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Grubtown 4: The Wrong End of the Dog

written by

Philip Ardagh

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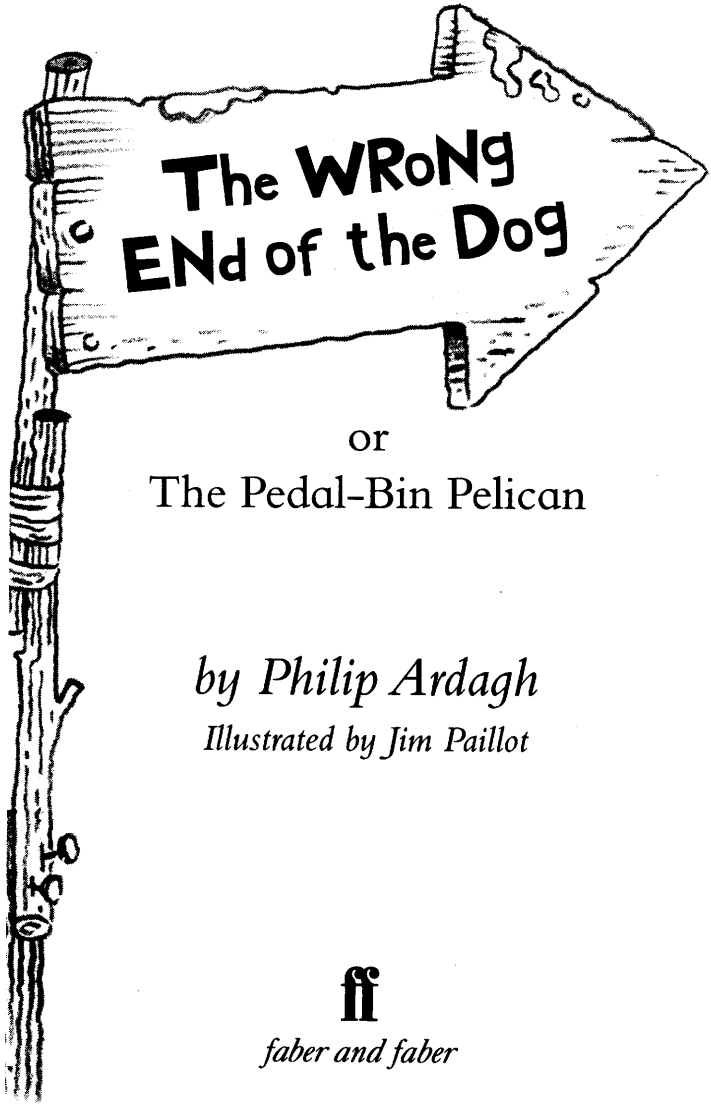
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GRuBtoWN taLes

Book Four



or

The Pedal-Bin Pelican

by Philip Ardagh

Illustrated by Jim Paillot

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For my brother.
It's about time he had another dedication

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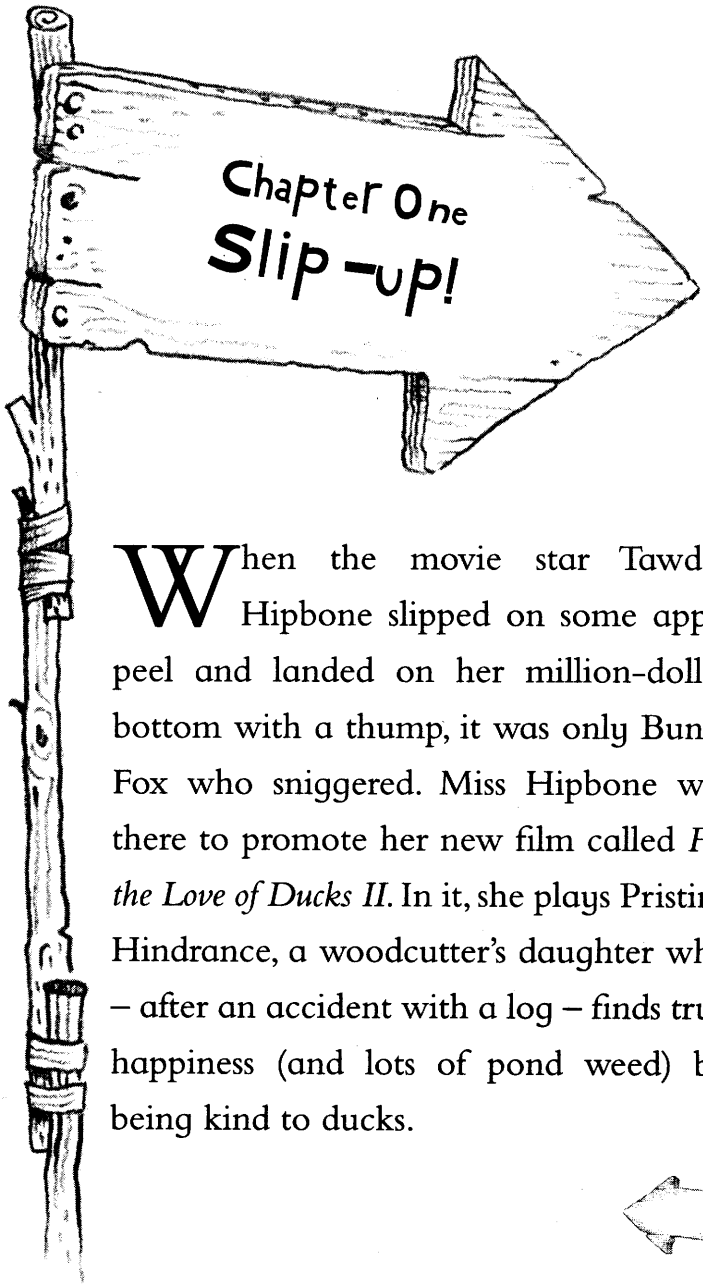
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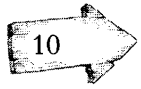


When the movie star Tawdry Hipbone slipped on some apple peel and landed on her million-dollar bottom with a thump, it was only Bunty Fox who sniggered. Miss Hipbone was there to promote her new film called *For the Love of Ducks II*. In it, she plays Pristine Hindrance, a woodcutter's daughter who – after an accident with a log – finds true happiness (and lots of pond weed) by being kind to ducks.

The sniggering Bunty Fox hates ducks. You want evidence? She and her husband own a shop called KILL ALL DUCKS. Proof enough that she's not a big fan of them, I'd say.

A large crowd had gathered outside **SMOKY'S** – Grubtown's one and only cinema – to greet Miss Hipbone for the Special Charity Gala Performance of the film, and the police were out in big numbers: both Chief Grabby Hanson and Sergeant Constable Gelatine were there, along with Gelatine's nephew, Officer Mustard Tripwire. (Yup, it was just the three of them but they were wearing *great* uniforms. No one on Earth could look more like a chief of police than Grabby Hanson in his full-dress (special-occasion) police uniform. When off-duty he could get a job playing chiefs of police in films and on television if he wanted to.)

Mayor Flabby Gomez had provided a short length of red carpet to cover the distance from Miss Hipbone's big and shiny – and ridiculously



long – car to the door of the cinema. (He kept different lengths of carpet in the seven-storey-high garden shed he was living in whilst knitting a new home.)

He had instructed Hetty Glue-Pen, **SMOKY'S** manager and projectionist, to set up two microphones just outside the cinema doors: one for him to give his speech into and one for Tawdry Hipbone to say nice stuff about him and Grubtown and, of course, about *For the Love of Ducks II.*

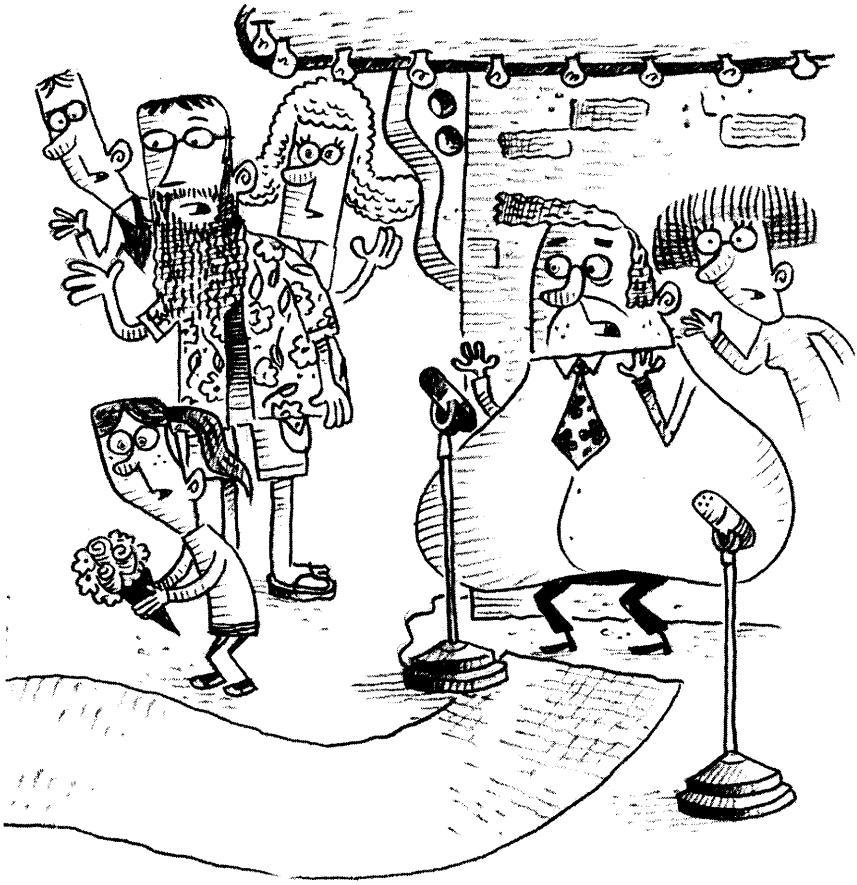
Mayor Gomez had been practising his speech for over a week, but now it looked like it might not happen. The movie star had slipped on the apple peel, between the limo and theatre steps, before he'd even had a chance to say, 'Greetings, fellow citizens of Grubtown!'

He shouted, 'Blimey!' instead.

There was a great big gasp from the great big crowd . . . and just that one snigger from Mrs Fox, of course. Chief of Police Grabby



Hanson leapt forward to the distressed Miss Hipbone and helped her to her feet with one hand while rummaging through her glittery handbag with the other. He managed to slip into his pocket a small gold-framed mirror and an unopened packet of Hotty Mintettes (*The*



little mints with the big bite). Grabby's not called 'Grabby' for nothing.

Constable Gelatine, meanwhile, had peeled the apple peel off the bottom of Miss Hipbone's shoe. Jilly Cheeter, the girl who'd been given the honour of presenting Tawdry Hipbone with

a bouquet of roses, dashed across to where the movie actress's hairpiece had landed as she fell. It wasn't quite a wig. Miss Hipbone still had plenty of jet-black hair (real or otherwise) on top of her beautiful head. It was more like it was for making her hair BIGGER. It looked to Jilly Cheeter like either:

(a) a very small shaggy black dog

or:

(b) a very well-fed guinea pig.

It turned out to be (a).

As Jilly Cheeter handed it back to Miss Hipbone it licked her fingers. That way she was able to tell the ball-of-fur's front end.

'Thank you,' said the actress and smiled at Jilly with such a perfect set of gnashers that Jilly was almost blinded by the whiteness of them. Miss Hipbone reached up and pushed the doggy hairpiece back in place.





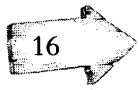
Jilly Cheeter noticed that, close up, Tawdry Hipbone didn't look quite so young and glamorous as she did from a distance. She could see that the movie star was wearing make-up – *lots* of make-up – but you could still see wrinkles underneath.

Sometimes I spend hours and hours and *hours* in the bath thinking important things – and letting the tiny creatures in my beard enjoy splashing about a bit – until long after the water has gone cold. Whenever I do this, I end up with fingertips more wrinkled than the wrinkliest of prunes. Amazingly, Miss Hipbone's face looked a zillion times wrinklier than that. I'm talking **WRINKLED**.

'Guess how old I am,' whispered the movie star. (Her breath smelled of Hotty Mintettes.)

Jilly was shocked by the question. She's not that good at guessing grown-ups' ages and knows how important it is not to get it wrong. She reckoned that, from where she was now standing, Tawdry Hipbone looked really old, like FORTY or something, so – to be on the polite side of safe – she said, 'Twenty-eight, Miss Hipbone?'

Miss Hipbone gave a cackling laugh which sounded like someone crinkling up tracing



paper. 'Sixty-three!' she said. 'The secret's in the diet.'

Jilly Cheeter was so surprised by this piece of news that, for a moment, she forgot that the capital of France is Paris and thought it was an elephant. She didn't know what to say, so it was rather lucky for her that she – along with just about everyone else – was distracted by Constable Gelatine's nephew, Mustard Tripwire, making an arrest.

The arrestee – or whatever you call the person being arrested – was none other than Bunty Fox.

'What are you charging me with?' she demanded as she struggled to free herself from the young police officer.

'Sniggering at the misfortune of an internationally famous and much-loved film actress!' said Officer Tripwire, even impressing himself.

Everyone cheered. We're not big fans of

Bunty Fox and her family here in Grubtown. They've caused more than their fair share of trouble over the years (and weren't that long out of prison). And nobody likes to see someone with an unfair share of anything, whether it's:

slices of melon

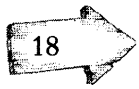
free concert tickets

pancakes

or causing trouble.

At the back of the crowd of onlookers stood a small girl called Emily Blotch. She was standing on a crate of custard pies, labelled: **NOT TO BE USED FOR COMIC EFFECT**, which, I'm pleased to report, they weren't. (Not one of them was thrown during the making of this book.)

Emily is the daughter of Condo Blotch. Nowadays, of course, Condo Blotch is very well-known. You're probably familiar with her chain of ***STOP BEING QUITE SO FAT*** keep-fit centres and have seen her face on the front of magazines and on cartons of the



Condo Blotch ***STOP BEING QUITE SO FAT*** soft drinks range. At the time of these events, though, Condo was a single mum who worked very hard as a cleaner in a number of places in and aroùnd Grubtown.

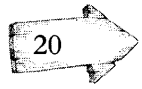
Next to Emily stood Informative Boothe, town know-all. Unlike everyone else, he didn't appear to be the slightest bit interested in what was going on around him. He had his back to **SMOKY'S** and his head was buried in what looked like a map or a list of instructions, or both. He paced up and down and seemed to be looking for something. At one stage he bumped in Flabby Gomez's son, Tundra, who was supposed to be up at the front of the crowd. Tundra Gomez is now the doorboy – which is a young door*man* – at the cinema, which is why he was there in his impressive doorboy's uniform for the Special Charity Gala Performance of *For the Love of Ducks II.* (The charities in question, by the way, were The Society of Unicyclists

With One Flat Tyre Each and one especially set up for Trying To Find A Way Of Going Back In Time And Saving The Dodo From Extinction And That Kind Of Thing.)

Tundra is a very large lad so, although the adult uniform was far too *long* for him and was trailing along the red carpet, it wasn't nearly w-i-d-e enough for him. He could only do up one button (across a less bulgy part of his body). And even that was putting a serious strain on the gold-braided buttonhole. He was busy trying to push his way to the front of the crowd.

While Bunty Fox was being put in the back of the **GRUBTOWN DOG POUND & FLORAL DELIVERIES** van (which the police department was using until their own van was fixed), Miss Hipbone had made it to her microphone. Like many famous film actors, when she speaks without a script she isn't nearly as interesting as she seems on screen.

'Mr Mayor, ladies and gentlemen,' she said,





'it's so lovely, lovely, lovely to be back in the very town where I was born for this special showing of my latest motion picture.' The dog on top of her hair turned round and snuggled back down again, trying to find a comfortable position. 'I have very lovely, lovely memories of this – er – lovely town so I was delighted to be asked to share this very lovely event with you. I also want to take this opportunity to announce to the WORLD that I shall be marrying my second husband for the third time.'

The crowd cheered and people took lots of photos and Grabby Hanson took lots of cameras.

'I thought it was supposed to be her third husband for the second time?' he whispered to Flabby Gomez.

The mayor wasn't listening. He'd just seen a STRANGE SIGHT at the back of the crowd.

