For Millie and Caroline, thank you for taking a chance on me – SH

For Rob – BM

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

Text copyright © Oxford University Press 2024
Illustrations copyright © Becka Moor 2024

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published in 2024

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, used for text and data mining, or used for training artificial intelligence, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

ISBN: 978-0-19-278831-3

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in China

The manufacturing process conforms to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.


HIGH IN MASQUE TOWER . . .
NORA!!
YOU CALLED, GRANDDADDY MASQUE?
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS? HAVE YOU?
MY EVIL EMPIRE IS IN CHAOS. CHAOS!
WE'RE LOSING MORE MONEY BY THE DAY . . .
WITH MORBID CRAWFORD IN PRISON, HIS RAVENS ON SECURITY AREN'T EVEN DOING THEIR JOBS ANY MORE!
I'M FINDING RAVEN FEATHERS EVERYWHERE.
AND NOW, I CAN'T EVEN RELY ON THE MAYOR FOR THAT NEW CONTRACT. SHE SAYS SHE
'NEEDS TO BE MORE CAREFUL AFTER THE CARROT DEBACLE'.
DON'T THINK I'VE FORGOTTEN THAT YOU WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT. IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO AIRLIFT CARROTS FROM BARGES.
THAT MAYOR IS SO KEEN TO KEEP HER SNOUT CLEAN SHE'S CLASSING ALL PETTY CRIME AS SERIOUS CRIME NOW.
IMAGINE, WE COULD ALL GO TO PRISON FOR DROPPING LITTER!


THIS IS YOUR FAULT. IT'S TIME YOU LEARNED SOME GOOD OLD-FASHIONED VALUES LIKE RESPECT FOR YOUR ELDERS AND BASIC ACCOUNTANCY AND–
GET YOUR HEAD OUT OF THOSE SILLY BOOKS! READING. BAH!
BUT GRANDDADDY I HAVE TO READ THIS, IT'S HOMEWORK FROM SCHOOL–
ENOUGH!
I'VE ASKED YOUR BROTHERS TO KEEP AN EYE ON YOU. LET'S SEE IF THEY CAN STEP UP AND BE THE GRANDKIDS I NEED.
THEM?
SERIOUSLY? THEM?
PLEASE JUST GIVE ME ONE MORE CHANCE. I CAN SAVE YOUR EVIL EMPIRE.
OH, REALLY? AND I SUPPOSE YOU HAVE A BUSINESS PLAN READY TO GO?
I DO.
HE HUH EGH HGH HE.
IS THAT YOUR EVIL LAUGH?
YOU SOUND LIKE A GHOST WITH A SORE THROAT.
Business Plan
YOU MAY HAVE JUST GUESSED MY GHASTLY IDEA.
NOW, GRANDDADDY, IF YOU'LL JUST LET ME EXPLAIN . . .





Reggie flicked the button on the remote control and changed the channel for the fourth time in twenty-three seconds. He was met with a chorus of groans from his family who were squeezed on the couch next to him.

'Just pick a channel,' his big sister Lettice moaned.

'Your sister is right,' Dad said. 'You've been flicking through news channels back and forth and it's making me a bit dizzy.'

'Me too,' Mum agreed. 'Seeing all the news on all the channels is not good for my nerves.'

Reggie pinged back to the news channel the Rabbit family usually watched and settled back against the plump cushions of the couch.

'I don't understand where Detective Fox is,' he said, mainly to himself. 'Who is keeping the city safe?'

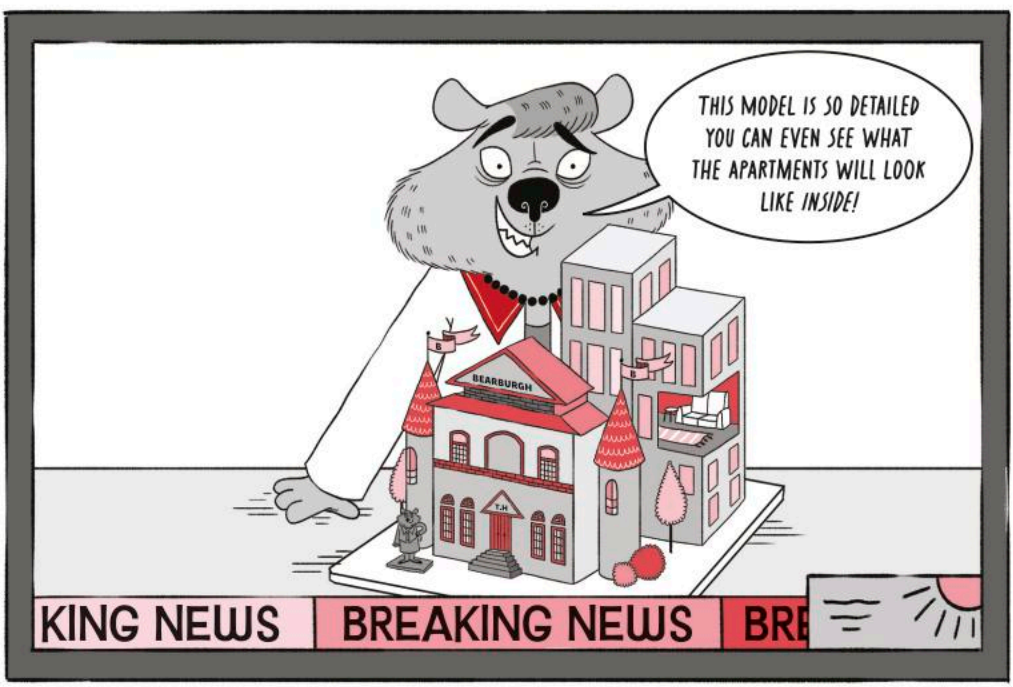
It had been weeks since Reggie and his best friend Pipsquark had teamed up with Detective Fox and his partner Nancy, to solve the Great Carrot Heist. But since then, there had been no news of the great detective at all.

Reggie knew better than to assume that Bearburgh was now completely crime-free, and he suspected that the Masque family were planning their next move.

The TV screen was filled with Mayor Bear's massive head. Reggie couldn't help stifling a yawn as the mayor

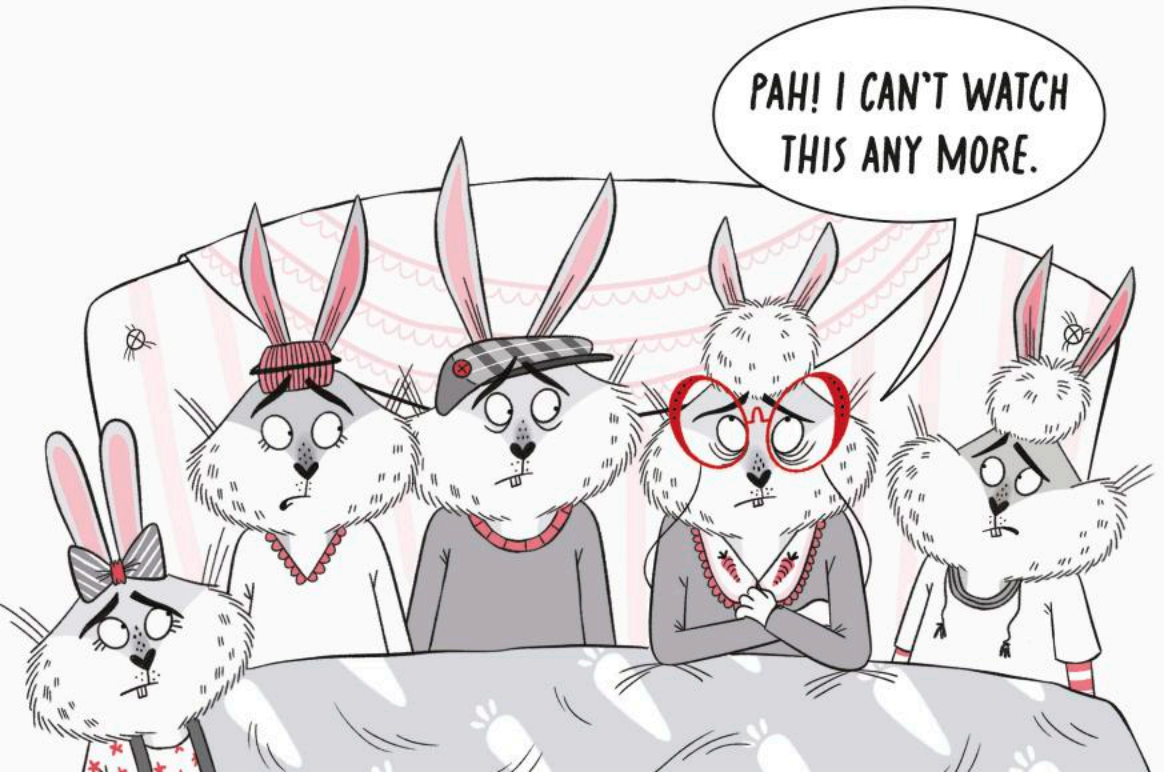
talked about refurbishments to the town hall and all the new apartment buildings she was planning to build. She even showed off a model of the project.

'. . . Beaver Builders will be starting with the town hall. Unfortunately, the roof is leaky and the original building is damaged as a result.'



'Isn't that the roof that Masque Industries were responsible for constructing?' the reporter asked.

Mayor Bear waved a paw as if brushing off the question. 'I don't like to play the blame game. Mayor Bear is a fair mayor! I'm here to fix problems and we have a housing problem that I'm about to fix with a host of brand-new luxury apartments.'



All eyes of the Rabbit family were on Granny, who they all thought had dozed off.

'Who does she think she is?' Granny muttered. 'She's building these flash new apartment buildings, but regular folk can't afford them!'

Reggie opened his mouth to say something, but Granny Lavender continued. 'This is exactly what happened in my day and is exactly the reason we left the city and set up here in Little Critter.'

'Little Critter's not so bad,' Lettice said, soothingly.

'It's not,' Granny Lavender said quietly. 'But it would have been nice to have a choice about leaving. We were pushed out of our homes by people like her. If anyone needs me, I'll be working on my book.' She bundled up her knitting and left the room.

Reggie's mouth fell open. He wasn't sure he'd ever

seen his grandmother this upset before.

'What's got her carrots in a twist?' Dad said.

'And what's this about writing a book?' Mum asked.

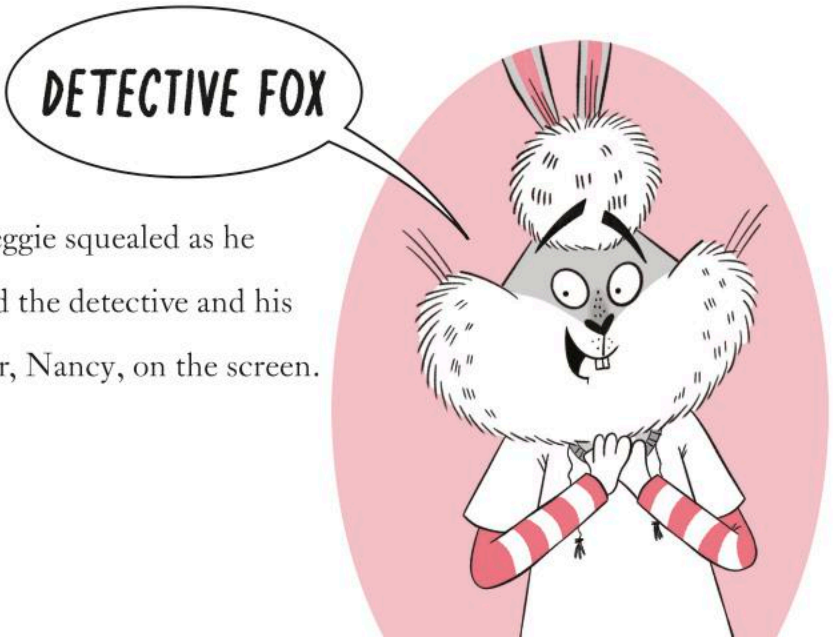
'Isn't it a story about history or something?' Lettice said.

'I think it's about being old,' Dad said, knowledgeably.

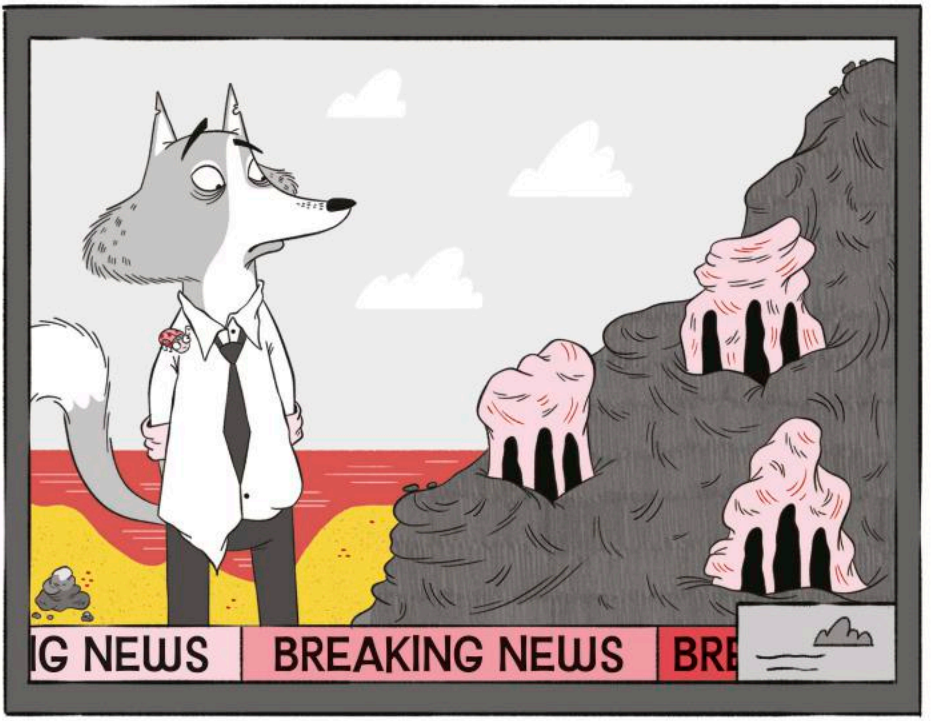
Reggie sighed. His family never paid attention—they would all make terrible detectives.







Reggie squealed as he spotted the detective and his partner, Nancy, on the screen.



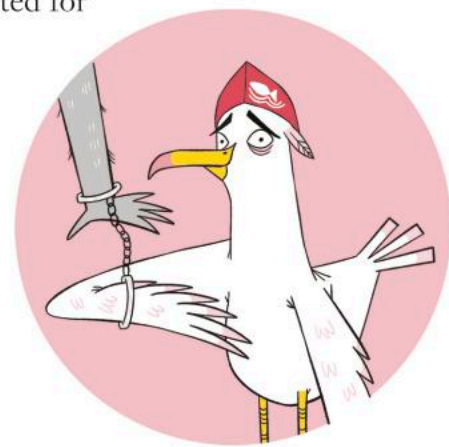
They were standing on a street beside Seagull Rock, a huge seagull housing estate on the edge of Bearburgh City. Reggie recognized it from photos Pipsquark had shown him of her holiday at the coast last year.

'Ooooo,' Lettice mocked, 'it's Reggie's hero!'

'Shhhhh,' Reggie hushed as the news reporter spoke

and a picture of a kind-looking old seagull flashed on the screen.

'. . . Mr Gabbiano, a local fish and chip shop owner and former activist, has been arrested for selling out-of-date chips, which we are now hearing, were more than likely stolen,' Cattryn Catkin reported.



On the screen the picture of Mr Gabbiano had disappeared and now Cattryn Catkin was standing beside Detective Fox and Nancy, ready to interview them. Mayor Bear was beside them, smiling at the camera.

Reggie leaned forward, so close that his nose almost touched the screen.


TELL US, NANCY, HOW DID YOU CATCH THE CRIMINAL SEAGULL IN THE ACT?
WELL, WE DID WHAT EVERY GOOD DETECTIVE TEAM DOES . . .
WE FOLLOWED THE EVIDENCE.
THAT WAS ALL THANKS TO MY ORDERS ON CLEANING UP CRIME IN THE CITY. I KNOW SOME OF YOU FELT LET DOWN AFTER THE CARROT HEIST BUT I'M HERE TO TELL YOU ALL THAT . . .
I'M THE MAYOR THAT CLEANS UP CRIME!
MAYOR BEAR IS A FAIR MAYOR.

The screen quickly flashed to a weather update for the coming week.

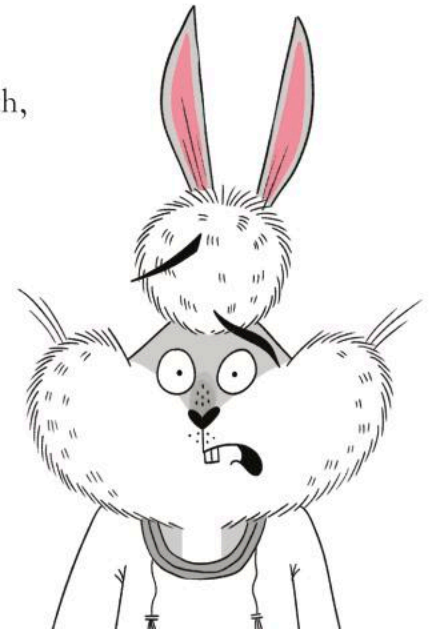
Reggie was aghast.

What was that?

How could the greatest detectives in Bearburgh, maybe even the world, be on the case of a criminal seagull who sold old chips?! What had happened to foiling master criminals? What had happened to cracking the greatest conundrums of Bearburgh? What had happened to the detectives who helped solve the Great Carrot Heist?

'You'll want to shut your mouth, Reggie, or you might catch flies,' Mum said.

Reggie hadn't realized his mouth was still hanging open in disbelief.



'What's so important about some old chips?' Lettice scoffed. 'I'm sure there are actual crimes that those detectives should be solving.'

'Now, now, Lettice,' Dad interrupted. 'Remember how upset we were as a rabbit community during the Great Carrot Heist? Perhaps chips are the same for seagulls.'

Reggie was unable to say a word. For the first time in a long time—maybe ever—he actually agreed with his sister.

