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Opening extract from

Pinocchio

Written by

Carlo Collodi

Illustrated by

Fulvio Testa

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To my little friends

Alexandr, Claire, Hal, Ixchel, Logan, Nick,
Nikita, Noah, Solon, Susannah, Tsion, Xochitl

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Pinocchio

Illustrated by
FULVIO TESTA

Translated from the Italian by
GEOFFREY BROCK

Introduction by
UMBERTO ECO

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Chapter 3

Geppetto lived in a small ground-floor room, lit by a single window. The furnishings could not have been plainer: an old chair, a ramshackle bed, and a table that was falling apart. On the rear wall you could see a fireplace with a glowing fire, but it was a painted fire, and above it was a painted pot, which boiled merrily and gave off steam that really looked like steam.

As soon as he got home, Geppetto gathered his tools and got ready to carve and construct his puppet.

"What name should I give him?" he said to himself. "I think I'll call him Pinocchio. That's a lucky name. I once knew an entire family by that name: the father was Pinocchio, the mother was Pinocchia, and the kids were all Pinocchio Juniors, and they got on just fine. The richest one was a beggar."

Now that he had a name for his puppet, he set to work in earnest, carving the hair, then the forehead, then the eyes.

Imagine his surprise when, as soon as the eyes were finished, he saw that they could move and were staring straight at him.

Geppetto didn't like the way those eyes looked at him, and he said in an angry tone, "Wicked wooden eyes, why are you watching me?"

No answer.

Then after the eyes, he made the nose. But no sooner was the nose finished than it started to grow. And it grew and grew and grew, until in a few minutes it had become a huge, nearly endless nose.

Poor Geppetto kept struggling to trim it back down to size, but the more he trimmed it down, the longer that impertinent nose became.

After the nose, he made the mouth.

Before the mouth was even finished, it began to laugh and mock him.

"Stop laughing!" said Geppetto, annoyed. But it was like talking to a wall.

"I said stop laughing!" he yelled in a threatening tone.

The mouth stopped laughing but stuck its tongue all the way out.

Not wanting to damage his own handiwork, Geppetto pretended not to notice and kept on working.

After the mouth, he carved the chin, the neck, the shoulders, the torso, the arms and the hands.

No sooner had he finished the hands than he felt his wig being snatched from his head. And what do you think he saw when he looked up? He saw his yellow wig in the puppet's hand.

"Pinocchio! Give me back my wig at once!"

But Pinocchio, instead of giving the wig back, set it on his own head. He was half swallowed beneath it.

This insolent, mocking behaviour made Geppetto feel more miserable and wretched than he had ever felt in his life, and turning to Pinocchio he said, "What a scamp of a son! You're not even finished yet and already you're treating your father with disrespect. That's bad, my boy, bad!"

And he wiped a tear from his eye.

The legs and feet were still left.

When Geppetto finished making the feet, one of them kicked him in the nose.

"I deserve it!" he said to himself. "I should have known – now it's too late!"

Then he lifted the puppet from under the arms and set him down on the ground so as to make him walk.

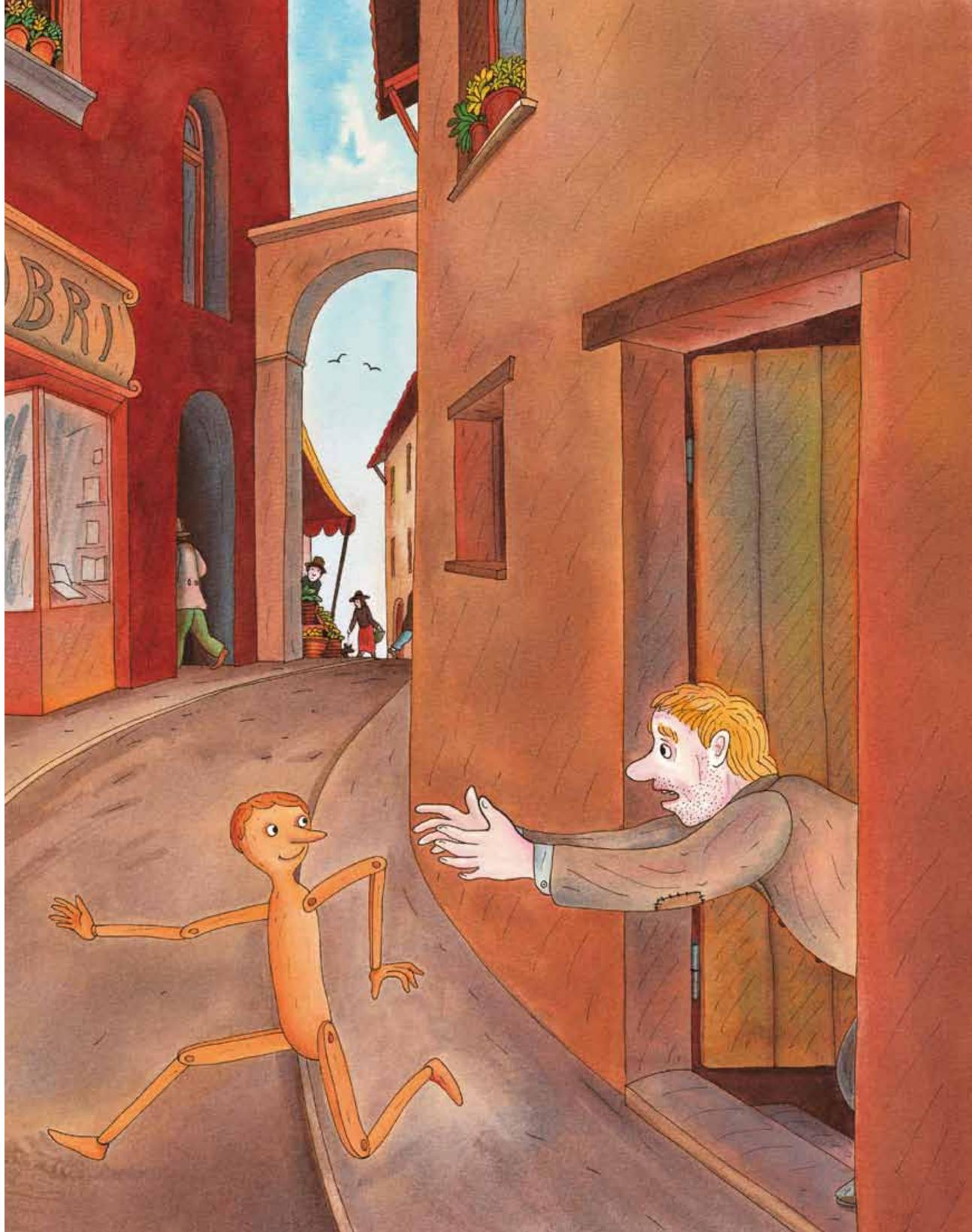
Pinocchio's legs were stiff and he didn't know how to move them, so Geppetto led him by the hand, teaching him to put one foot in front of the other.

When his legs loosened up a bit, Pinocchio began to walk by himself and then to run around the room, until he slipped through the door, jumped into the street, and ran off.

And there was poor Geppetto running after him, unable to catch him because that puppet was bounding like a rabbit. The clacking of his wooden feet on the pavement made quite a racket, like twenty pairs of farmer clogs.

"Catch him! Catch him!" yelled Geppetto. But the people who were out in the street, seeing this wooden puppet running like a thoroughbred, stopped and watched him with delight. They laughed and laughed and laughed, not believing their eyes.

Finally, and fortunately, a policeman appeared. Hearing all that clatter, and thinking it was some colt that had slipped from its master's grasp, he bravely planted his feet wide in the middle of the road and resolved to stop him and prevent further mayhem.



When Pinocchio saw the policeman blocking the entire road up ahead of him, he figured he'd surprise him by running straight between his legs, but it didn't work.

Without budging an inch, the policeman snatched him up by the nose (it was a prodigiously long nose, one that seemed specially designed to be easily seized by policemen), and delivered him back into Geppetto's arms. Geppetto's first impulse was to give him a good ear-pulling, to set him straight. But imagine his reaction when, looking for Pinocchio's ears, he wasn't able to find them – and do you know why? Because in his haste to finish carving, he had forgotten to make them.

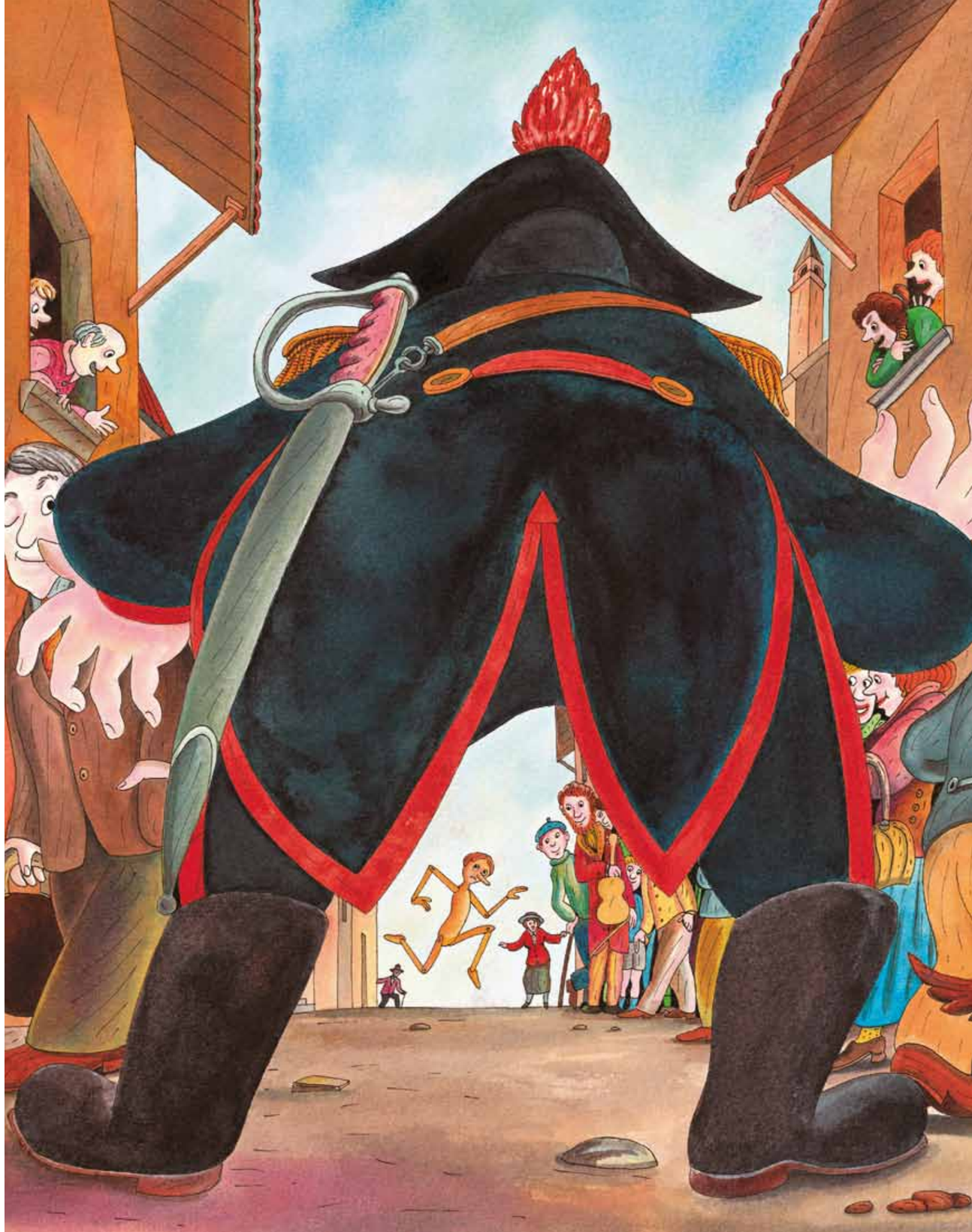
So he grabbed Pinocchio by the nape of his neck and began to lead him back. Shaking his head menacingly, Geppetto said, "We're going home. And you can be sure we'll settle our accounts when we get there."

Pinocchio understood his drift and threw himself to the ground, refusing to take another step. Meanwhile the busybodies and the idlers began to gather into a crowd around them.

They all had their opinions.

"Poor puppet!" some said. "Who can blame him for not wanting to go home! Just imagine how that mean Geppetto would thrash him!"

And the others added spitefully: "That Geppetto seems like a nice man, but he's a real bully with the boys! If they leave that poor puppet in his hands, he might well bust him to pieces!"

In short, they made such a fuss that the policeman set Pinocchio free and took poor Geppetto straight to jail. At a loss for words to defend himself, Geppetto cried like a little calf, and on his way to jail he stammered as he sobbed: "Wicked child! And to think that I worked so hard to make him a proper puppet! But it's my own fault – I should have known what to expect!"

What happened next is so strange you'll scarcely believe it, but I'll tell you all about it in the coming chapters.