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The  
Legend  
of  
GHASTLY  
JACK  
CROWHEART

WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY  
**LORETTA SCHAUER**

A

ANDERSEN PRESS

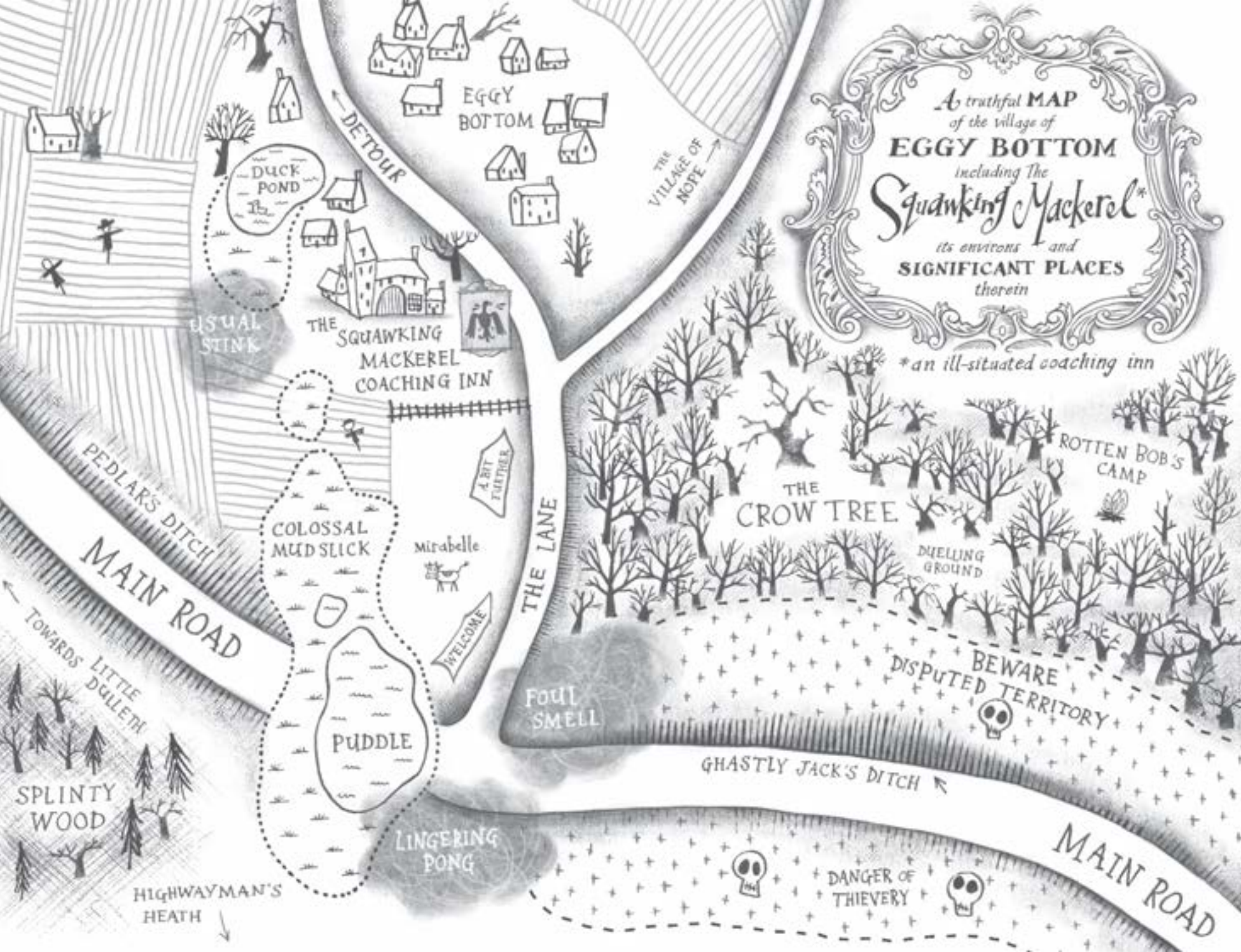


For the dread highwayman Peter;  
with all my love - L.S.



A truthful MAP  
of the village of  
**EGGY BOTTOM**  
including The  
*Squawking Mackerel*  
its environs and  
**SIGNIFICANT PLACES**  
therein

\*an ill-situated coaching inn



EGGY BOTTOM

THE VILLAGE OF NOPE

DUCK POND

USUAL STINK

THE SQUAWKING MACKEREL COACHING INN

A BIT FURTHER

THE LANE

THE CROW TREE

ROTTEN BOB'S CAMP

DUELING GROUND

COLLOSSAL MUDSLICK

Mirabelle

FOUL SMELL

BEWARE DISPUTED TERRITORY

GHASTLY JACK'S DITCH

PUDDLE

LINGERING PONG

DANGER OF THIEVERY

MAIN ROAD

TOWARDS LITTLE DULETH

SPLINTY WOOD

HIGHWAYMAN'S HEATH

MAIN ROAD





1

## The Squawking Mackerel

*Clank, clank, ting!*

Lil ignored the bell and slopped a spoonful of greasy turnip soup into the bowl.

The old bishop took a slurp. His jowls wobbled, his eyebrows descended, and he coughed a great big glob of it out onto her foot. ‘Phhah!’

‘Would you like a bit of bread with that?’ Lil asked, and dodged out of the way before a muddy boot landed on her backside. The Bishop was one of the regulars at The Squawking Mackerel. He wasn’t the worst of Lil’s customers. He did occasionally slip her a tip. A battered halfpenny if she was lucky. She sighed.



*Ting, ting, clank!*

‘Lil! I’m busy,’ shrieked her mother as she stood arranging some pickled duck toes on a platter of boiled beetroot.

‘Me too,’ shouted Lil’s sister Margery, as she curled a lock of hair over the pimple in the middle of her forehead.

‘Yeah. *Very* busy,’ Lil muttered.

Leaving the basket of stale bread rolls with the Bishop, she stomped over to the entrance and stood behind the dark oak counter. As she got there, a small pale hand reached up to ring the bell again. Lil thumped the soup ladle down on the counter top and the tiny hand disappeared.

‘Can I help you?’ She grinned at a stooped-over gentleman in a wig. The top half of him looked as if he’d landed chin-first in a puddle.

‘I *fear* you may be able to offer me a meal and lodgings for the evening,’ he sniffed. ‘I was told to expect the most extraordinary of welcomes by the urchin at the sign.’

‘Of course, sir.’ Lil scooted herself up onto the counter so she could get a better look at him. He was, after all, quite correct to fear the prospect of staying a night in this grotty place. Lil assessed how much money she was likely to be able to charge him for his stay. He had an array of oddly shaped suitcases, bags and boxes about his feet. A thin, pale boy

with straw-coloured hair stood amongst them. ‘How many rooms, sir?’

‘One. The boy will sleep in a suitcase.’

The boy in question was certainly small. He glanced up and shrugged.

‘All right,’ she said, ‘that’ll be a shilling a night and two pennies for the boy.’

‘Why should I pay for the boy if he sleeps with the luggage?’

‘You’ll have to discuss that with my mother,’ said Lil.

‘Now, why don’t you find a cosy spot by the fire, and I’ll serve you some hearty soup for your troubles?’

Lil was unwilling to haggle with the customers. Not her job. Leave that to Ma.

‘I see that I have little choice in the matter,’ snorted the gentleman. ‘Be careful with those boxes, they contain my most precious inventions.’

‘Inventions, sir?’ Lil leaned further over the counter, all of a sudden the soggy pile of suitcases offered a glimmer of excitement.

With a flourish, the gentleman produced a damp dog-eared business card. ‘I’m surprised you haven’t heard of me. Mr Alwynne R. Sprottle? Purveyor of *remarkably* modern wig-warmers and . . .’ he glanced around haughtily,

‘. . . intimate apparel.’

‘*Underwear*,’ explained the boy. His cheeks flushed scarlet.

‘Oh,’ said Lil.

‘I was on my way to Countess Hollingcroft’s estate, to attend one of her exclusive soirées, when my coach was delayed by that disgraceful quagmire at Eggy Bottom. If it wasn’t for that stable boy and his cow, we’d be stuck there now, sinking ever deeper into the freezing sludge.’ He sniffed again, but a dribble from his nose dropped onto the front of his coat where it glistened like a slug trail. ‘I’m convinced I’ve caught a chill.’







The only reason anyone ended up staying at The Squawking Mackerel was purely down to Lil's muck-manoeuvring efforts. There was a muddy puddle of epic proportions a quarter of a mile down the road, just before the turn-off for the inn. Sensing an opportunity to divert the coaching traffic (and penny tips) her way, Lil had blocked up the drainage ditches with mouldy cabbages, rotten turnips and leftover dumplings. The resulting mud slick ensnared even the sleekest of coaches, and by the time the stranded travellers could persuade that thick-headed oaf Arthur Boote to haul their carriage wheels out of the mess, it was usually too late for them to travel on anywhere else. So they had no choice but to arrive wet and grumpy at the doors of the inn. Tomorrow they would moan about the lumpy beds and itchy blankets, but tonight the guests were at the mercy of Ma Scroggins's cauliflower and pigeon-liver relish.

'Some soup will help with that, sir, and a nice cosy bed for the night,' Lil replied diplomatically.

'When will my room be ready?'

'A few minutes,' said Lil, cheerfully. Or rather, whenever Margery could pull her gaze away from the mirror and actually get on with some work. Margery wasn't Lil's real sister, nor was Ma Scroggins her real 'Ma'. Thank goodness.

But they might as well be. Phylis, or Lil, as everyone called her, had been 'a part of the family' for as long as she could remember. An unpaid skivvy, more like.

Lil was about to holler Margery's name when Arthur Boote exploded through the door of the inn in a blast of cold air and cow dung.

'THEY'S BIN ROBBED BLIND!' he exclaimed to a stunned room.

A barrel-bellied gentleman burst in past him, thwacking the door against the wall with a mighty crack. Some kind of lord, by the looks of him, thought Lil. Mr Sprottle tried to shuffle his precious suitcases out of the way, but the lord was oblivious as he barged into the inn, flicking dirty rainwater from his cape. He was followed by a staggering, mud-spattered lady with ringlets plastered to her face, and two bedraggled girls in soggy pink bonnets. As the lady realised she'd reached dry ground, she swept her arm above her head, placed the back of her hand upon her brow and declared, 'The horror!' She then collapsed to the floor in a dead faint.

The room erupted.

Gentlemen rose to their feet in outrage. 'Madam!? Sir!? My very goodness!'





Ladies fluttered their fans in sympathy.

Clearly, neither the lord nor the lady was blind – but they had indeed been robbed.

‘He was a savage fiend!’ exclaimed the lord.

‘*Savage,*’ confirmed Arthur.

‘He manhandled my manservant, and looted our trunks!’

‘*The devil!*’ (Arthur again.)

‘He rifled our pockets, bold as brass, with his own *filthy* mitts!’

‘*Nasty man,*’ Arthur nodded.

Ma Scroggins had rushed over to administer to the lady, who had collapsed into a puddle of her own silks. Her wig had popped off in the commotion so Ma shoved it back on her head, though it might have been back to front.

‘What did he look like?’ asked Ma, shocked.

‘About six feet tall,’ the lord continued.

‘*A giant,*’ added Arthur.

‘He was unshaven and grubby. He had the most terrible dark twitchy eyes and a most unpleasant . . . fetid . . . er . . .’ He screwed up his nose and wiggled his fingers in search of the right word.

‘He stank of cheesy feet,’ peeped one of the little girls.

‘The whole lot of them did,’ added the other.

‘*Highwaymen!*’ declared Arthur.

The man turned to Ma Scroggins and fixed her with an entitled glare. ‘We will obviously require accommodation.’

‘Well, I might be able to make one of our more exclusive rooms available . . . it’ll cost ya, though.’

‘Madam!’ the man gasped. ‘We have been burglarised! Would you take advantage of a family forced into such dire circumstances? I am shocked and appalled!’

Ma Scroggins pulled herself up indignantly.

‘Well, I don’t mean to be impolite, sir, but I’ve got a business to run ’ere.’

‘How could you demand payment in light of a predicament such as ours? In fact it is an insult. Do you know who I am?’

Ma Scroggins shuffled and frowned. Had she missed something? ‘I’m sure we could come to some arrangement . . . but this is a much sought-after establishment . . .’

‘Madam! My wife, my daughters and I have experienced a most vicious attack, inflicted upon us by a bunch of merciless scoundrels and we will not be *further* inconvenienced by *your* daylight robbery. We will require a suite of rooms. There is my family of course, our immediate staff and foot-servants, plus the coaching attendants. We’ll take the entire



first floor. I trust you are able to accommodate a family of our standing in the manner to which we are accustomed?’

Now it was Ma Scroggins who turned pale and started to stagger.

‘I . . . I’m sorry, sir, we are almost full-to-bursting this evening!’

The man’s face turned a thunderous shade of purple. A vein throbbed on his forehead. But he replied in a clear, slow voice.

‘My good woman, I am the fourth EARL OF ROCHESTER!’

Well, that changed everything.

Ma Scroggins shuddered to attention and began spluttering apologies and platitudes.

Rooms were to be made available. Paying guests were to be inconvenienced. Fuss was to be made and escalated in proper proportion to Rochester’s rank and status. Naturally, the requirements of an earl trumped those of any other customer who had suffered the misfortune of winding up at The Squawking Mackerel that night. A troop of wet and muddy servants marched through the inn, rearranging furniture and commandeering everything from blankets to bed pans. Everyone was obliged to make way – all except

the old bishop, who sat there rumbling into his soup. Nobody dared budge a bishop.

‘Welcome to The Squawking Mackerel,’ Lil muttered. ‘Possibly the mizziest, bleakest little coaching inn on the edge of nowhere interesting, in the middle of the Great Long Boring Road between Snottingham and London.’

Ma would be furious at having to put up all these extra guests for free. The sensible thing for Lil to do would be to keep a low profile until Ma calmed down.





## Remarkably Modern Bloomers

Lil surveyed the dining tables, looking for the next crisis to avert. She noticed a gaggle of ladies had settled themselves around one wonky table, and a cluster of gentlemen had arranged themselves at another. Despite their expensive silk and furs, they all looked like someone had poured a bucket of Eggy Bottom pond water over their picnic. Feathers had limped, rouge had run, and pomade had slipped to form a crackly rim at the edges of their perfectly powdered foreheads.

Mr Sprottle had wasted no time in swooping in on the pair of middle-aged ladies nearest the fireplace, who half-listened to him with a look of mild distaste upon their



bedraggled faces. His sales pitch on ‘Remarkably Modern Bloomers’ and self-scaffolding undergarments had not gone down well. Now he had artfully arranged a selection of buttons, trinkets and ribbons on the table in front of them.

‘I can assure you that they are all the rage on the Continent. Although Countess Hollingcroft *herself* was particularly interested in my *panniers*.’ Sprottle produced a tattered pamphlet from his soggy pocket. ‘One can never have *too* expansive a skirt this season, provided one has the *vast* doorways and a *big enough* residence to accommodate such fashion of course, ho, ho,’ he tittered.

Lil frowned. She’d never heard of panniers. But at the





mention of the countess's name, the ladies' interest was suddenly piqued. Lil sidled closer to the conversation. The woman on the panniers pamphlet looked like she had a couple of baskets stuffed under her petticoats to make her dress stick out at the sides. Lil wondered what would happen when she tried to sit down. And she'd have to shuffle sideways through doors.

Several linen items in Sprottle's boxes had got damp in the downpour. The boy stood with his arms outstretched by the fire while Mr Sprottle proceeded to arrange items on him like a drying rack, all the while chattering away at his customers.

The boy sneezed.

'I do beg your pardon, ladies, one of the *downsides* of a portable clothes rack... ho, ho.'


Sprottle turned to bark at the boy, 'Fetch the other pannier pamphlet. Quickly. From the bag.' He then turned back to the lady on his right, tapping the side of his nose theatrically. 'An exclusive preview of this season's *must-have* silhouettes...'



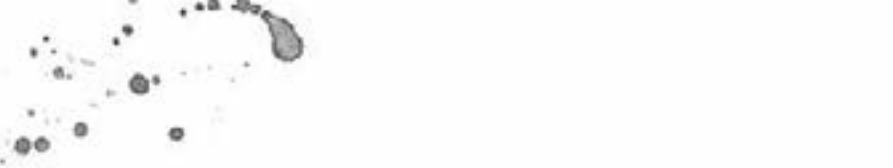
Achieve the most  
**E-X-P-A-N-S-I-V-E**  
silhouette, with  
**A R. SPROTTLÉ'S**  
**SUPERIOR**  
SELF-SCAFFOLDING

dignified      Secure

**PANNIERS**

Be prepared  with Sprottle's  
**PATENTED EVER-EXPANDING DESIGN**

A large, ornate advertisement for 'PANNIERS'. The text is arranged in a decorative frame. At the top, it says 'Achieve the most E-X-P-A-N-S-I-V-E silhouette, with A R. SPROTTLÉ'S SUPERIOR SELF-SCAFFOLDING'. Below this, there are two illustrations of women in large, elaborate dresses with panniers. The first woman is labeled 'dignified' and the second is labeled 'Secure'. At the bottom, it says 'PANNIERS' in large, bold letters, followed by 'Be prepared with Sprottle's PATENTED EVER-EXPANDING DESIGN'. There is a small logo between 'with' and 'Sprottle's'.



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## Shiny Things

Up in the rafters, two beady black eyes watched the scene below. A great flock of humans had squeezed themselves into the inn that night. They squawked and flapped and made a mighty clatter as they came inside to roost!

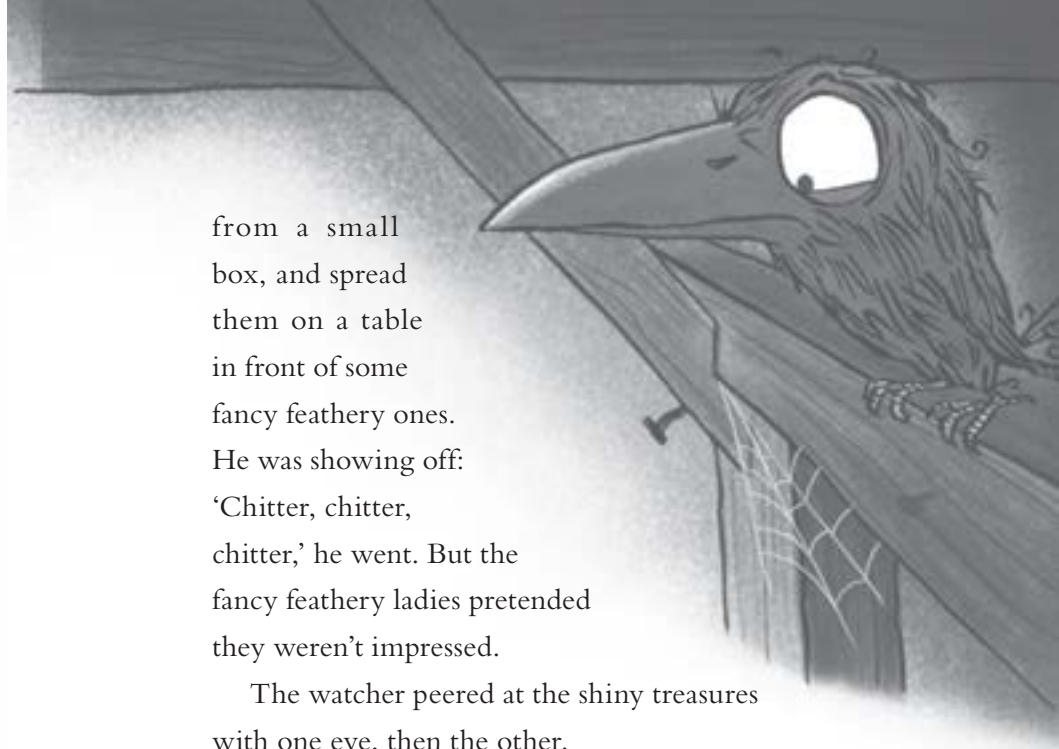
There was a great big noisy one, waving and bellowing, and lots of nervous ones who were scurrying about making a comfy nest for him. Even Ma Scroggins did as she was told when the big one barked.

The watcher had not stolen anything from them. Not yet. He waited for them to settle.

A chattering newcomer produced several shiny treasures



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from a small box, and spread them on a table in front of some fancy feathery ones. He was showing off: ‘Chitter, chitter, chitter,’ he went. But the fancy feathery ladies pretended they weren’t impressed.

The watcher peered at the shiny treasures with one eye, then the other.

He watched as a small scrawny boy crouched under the treasure table, searching, rummaging.

The watcher hopped to the floor.

Something brushed against Lil’s ankle. She glanced down to spot a small black scruffy bundle hopping under a chair. It sat there, eyeing up the trinkets on the table. Lil stamped her foot, but the beady-eyed bird just sauntered closer to where the clothes-rack boy crouched under the table, digging into a bag.

*CAAAAAW!*

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The boy jumped up and hit his head on the underside of the table, sending the trinkets and buttons flying, along with several bowls of lumpy soup. Some of which splattered across the gown of one of Mr Sprottle's potential customers. She sat bolt upright, blinking a piece of parsley out of her eye while Mr Sprottle leaped to his feet and began wafting a napkin at her.

'I'm so sorry. Such clumsiness,' he yelped.

Quick as a flash, the cawing ball of feathers swooped in, grabbed a shiny button off the floor, and flew into the coal bucket near the fire.



'Aaaargh! What was that?' yelled Lady Pilchington-Whare, squinting through her good eye.

'What was what?' Lil asked innocently.

'Was it a crow?'

'No! I don't know. It wasn't a crow.'

'Not a crow?'



'It was definitely a not-a-crow, m'lady!'

'You *silly* boy! Those silver buttons cost three shillings each!' bellowed Sprottle.

Lil darted towards the fireplace. 'Just adding some more coal to the fire,' she muttered, snapping the lid of the coal bucket tightly shut. She gave it a good shake until something metallic rattled inside. Nobody took any notice of Lil. They watched, agape, as Mr Sprottle hopped from foot to foot fretting about the soup stains, and the boy frantically dabbed at the wet patch on Lady Pilchington-Whare's gown.

Lil lifted the lid of the coal bucket and a dishevelled tail-less crow shot out and sat on the window ledge, trailing a cloud of soot. She reached into the bucket.

'Here's a button!' she called, rushing up to the table. 'Let me sort that out for you, m'lady...'

'What's going on over 'ere?' Lil's mother barged her way through the tables. 'Lil? Is that you causing trouble? Is that pesky bird in 'ere again?'





‘No, Ma, just helping Lady Pilchington-Whare. There’s been a soup incident.’

Lil risked a glance at the windowsill. Augustus Scratchy, the crow, had flown out, leaving two sooty scuff marks behind him.

‘I’m so sorry, Lady Pilchington-Whare! Do forgive me,’

warbled Mr Sprottle.

‘Here now, why don’t you go up and change, Lady P? Give that dress to Lil and she’ll ’ave it clean by the morning,’ said Ma Scroggins. ‘Margery! Come and see if the ladies and gentlemen would like something else to eat or drink. I ’ave a delicious jellied trout and minced crabapple pie that’s just come out the oven,’ she crooned.

Margery humphed past, kicking a broken crock of soup and grinding its contents into the rug. ‘Scrawny little bog beast,’ she hissed at Lil.

Lil scooped up the broken crockery and started to mop up the



soup. She was sick of Margery. Why did she always have to make things worse? It was Margery’s belief that one day she would catch the eye of a fine gentleman and be whisked away from her life of drudgery to live in a nice posh house. Lil thought it more likely that Margery would marry Arthur Boote.

Arthur lived next door at the Eggy Bottom blacksmith’s with his dad and his gormless sister, Maude. Arthur was a smug-faced little snitch, who could never keep his mouth shut. It was his job to lurk about the inn sign, hauling wagons out of the mud with his pet cow Mirabelle. His dad, Mr Boote, was always sniffing around the inn, proposing various ‘business arrangements’ to Ma. And Maude? Well, Maude was Margery’s *best friend*. Although goodness knows why – she was so boring. Margery and Maude were experts in petty gossip and slack-mouthed dawdling, and



they *never* missed an opportunity to pick on Lil. She hated the lot of them.

After the shifting and shunting of guests and rooms, it was clear that Mr Sprottle had drawn the short straw and was dumped into a tiny room in an annexe. There was barely enough space for the bed, so it was agreed that some of his suitcases and boxes would have to be stored elsewhere, guarded by the boy. Lil stacked them outside the lost property cupboard.

She was curious about the clothes-rack boy.

‘What’s yer name?’ she asked.

The boy stared at her in silence for a few moments before replying.

‘Um . . . Ned. I mean, Snederick Smythe really, but everyone calls me Ned. Well . . . they don’t really, they call me “Boy” usually . . . But I’m Ned.’

He nodded as if he’d just convinced himself.

‘Well, Ned, make yourself comfy. There’s a sack of quilts in the corner. They’re probably clean as they’ve never been on the beds in this place. Just a bit dusty – give them a thump. That’s it. I’m Lil, by the way.’

She nodded towards the open cupboard.

‘Thank you, Lil,’ said Ned. He stared at Lil again for a

few moments, then climbed in on top of the quilts and crossed his legs. ‘I’ve never had my own room.’

‘Well, make the most of it. Here’s a candle, don’t fall asleep and forget to blow it out.’

‘I won’t,’ he replied eagerly.

‘Goodnight, then.’

Ned sat amongst the lost property as if he had just been crowned king of the cupboard.

‘Goodnight . . . thanks!’ He waved.

Lil shook her head and bustled off to the kitchen to grab a mug of milk to take up to her own attic room. ‘Odd boy,’ she muttered to herself.

