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Opening extract from

Operation Bunny

Written by

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WINGS & CO

THE FAIRY DETECTIVE AGENCY'S FIRST CASE

OPERATION BUNNY

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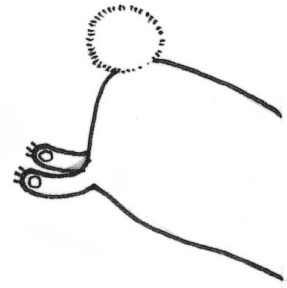
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For Ellen Butler, my dearest friend.

With love, S

Chapter One



Daisy Dashwood and Ronald Dashwood had everything a young couple could dream of: a house in the suburbs, with box hedges shaped like squirrels, two cars in the drive with customised number plates – HER1 and HIS2, a tennis court, a small swimming pool, a gym. They even owned a villa near Malaga in Spain. But the one thing they didn't have, the one thing neither money nor nature had been able to give them, was a baby.

Their next door neighbour, Miss String, had suggested kindly that perhaps Daisy should make a wish.

'A wish,' said Daisy Dashwood. 'The cheek of the nosy old bat. As if you get anything by wishing.'

'Quite right, Smoochikins,' replied her husband. 'Best to believe in facts and figures, not in airy-fairy wishes and daft stuff like that.'

Ronald knew about such things. He had made his money as a hedge fund manager – whatever a hedge fund manager was. Daisy couldn't agree more. She trusted in her credit cards: silver, gold and platinum.

Miss String's house was a real eyesore. At least, that's what Daisy called it.

It had crooked turrets and large windows and a charm that the Dashwoods' house would never possess in a thousand years. Miss String's ancestors had once owned all the surrounding countryside. Bit by bit, the huge estate had been nibbled away by debt until finally Miss String had been forced to sell the remaining land, leaving her with only the house and garden.

Now Miss String's house sat in the middle of three bossy buildings, every one of her wealthy neighbours wanting a slice more of her large garden for themselves.

It was Ronald Dashwood who had made what he considered to be a wildly generous offer for nearly all of the garden. This would have left Miss String a small patio at the back and a footpath at the front so that she could get into her house.

‘The cheek of the old bat,’ said Daisy Dashwood when Ronald’s offer was turned down. ‘What does she need so much garden for? And the vegetable plot? Oh, my days, hasn’t the woman heard of home deliveries? The next thing she’ll be telling us is that she doesn’t own a computer, or even a TV.’



On both counts Daisy Dashwood was correct. The modern world had somehow passed by Miss String and Fidget, her cat. The closest it had ever come to knocking on her front door was the dreadful collection of ‘executive’ homes that had sprung up around her. Whatever ‘executive’ meant.

One summer’s morning, the Dashwoods were eating breakfast when Daisy spotted a headline in the newspaper.

BABY THOUGHT TO BE A BOMB.

‘Listen to this, Ronald.’

‘What, Smoochikins?’

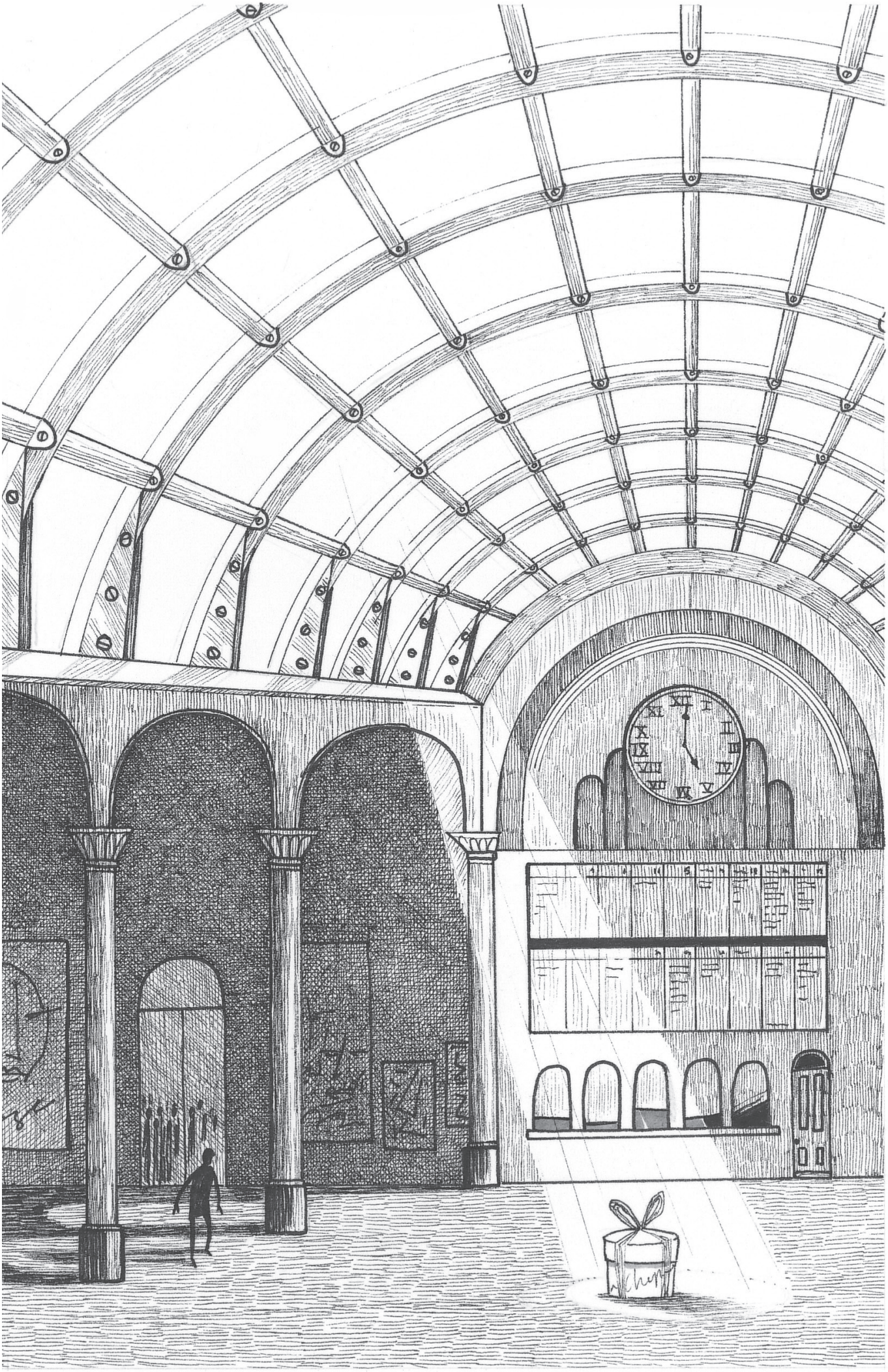
'It says, "Yesterday Stansted Airport was closed from ten o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon, causing –"' Daisy paused, pan-de-mon-ium. A hatbox believed to contain an explosive device had been left in the main concourse of the terminal. Andrew Vole, 46, head of the bomb disposal team, said ticking could be heard coming from inside.

'It was a very good thing,' he added, 'that the baby started crying before we did our controlled explosion.'

When the lid was removed, a baby girl, less than three months old, was found lying in blue tissue paper. Beside her was a trick clock with a cuckoo that squirted water.

The police are now searching for the owner of the hatbox, who they suspect to be the mother of the infant. They said they had nothing to go on other than the name printed on the hatbox – Emily's Millinery.

For the time being the baby is being cared



for at Cherryfield Orphanage. A nurse has named her Emily after the hatbox and Vole after the bomb disposal officer." '

Daisy paused, then said 'Ronald', in a voice that sounded like a cross between a whine and a peacock scream. It was the special voice she used when she wanted something expensive or difficult to get.

'I am all ears,' said Ronald, and he was. He had a shocking pair of red, sticking-out ears. In fact, they were the first thing you noticed about him.

'What I wish . . .' said Daisy.

'What I know,' interrupted Ronald, 'is that you *never* wish, Smoochikins.'

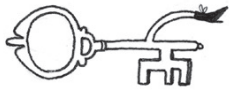
'Well, I'm going to make an exception, just this once.'

'All right,' said Ronald. 'What is it you wish for?'

'I wish that baby was mine.'

Ronald smiled lovingly at his credit card-munching wife and said, 'Whatever little Smoochikins wants, she shall have.'

And in less time than it took to grow mint, the Dashwoods had adopted Emily Vole.



As Fidget the cat said to Miss String on hearing the news, a wish can be a dangerous thing.

'I agree,' sighed Miss String as they sat in their enchanting garden one afternoon while the kettle was busy making the tea. 'Perhaps I shouldn't have said anything.'

'Always best,' agreed Fidget. 'Humans, in my considered opinion, don't think things through, especially when it comes to wishes.'

Which was quite right. Daisy Dashwood never thought at all if she could help it. She had just made a wish. Why, isn't that what everyone does? Make a wish – it's easy-peasy.