whole world, and the Queen's favourite jewel. However, it wasn't her favourite because of its size or value, but because of something far more extraordinary. You see, the gem was flawed, which meant it had many lines and waves and scratches inside, and when people stared into it they might see mountains, or rivers, or ships on the sea in the imperfections, the same way that you can make shapes out of clouds.

What no one knew, not even the Royal Rabbits, was that every time the Queen looked into the diamond, which she did whenever she felt a little weary, she would see a simple cottage, in the middle of a wood, and herself in the garden there, clipping the roses and enjoying the bees like an ordinary woman living an ordinary life. The sight soothed her and made her feel happy, momentarily taking her away from the often tiring life of duty and service (being Queen is not only about riding in a carriage and wearing a crown).

Once a year, on the first of May, the Queen allowed the Siberian Diamond to be taken to the Tower of London and put on display for one week only. Thousands of people queued up just to admire the beautiful jewel in its bullet-proof glass case, which, supposedly, made it impossible to steal. It was kept in a similar case at the palace, and was thought to be safe, but even unsinkable ships sometimes sink, and now Shylo realized that unstealable diamonds could be stolen too.

He watched with sadness as the Queen started to weep and the King went to comfort her. Shylo's ears drooped with guilt, his heart filling with shame that he had been sleeping while this outrageous robbery had taken place. It was all his fault. How he wished he could turn back the clock! He was so overcome that he didn't hear the growling of the Pack, the Queen's corgis, who had spotted the little rabbit and were

slowly sneaking up on him. The Pack liked nothing more than fat, juicy rabbits, but even a scrawny, bony rabbit like Shylo was worth chasing.

Suddenly, Shylo got a whiff of dog - not only did he have sensitive ears, but (luckily) a highly sensitive nose as well. He looked down the corridor and spotted the fearsome corgis advancing.

He glanced around quickly, trying to work out an escape route. The hidden entrance to the secret network of tunnels beneath the palace was on the other side of the corridor, which was both wide and exposed. But what choice did he have? He could scamper back up into the pelmet because the dogs wouldn't be able to climb the curtain after him, but this was no time to hide: he had to return to The Grand Burrow at once and inform the Royal Rabbits of the robbery.

Shylo glanced back at the weeping Queen. The

sorry sight gave him a rapid surge of courage, like a fire in his belly (where the cabbages had been). He held his breath and dashed into the corridor. The Pack were now very close indeed and he froze in terror for a moment at the sight of the ferocious dogs. Messalina, their yellowed-fanged leader, curled her lip and growled. Then she quickened her pace. With his heart in his mouth, Shylo darted across the carpet towards the potted plant that concealed the secret tunnel entrance.

The dogs were almost upon him. He could feel their breath on his fur. With a shaky paw, he reached behind the plant and pushed a hidden panel in the skirting board. The door opened and Shylo fell into the tunnel with relief. He shut the panel behind him just as Messalina's wet nose thrust itself into the gap, then withdrew with a yelp.

Shylo jumped on to a chute and slid all the way down into The Grand Burrow, which was the home of the Royal Rabbits of London, and his home now. He was safe, albeit a little bit shaken.