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opening extract from

Pinocchio

written by

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chapter 2

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said the carpenter, still too weak to get up off the floor.

A sprightly old man stepped into the shop. His real name was Geppetto, but when the local children wanted to tease him, they called him Maisy because his yellow wig was exactly the colour of maize porridge.

Geppetto was very short-tempered, and calling him Maisy was a good way to drive him wild. He'd fly into a rage straight away, and then there was no holding him back.

"Good day, Mr Antonio," Geppetto said. "What are you up to down there on the floor?"

"I'm teaching ants the alphabet," snapped the carpenter. "And what brought you here, Mr Geppetto?"

"My legs," Geppetto replied, to get his own back. "But seriously, Mr Antonio," he went on, "I came to ask you a favour."

"Ask away," the carpenter said, as he struggled into a kneeling position.

"I had an idea this morning," Geppetto explained.

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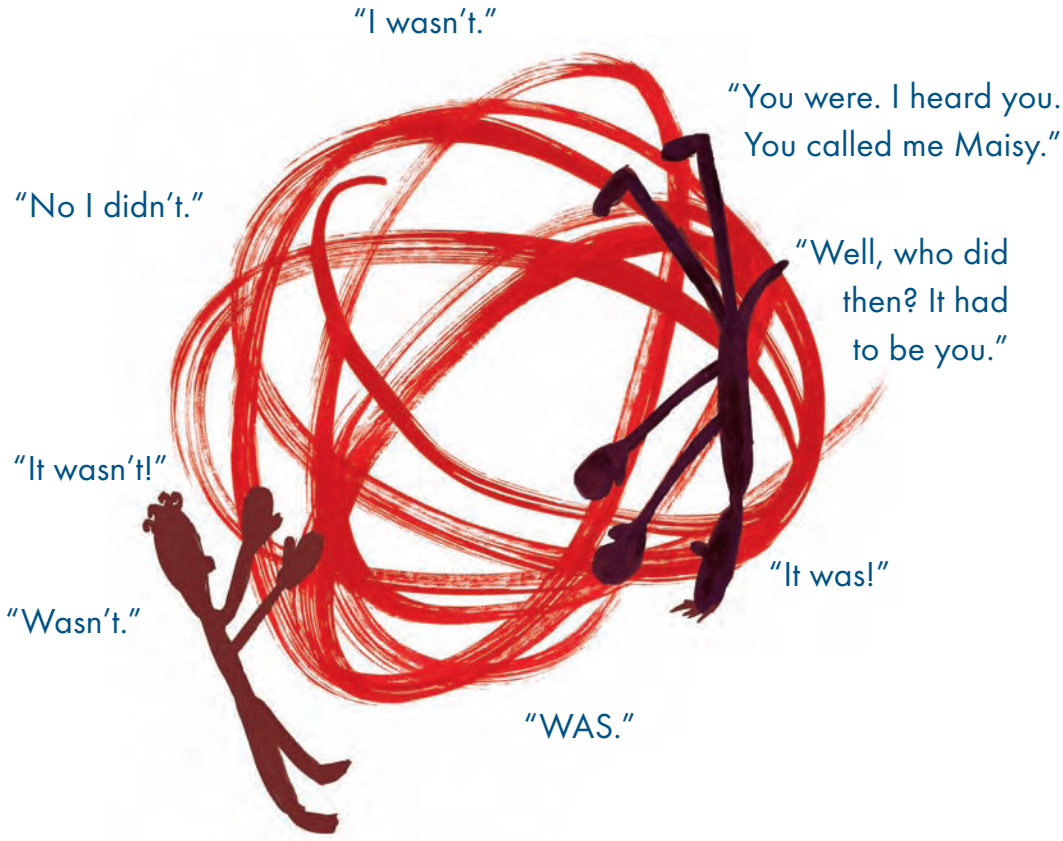
"Let's hear it."

"I thought I'd make myself a wooden puppet. But not just any old puppet. I thought I'd make an amazing puppet. A puppet that would be able to dance. A puppet that could fence. A puppet that could do somersaults. Then I'd travel the world, showing it to the public, and earn my crust of bread that way. What do you think?"

"Great idea, Maisy!" cried the mysterious little voice that had frightened Mr Cherry earlier.

When he heard the word "Maisy", Geppetto turned bright red.

"What are you calling me names for?" he yelled at the carpenter.



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Having worked themselves up into a rage, they moved on from words to actions and flew at each other, punching, scratching and biting.

At the end of the fight, Antonio was left with Geppetto's yellow wig in his hand. His own salt-and-pepper hairpiece was firmly clamped between Geppetto's teeth.

"Give me back my wig," said Mr Cherry.

"You give me back mine, and we'll forget the whole business."

So the two old men exchanged hairpieces, shook hands and swore they would be friends for ever.

"Now tell me," the carpenter said, as a sign that peace was restored. "What was this favour you wanted?"

"I wondered if you'd let me have a piece of wood. To make my puppet with."

Mr Cherry was delighted to help. He hurried over to his bench to fetch the log that had given him so much trouble. But just as he was about to hand it over to his friend, it jerked violently out of his grasp and landed painfully against Geppetto's bony shins. "Ouch!" cried Geppetto. "Is that how you usually give presents, Mr Antonio? You almost broke my leg!"

"It wasn't me, I swear."

"Who do you think did it then – me?"

"The log."

"I'm well aware it was the log, but you threw it!"

"I didn't!"

"Liar!"

"I'm warning you, Geppetto, I'm starting to feel like calling you Maisy..."

"Jackass!"

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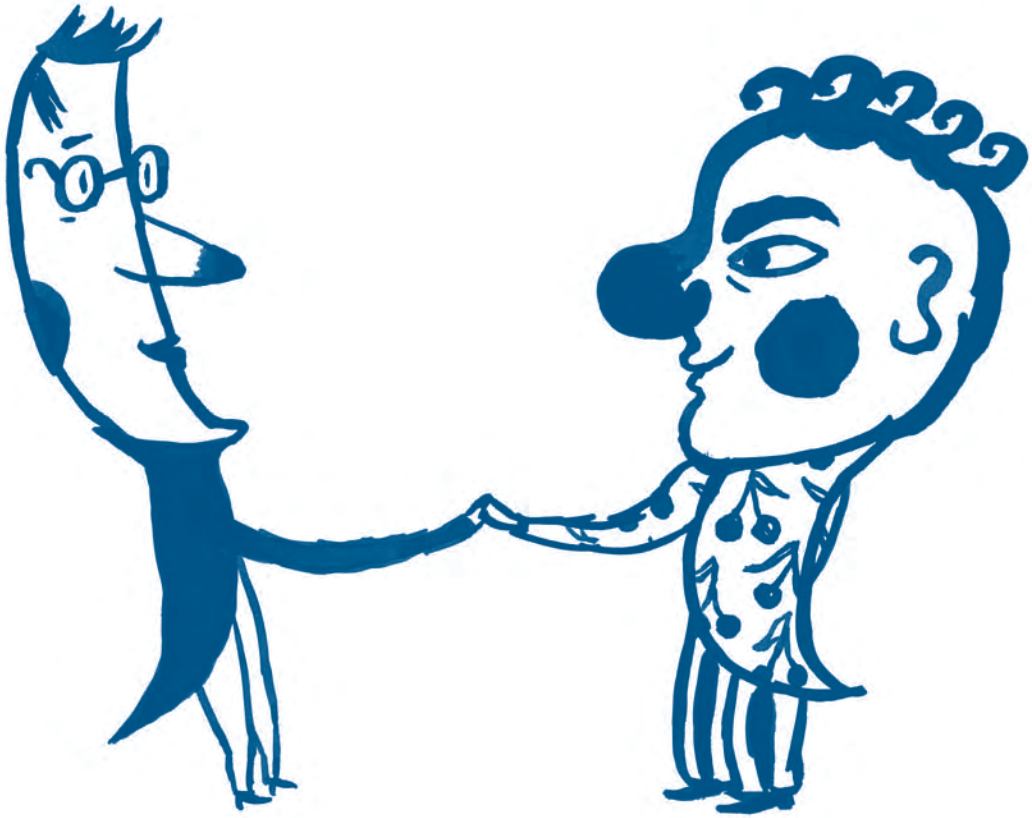
"Maisy!"
"Bird-brain!"
"Maisy!"
"Gorilla!"
"Maisy!"

When Geppetto heard himself being called Maisy for the third time, he saw red and leapt on the carpenter. Fists flew.

When this fight was over, Antonio had two more scratches on his nose and Geppetto had two fewer buttons on his jacket. Since this evened out the score, they shook hands and swore eternal friendship.

And Geppetto picked up his piece of wood, thanked Mr Cherry and limped off home.



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CHAPTER 3

Geppetto's home was a small, dark room on the ground floor. The furniture couldn't have been simpler. There was one wobbly chair, an uncomfortable bed and a rickety table. At the far end of the room you could see a hearth with a fire burning in it. It wasn't a real fire, though – it had been painted onto the wall. Hanging over the painted fire was a painted pot, boiling away merrily and giving off a cloud of painted steam that looked just like the real thing.

As soon as he got home, Geppetto picked up his tools to carve his puppet. Suddenly he was struck by a thought.

"What shall I call him?" he wondered.

"Pinocchio is a good name," he decided. "It'll bring him luck. I knew a whole family of Pinocchios once – Mr Pinocchio, Mrs Pinocchio and the Pinocchio children – and they were all as happy as anything: the richest one begged for a living."

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Now he had found a name for his puppet, he set to work from the head down, briskly carving out hair, forehead and eyes.

Once the eyes were finished, he stood back, amazed. They were moving. First they looked around a bit, then they stared at him, so intently that he felt quite put out.

"Hey! What are you looking at, you nasty wooden eyes?" he asked.

There was no reply.

Next he carved the puppet's nose. The moment it was finished, it began to grow. It grew and grew, so that in just a few minutes it was the longest nose he'd ever seen. Poor Geppetto kept trying to whittle it down, but the more he tried, the longer that mischievous nose became.

Next he carved the puppet's mouth, but it wasn't even finished before it began to laugh and jeer at him.

"Stop laughing," Geppetto snapped angrily. He might as well have been talking to a brick wall. "Stop laughing!" he shouted, "or else..."

The mouth fell silent, but stuck its tongue out instead. Geppetto thought it wise to pretend he hadn't noticed. He went on to carve the puppet's chin, neck, shoulders, stomach, arms and hands.

The moment the hands were finished, Geppetto felt something being whisked off his head. He looked up, and what do you think he saw? His yellow wig in the hand of his half-finished puppet.

"Pinocchio!" he yelled. "Give that back this instant!" The puppet did nothing of the sort. Instead he plonked the wig onto his own head, where it sank down over his eyes.

This was such insulting behaviour that Geppetto felt more miserable than he'd ever felt in his life.

"You naughty, naughty boy!" he said. "You're not even finished yet,

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and already you show your father no respect! I'm disappointed in you, I really am..." And as he said this he wiped away a tear.

Last of all Geppetto carved the puppet's legs and feet. The moment they were finished, he received a sharp kick on the end of his nose.

"It serves me right, I suppose," he sighed. "I should have known that would happen. No use complaining now."

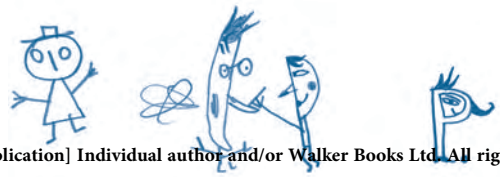
He lifted Pinocchio up and stood him in the middle of the room so that he could take his first steps, but the puppet's legs were so stiff that at first he couldn't move them at all. Geppetto held him by the hand and taught him how to put one foot in front of the other.

Once his legs were loosened up, Pinocchio began to walk on his own, then to run around the room. Suddenly he made a break for the front door and began careering off down the street. Poor old Geppetto followed him, but he didn't stand a chance – the naughty puppet ran tremendously fast, in great leaps and bounds like a hare, with his hard wooden feet going clackety-clack on the cobblestones.

Geppetto was shouting "Stop him, stop him!" but, when the people on the street saw the wooden puppet flash by, they just stopped in amazement and laughed and laughed, quite unable to believe their eyes.

Luckily a passing policeman heard the commotion. He concluded that a pony must have slipped its halter, and bravely crossed the street, determined to stop the animal and avoid a dangerous accident.

Pinocchio saw that his way was barred. He tried to surprise the policeman by slipping between his legs, but the constable simply reached out a hand, caught the puppet by his ridiculously long nose (it might have been made for policemen to catch hold of) and handed him back to Geppetto.



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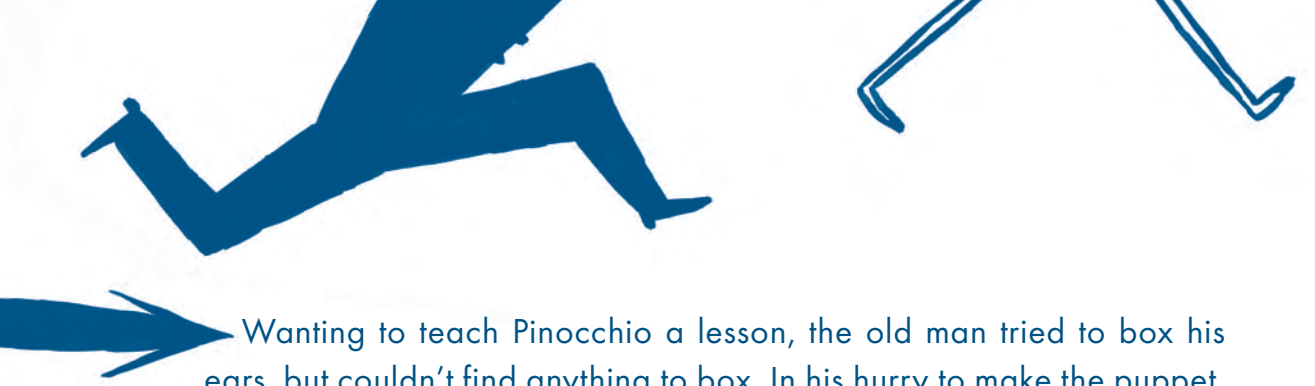


Wanting to teach Pinocchio a lesson, the old man tried to box his ears, but couldn't find anything to box. In his hurry to make the puppet, he'd forgotten to give him any ears at all.

Shaking his head angrily, Geppetto took Pinocchio by the scruff of the neck and led him away.

"Just you wait till we get home!" he said.

When Pinocchio heard this, he flung himself to the ground and refused to budge. A crowd of curious passers-by began to gather, every one with an opinion.

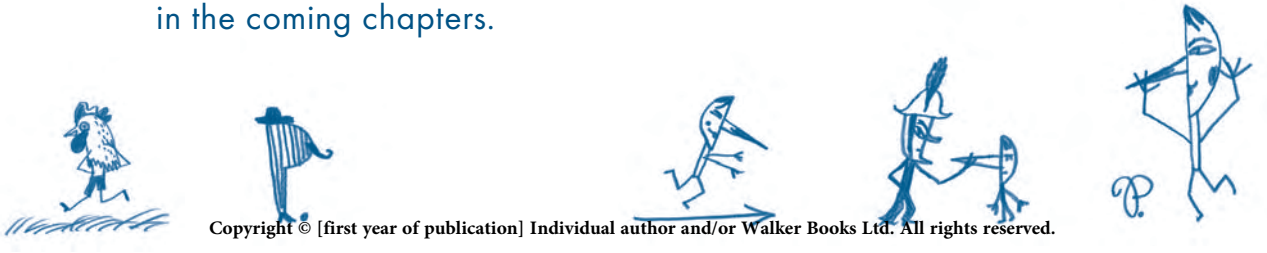
"The poor little puppet!" said one. "No wonder he doesn't want to go home. That horrid Geppetto will probably give him a thrashing."

"Geppetto seems like such a nice old fellow," another added maliciously, "but with kids he's a real tyrant. If they leave that poor puppet with him, he's quite capable of smashing him to bits."

To cut a long story short, these onlookers made such a fuss that the policeman ended up freeing Pinocchio and marching his poor father off to prison. Geppetto, too shocked to argue, was crying his eyes out.

"That wicked, wicked child!" he muttered, between sobs. "And to think I tried so hard to make him a well-behaved puppet! But it serves me right. I should have known."

And so begins the extraordinary story of Pinocchio, which I will tell in the coming chapters.



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