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An extract from  
**The Book of Bedtime Stories**  
**Ten Prize-winning Stories from**  
**Mumsnet and Gransnet**

Published by  
**Walker Books Ltd**

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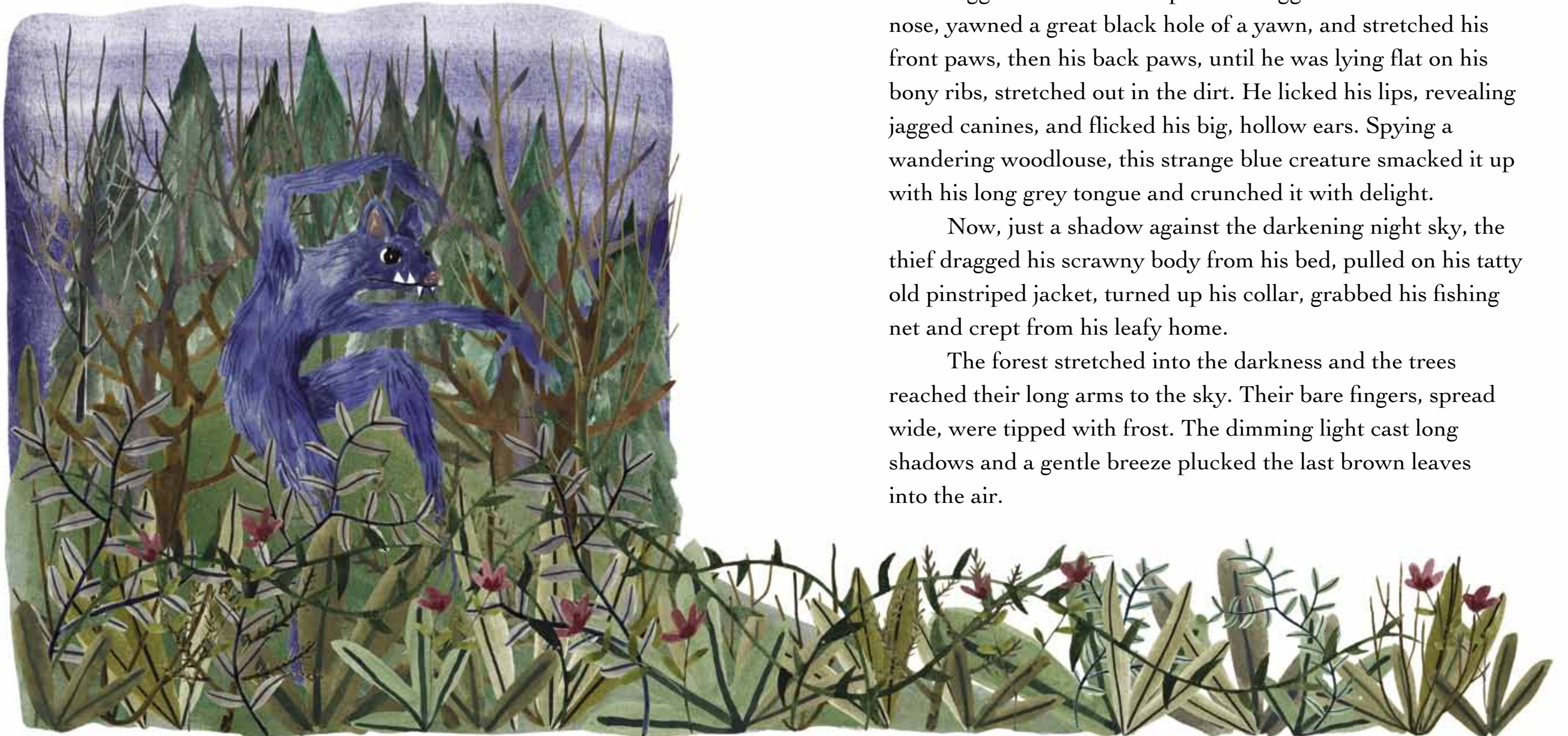
**HIS DARK BLUE FUR** bristled in the cold evening breeze. The thief curled his spiny fingers over the edge of his burrow and sniffed the cool air. He opened his gummy eyes. His long black lashes slowly came unstuck, thick with the sleep of a

hundred years. The sun was low on the horizon and shone bright pink in his great round eyes. He flinched away from the light. He was too early.

The thief slid backwards, deep into his nest of leaves, and snuggled into his warm pit. He wriggled his wrinkled nose, yawned a great black hole of a yawn, and stretched his front paws, then his back paws, until he was lying flat on his bony ribs, stretched out in the dirt. He licked his lips, revealing jagged canines, and flicked his big, hollow ears. Spying a wandering woodlouse, this strange blue creature smacked it up with his long grey tongue and crunched it with delight.

Now, just a shadow against the darkening night sky, the thief dragged his scrawny body from his bed, pulled on his tatty old pinstriped jacket, turned up his collar, grabbed his fishing net and crept from his leafy home.

The forest stretched into the darkness and the trees reached their long arms to the sky. Their bare fingers, spread wide, were tipped with frost. The dimming light cast long shadows and a gentle breeze plucked the last brown leaves into the air.







High in the branches, yellow eyes blinked and turned to stare at the thief. One owl screeched as he drew near, then another, then another, until a wailing choir could be heard far away on the wind.

The thief stood defiantly. He shook his fishing net at his watchers and threw his head back with a rasping laugh. Then he took off through the forest, dancing through the shadows.

The thief pushed his way through thickets and brambles until he broke from the undergrowth onto a muddy path, his blue fur now tangled with thorns and twigs. He could just make out a sliver of light from the rising moon. One solitary star shone brightly above him.

The thief lifted his net and leaped with all his might. He jumped high into the sky, just making it above the tops of the highest trees.

**SWISH!**

Landing heavily on the dirt path, the star shone brightly in his filthy paws. He shoved it carelessly into one of his many pockets

and the light was gone.

As the hour grew late, twinkling star after twinkling star popped into view. A crescent moon now hung lazily on the horizon.

The muddy path turned into gravel, then a quiet road, twisting and turning to a distant town high up on a hill. The thief hopped along the road. He jiggled and skipped and sniggered. Then he leaped high into the sky.

**SWISH!**

With another star in his pocket, the sky became a little darker. Soon the creature was dancing past streets and houses. Sweet-smelling smoke billowed from chimneys, curtains were shut tight and all was quiet.

A fluffy white cat shot across the road and stopped in its tracks when it spied the shadowy creature. It arched its back

and hissed. The thief raised its deep blue hackles, bared its wonky teeth and hissed right back. The cat turned on its heels and fled in terror. The thief leaped into the sky with glee.

## SWISH!

The sky became a little darker. He had jumped as high as the rooftops to catch this small twinkly star, and as he fell he saw a curtain twitch and a tiny pink nose press hard against the window. The boy threw his window wide and pointed accusingly at the thief. His breath hung like a cloud on the cold air.



“Thief!” he cried. The dark blue shadow saluted to the boy and bowed, then chuckled and continued on his way.

Springing and cavorting, up winding streets and cobbled steps, the thief came to the centre of the town high on the hill. He looked up in wonder at the stars blinking in the clear night sky. He licked his lips and flicked his ears.

Running through the narrow streets and alleyways, he jiggled and hopped and swished! Little by little the sky became darker and darker.

The thief passed white cottages covered in roses, grand town houses and tiny bungalows. Everywhere he went windows were thrown open and children in pyjamas and nighties cried, “Rascal!” and “Crook!”

But the thief paid no attention. He cackled and chortled as he leaped high into the sky.

## SWISH!

One by one he bundled the stars into his pockets. Each time the sky became a little darker. He danced and swished until there was nothing left but the sliver of the moon hanging vulnerable, alone in the shadowy night.

Looking up, the thief licked his lips and flicked his ears. Then he crouched ... took a deep breath ... and leaped as high as he could!