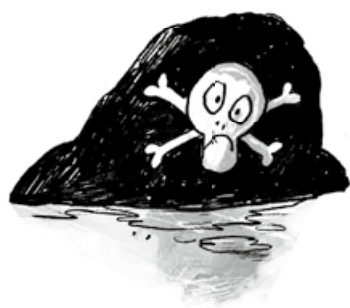




For Alfie - J. B.

For my nieces Iris, Rose and Dora - S. H.

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BUCK & EARS

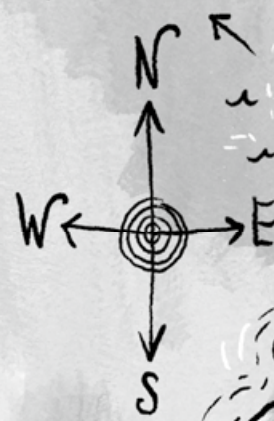
PIRATE DETECTIVES



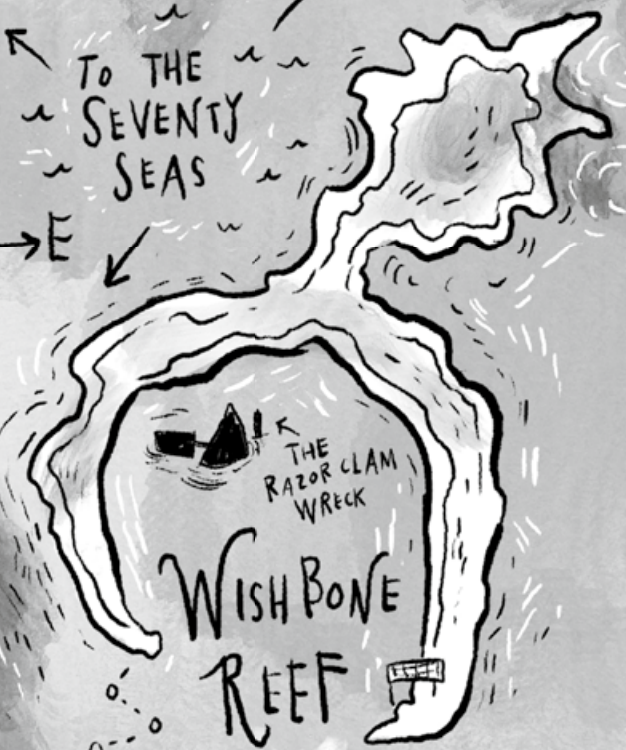
JENNIFER BELL

ILLUSTRATED BY *Sarah HORNE*

MAP



TO THE
SEVENTY
SEAS



WATERSKI
COURSE



VALENTINA'S
GROTALOW

PEARL
BEACH

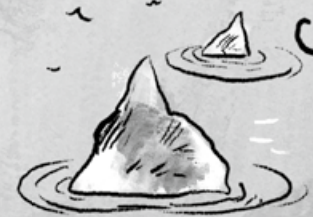
THE
CODFATHER'S
USED SHIPYARD



SCUTTLEFLINT
BAY

VERMICELLIS

CLEAR
WATER
COVE



Ahoy there, readers!

It is I, Agatha Fishty, the most famous mystery writer on the Seventy Seas! You may be confused to see me in someone else's book, but I am on holiday and I always read other writers' stories when I'm away.

I have found this tale about pirate detectives Buck and Ears to be most intriguing – and my books even feature in the story! I wonder if you can solve the case before Buck and Ears...

I'm not giving you the answers; you'll have to work them out for yourself. However, if you spot me again, it probably means there's a clue around. I'll talk to you at the end.

Happy sleuthing!

Agatha Fishty



CHAPTER ONE

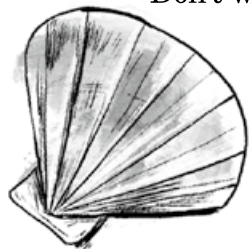


Pirate rubbish was always washing up on the shores of Scuttleflint Bay, but this was the first time a pair of rubbish pirates had swept in on the tide. They were strapped to a stinking barrel of sardines painted with the words **SHARK BAIT** in big white letters.

"Neptune's knickers!"

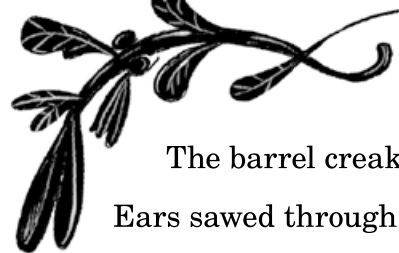
one yelled, thrashing against the ropes that bound him. He was a scrawny boy with dark freckles, and wore a scarlet jacket and black-buckled boots. His pirate captain's hat fell off as the barrel rolled forward, flipping him upside down. "We need to break free before someone sees us, Ears. This is so humiliating!"

A scruffy grey rabbit wearing baggy trousers and a striped shirt was fastened to the other side of the barrel. As they cartwheeled over, she grabbed a clam shell off the beach.



"Don't worry, Buck. I'll cut us loose in no time."

As always, Buck was grateful to have Ears with him. She was the sort of best friend you could rely on in an emergency, which was exactly why he had asked her to be his first mate when he'd taken his first-ever pirate captain's job.

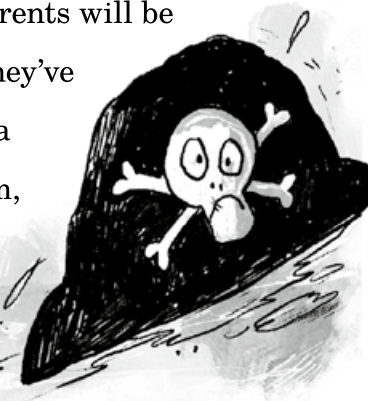


The barrel creaked and rocked as Ears sawed through the ropes with her shell. Eventually there was a loud *snap*. The pressure around Buck's chest released and he fell head first into the sand.

"Freedom!" Ears spluttered, spitting out a washed-up old flip-flop. She hopped upright and her whiskers jumped when she saw Buck. His hair was sopping wet, and mangy clumps of seaweed protruded from his pockets. Glancing down at her dripping clothes, she cringed.

"We look like we've been dragged through a storm backwards. Are you all right?"

"No," Buck fretted. His insides twisted with worry as he collected his pirate hat off the beach and shook it clean. "I can't believe our very first crew mutinied against us! My parents will be furious when they find out. All they've ever wanted is for me to become a fearsome pirate captain like them,



and I've failed on my maiden voyage." He sniffed and wiped his nose on his sodden jacket.

Ears offered a sympathetic smile. "I know you might feel awful now, but try to look on the bright side: at least you didn't get eaten by sharks or piranhas or razor-toothed sea muffins!"



Buck gave her a half-smile. One of the qualities he admired about Ears was her eternal positivity. Her family were famous for being the best ship workers in the Seventy Seas, but she

didn't seem worried that she'd been fired from her first job too. Buck wished he could be as cheerful as Ears, but nothing was going to lift his spirits right now. He gazed out at the ocean, remembering the moment their crew had turned against them. Their voices whirled through his head, haunting him like ghosts.



Buck shook his head. What was he going to do? He was ten years old; he'd spent his entire life training to be a pirate captain and now he'd failed at his first attempt.

He looked about miserably. "Where even are we?" he moaned.

Ears nodded towards a sign that read



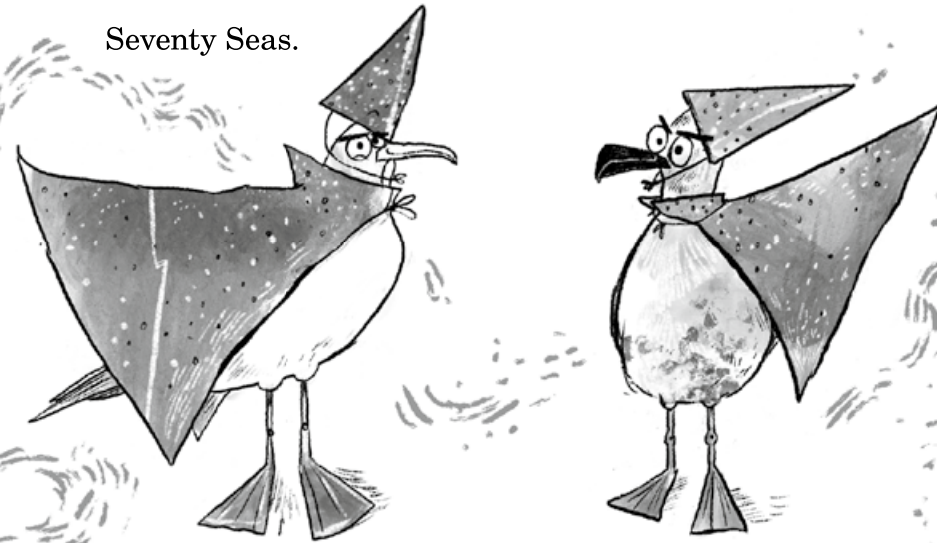
"I think it's a pirate town," she replied. "I've heard my siblings talk about it."

Buck didn't bother asking which siblings. Ears had seventy-four brothers and sisters, and Buck always forgot their names.

"*Pee-eww!* What's that stench?" squawked a voice overhead. "It smells like mouldy fish guts!"

Sand swirled into the air as a pair of beady-eyed seagulls landed on the beach beside them. One had speckled brown feathers; the other was

snowy white with a sharp yellow beak. Both were wearing sequined capes and glittery party hats that sat at odd angles on their heads. Buck groaned. A pair of nosy seagulls was all they needed. They were the biggest gossips on the Seventy Seas.



The white gull covered his nostrils with his wing and squinted curiously at Buck and Ears. "I know you! Aren't you Charlie Black-Buckle and Henrietta Sharp?"

"We prefer our nicknames: Buck and Ears," Buck replied, frowning warily at Ears.



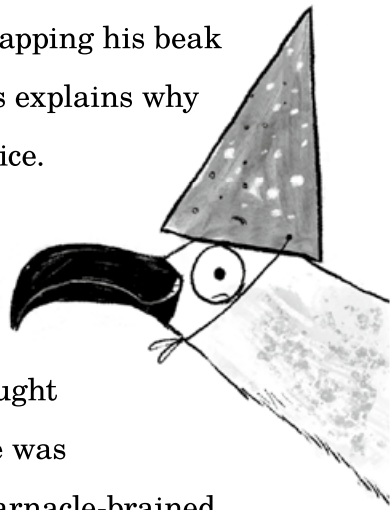
"The last I heard, you'd both set sail to make your fortune at sea," the brown-feathered gull chirped excitedly, pecking seaweed from Buck's sopping hair.

"Not going well?"

"Aha!" the white gull cried, tapping his beak against the sardine barrel. "This explains why you both smell like rotten fish juice. You've been thrown overboard! Mutiny much?"

Heat rose to the surface of Buck's cheeks. Just when he thought things couldn't get any worse, he was about to be teased by a pair of barnacle-brained seagulls.

Luckily Ears came to his rescue. "Will you look at the sun! Is it that time already?" she said, pointing at the sky.



"We really must get going. People to rob, places to plunder!" She grabbed Buck's sleeve and dragged him briskly up the beach, away from the seagulls. "Come on, let's get out of here," she hissed. "Quick."

"Mutiny on their *first* voyage!" the white-feathered gull cawed as Buck and Ears hurried away. "They've got to be the *worst* pirates ever."

"The *worst*! They're going to be the talk of the glitter gullabaloo tonight!"

"Oh, yes! What a party it will be! You look fabulous, Janet."

As the birds took to the air with their sequined capes fluttering behind them, Buck's heart sank. In a few hours, every seagull in the Seventy Seas would know what had happened.

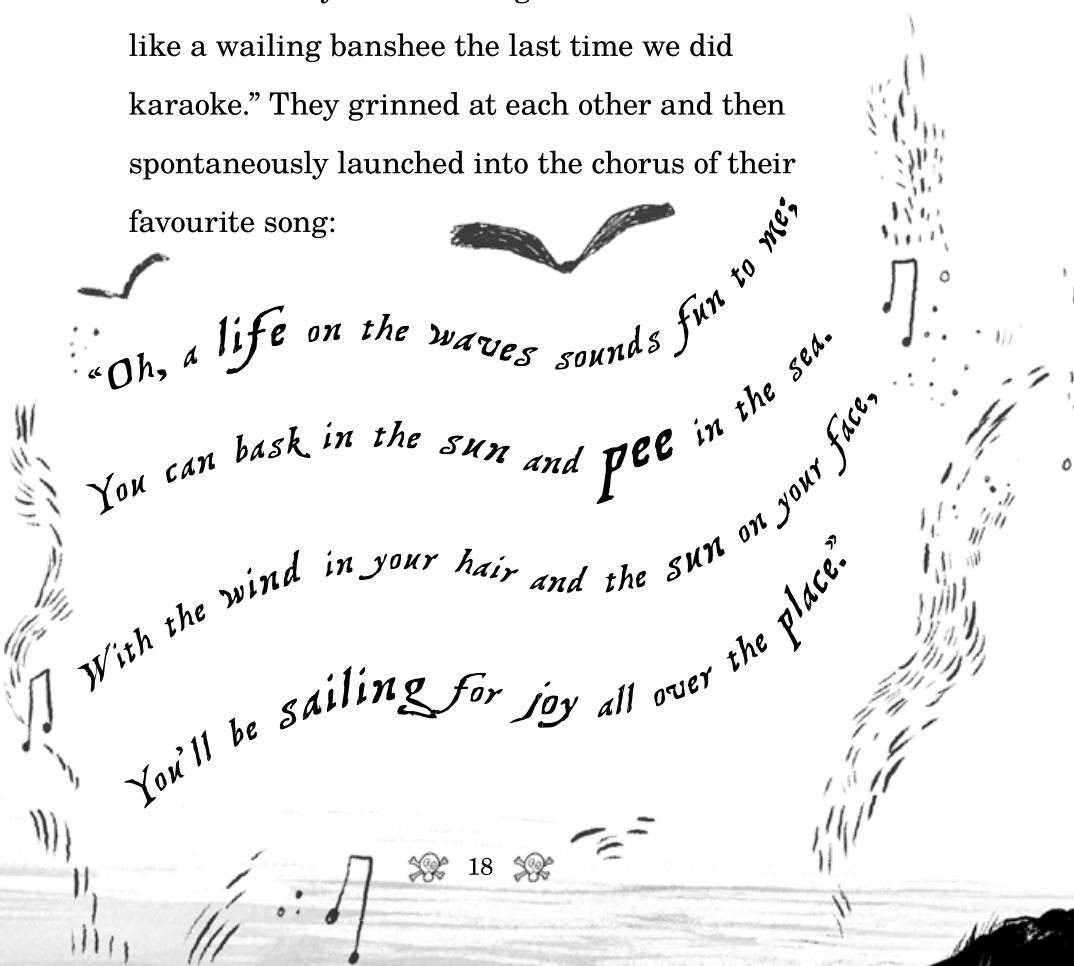
"No crew is ever going to work for me after this," he muttered. "My career as a pirate is over."

"I didn't much care for pirate life anyway," Ears said cheerily. "Shouting, brawling and

stealing are not for me. Give me a hammock and a good Agatha Fishty detective novel any day.”

Buck shrugged. “I suppose I’m not suited to piracy either. The crew were right: I *am* too polite and I *do* have excellent personal hygiene. Plus, I’m terrible at singing sea shanties.”

“You really are!” Ears agreed. “You sounded like a wailing banshee the last time we did karaoke.” They grinned at each other and then spontaneously launched into the chorus of their favourite song:



“Oh, a life on the waves sounds fun to me,
You can bask in the sun and pee in the sea.
With the wind in your hair and the sun on your face,
You’ll be sailing for joy all over the place.”

They both burst out laughing.

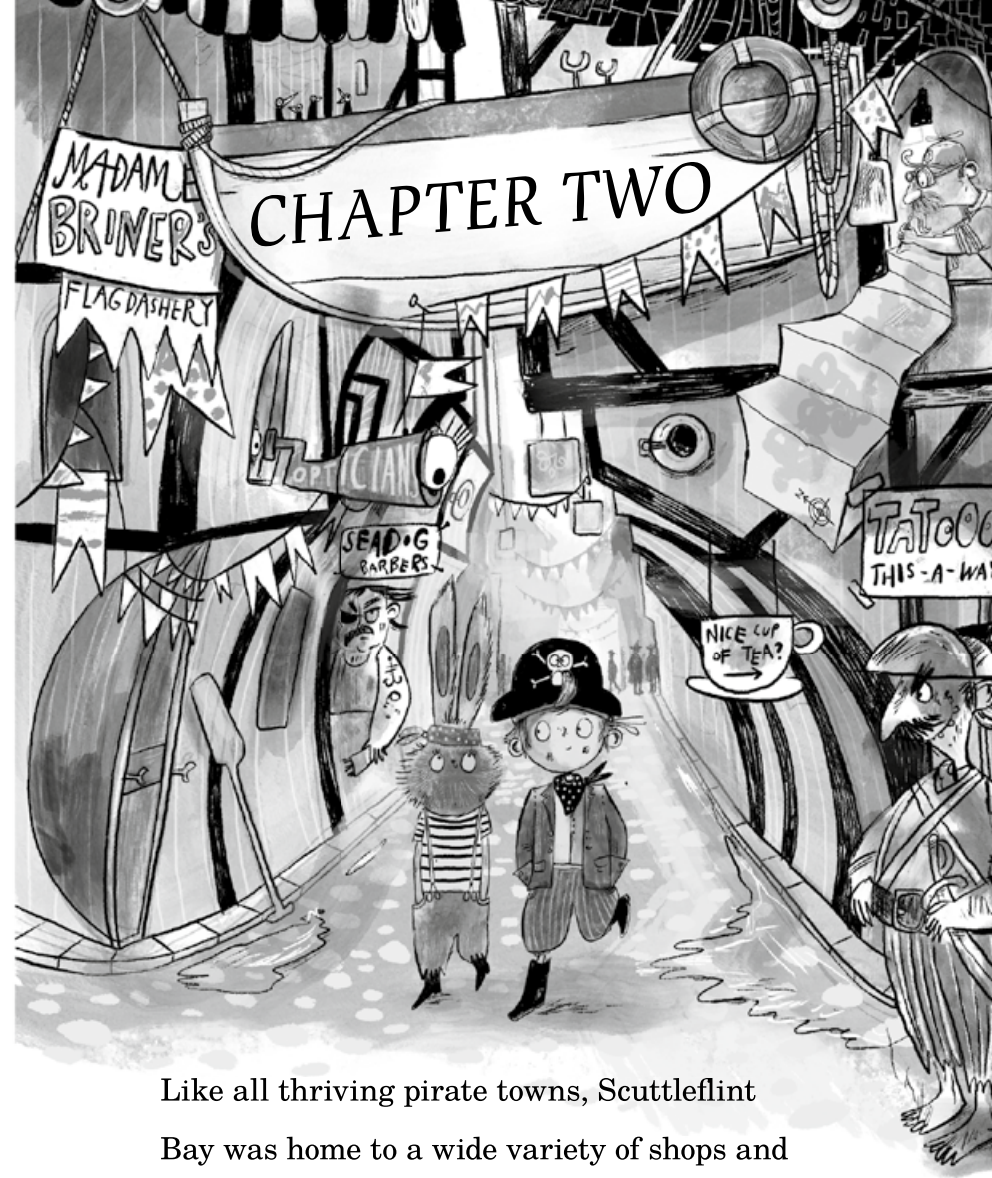
“Anyway,” Ears said, “you know what they say: ‘You can’t control the wind, but you can adjust your sails.’”

“Who says that?” Buck asked.

“Some old crocodiles near Gunpowder Lagoon, I think. The point is, now that our pirate careers seem to be over, we just need a change of direction.” Ears shook her fluffy tail enthusiastically. “There must be other professions better suited to our skills. Come on, let’s head into Scuttleflint Bay and see if there are any vacancies. We won’t return home until we’ve found new jobs!”

With an ever-growing flock of glittery seagulls circling above them, Buck and Ears trudged up the beach towards a parade of strange buildings constructed from old fishing boats,

driftwood and netting. Perhaps with a bit of luck, Buck thought hopefully, in Scuttleflint Bay they'd be able to turn their fortunes around.



Like all thriving pirate towns, Scuttleflint Bay was home to a wide variety of shops and businesses. As Buck and Ears wandered along the high street, they saw mapmakers,