

THE MARVELLOUS MISBEHAVING CLOCKS

A Tick-Tocking Time Adventure

By
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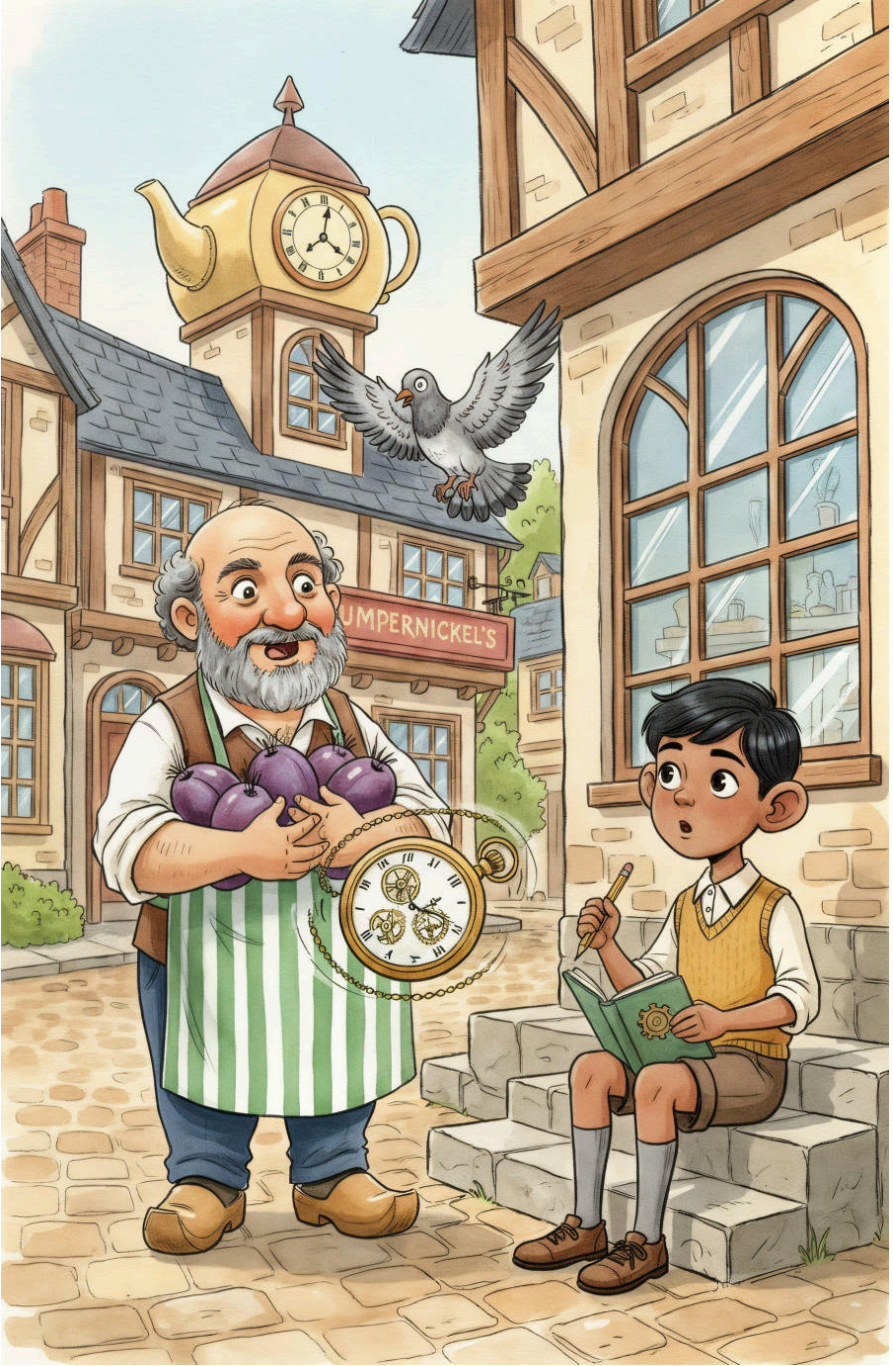
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DEDICATION

For everyone who has ever been told "in a minute" by a grown-up who definitely meant "never" — this one is for you, you patient little turnips.



CHAPTER 1

A MOST PECULIAR TUESDAY (OR WAS IT?)

Cogglesworth Hollow was a town built entirely on tick-tocking.

It sat in a little dimple of green hills, all higgledy-piggledy with crooked chimneys and crookeder lanes, and every single rooftop sprouted a clock tower of some sort. Big ones, small ones, ones shaped like teapots, ones shaped like grumpy owls (don't ask). The town hall had FOURTEEN clock faces stacked on top of one another like a wedding cake made of time, and the church bell chimed in waltz-time because the vicar had once been a ballroom dancer.

In short: Cogglesworth Hollow was bonkers about clocks.

And in the middle of all this tick-tocking lived a boy named Wendell Sprocket.

Wendell was eleven years old, had ears that stuck out like jug handles, and carried a small green notebook everywhere he went. The notebook was labelled, in his very neatest handwriting:

WENDELL SPROCKET'S BOOK OF SUSPICIOUS THINGS

On the Tuesday our story begins (or rather, the Tuesday that would begin, if Tuesdays were still behaving), Wendell was sitting on the steps of Mrs. Pumpernickel's Pie Shop, chewing a pencil and watching the town clock.

The big hand SHIVERED.

The little hand HICCUPPED.

And then — TICK-TOCK-WHIRRRRRR-BONG! — the entire clock tower began running backwards.

"Well, blithering barnacles," muttered Wendell, and flipped

open his notebook.

OBSERVATION #1: The town clock is going the wrong way. Backwards, in fact. Like a snail that has changed its mind.

He looked up just in time to see Mr. Grimble the greengrocer come bustling out of his shop, wagging a finger at little Hattie Hopscotch.

"Now, Hattie, my dear," boomed Mr. Grimble, "those plums are absolutely fresh. Picked this very morning, they were!"

The plums, Wendell noticed, had whiskers on them.

And at that EXACT moment — FIZZ-WHIRRR-CLICK! — Mr. Grimble's pocket watch popped open, and its hands spun gleefully backwards, like a ballerina who'd had too much fizzy lemonade.

The town clock spun back another minute.

A pigeon, mid-flight, suddenly found itself sitting on a chimney it had left earlier. It looked extremely cross about this.

OBSERVATION #2: When Mr. Grimble fibbed about his plums, the clocks went BACKWARDS. Coincidence? I think NOT.

Wendell scratched his head with the chewed end of his pencil. He had a tingly feeling — the sort of feeling he got when something marvellous and dreadful was about to happen all at once, like a sneeze that couldn't decide which nostril to use.

He stood up. He tucked his notebook into his pocket. He marched right up to Mr. Grimble.

"Excuse me, sir," said Wendell politely, "but did you know your pocket watch is running backwards?"

Mr. Grimble blinked. He pulled out his watch. He stared at it. The hands, naughty as kittens, spun merrily anticlockwise.

"Why — why — that's IMPOSSIBLE," sputtered Mr. Grimble. "I just had it cleaned by Sir Reginald himself, only last — last — "

The watch spun backwards another three minutes.

Wendell raised one eyebrow. (He had been practising the eyebrow-raise in the mirror for several months. He was now quite good at it.)

"Sir Reginald," he murmured, "the Museum Curator?"

But Mr. Grimble had already scurried off, watch ticking the wrong way, leaving behind a basket of plums and a powerful smell of fibs.



CHAPTER 2

THE CURATOR WITH THE CLOCKWORK WAISTCOAT

The Cogglesworth Hollow Museum of Mechanical Marvels squatted at the top of Cog Hill like a fat brass toad.

It had pointy turrets and pointier windows, and the front door was carved to look like an enormous clock face — except the numbers were all in the wrong order, and the 7 was upside-down (which, frankly, served it right).

Wendell pushed open the door. It went BONG.

Inside, the museum was so quiet you could hear the dust settling.

Glass cases stretched in every direction, each one filled with clocks: cuckoo clocks, grandfather clocks, water clocks, sundials, hourglasses, and one very peculiar clock shaped like a pickled herring (don't ask, nobody knew).

And in the middle of it all stood Sir Reginald Tockwell.

He was tall and thin and powdered, like a stick of celery that had rolled in icing sugar. His hair was slicked back with so much wax it gleamed like a freshly buttered parsnip. And his mustache —

Oh, his **MUSTACHE**.

It was enormous. It was waxed into two perfect curls at the ends. And when he saw Wendell come in, it gave a little **WIGGLE** — quivering like an angry caterpillar that had just been poked with a fork.

But the most extraordinary thing about Sir Reginald was his waistcoat.

It was emerald green and embroidered with golden cogs, and

instead of normal buttons, it was fastened with eleven tiny brass CLOCK HANDS, all sewn on with silver thread. They twitched gently as he breathed, ticking out the seconds.

"Yes? Yes?" snapped Sir Reginald, in a voice like a teaspoon scraping the bottom of a sugar bowl. "What does a grubby little BOY want in MY museum?"

"Hello," said Wendell brightly. "I'm investigating something strange."

"There is NOTHING strange here," said Sir Reginald, far too quickly.

Behind him, a grandfather clock gave a guilty TICK-TOCK-BACKWARDS.

Wendell's eyebrow went up.

OBSERVATION #3: Sir Reginald is lying. His clocks tattled on him.

"Sir," said Wendell carefully, "do you know anything about

pocket watches that run backwards when people fib?"

Sir Reginald went the colour of a boiled beetroot. His mustache quivered. His clock-button waistcoat began ticking faster, like a frightened mouse playing a tiny piano.

"FIBS?" he shrieked. "BACKWARDS? Preposterous! Pre-POS-terous! These are merely — merely — very fine antiques, dear boy. Nothing magical about them whatsoever. NOTHING."

At that exact moment, every single clock in the museum spun backwards by precisely TWO MINUTES.

DING-DONG-WHIRRRR-BONG!

A cuckoo popped out of its little house, looked very confused, and popped right back in again, muttering.

Wendell scribbled furiously.

OBSERVATION #4: Sir Reginald said there was nothing magical about the clocks. The clocks immediately ratted him

out. Conclusion: he KNOWS exactly what they do.

"Right," said Wendell. "Well. Thank you for your time, Sir Reginald."

"GET OUT!" howled the curator, his waistcoat now ticking like a furious metronome at a polka contest. "Out, out, OUT! And take your impertinent eyebrows WITH YOU!"

Wendell bowed politely (because manners cost nothing, as his Gran always said) and skipped out of the museum.

Behind him, he heard Sir Reginald muttering to himself:

"Soon... soon I shall have them ALL... and then those impatient millionaires will pay me a fortune for a few stolen minutes..."

Wendell stopped on the steps. He wrote, very slowly and carefully:

OBSERVATION #5: Sir Reginald is COLLECTING the magic watches. He wants to BOTTLE the time. He plans to SELL it. This is bad. This is very, very bad.

And from the top of Cog Hill, he could see the whole of Cogglesworth Hollow tick-tocking happily below — not yet knowing that its Tuesdays were in terrible danger.



CHAPTER 3

THE AFTERNOON THAT NEVER WAS

By Wednesday — or what should have been Wednesday — Cogglesworth Hollow was in a right old kerfuffle.

Things had begun unravelling like a badly knitted jumper.

It started at breakfast. Mrs. Pumpernickel told her customers that her cherry pies contained "real, fresh, hand-picked cherries from her own garden" (when in fact they were tinned and she'd never grown a cherry in her life). The pocket watch in her apron pocket went TICK-TICK-WHIZZZZ-BACKWARDS, and suddenly it was breakfast time all over again.

Half the town had to eat two breakfasts. Little Tommy

Tiddlewinks ate THREE, and was sick into a hedge.

Then Mr. Bumblesnoot the butcher told a customer that his sausages were "made from the finest, freshest, happiest pigs in the county" (they were mostly made of breadcrumbs and hope). HIC-WHIRRRRR-POP! went his watch, and the town lost another fifteen minutes.

The town clock spun backwards.

The sun, looking rather embarrassed, sheepishly rose back up half an inch in the sky.

By lunchtime, Bishop Whifflewhistle had told his congregation that his sermon would be "blessedly short today" (it was forty-seven minutes long), and the entire town had lost an ENTIRE AFTERNOON.

Wendell stood in the marketplace with his notebook out, scribbling like a maniac.

OBSERVATION #6: Adult fibs = lost minutes. Small fibs = small backwards. BIG fibs = BIG backwards. Today the town

has gone backwards by 4 hours, 22 minutes, and one slightly singed afternoon.

OBSERVATION #7: Nobody else seems to have noticed because they are too busy being confused. Grown-ups are a bit thick sometimes (bless them).

Around him, chaos was bubbling up like a pot of forgotten porridge.

A milkman delivered the same bottle of milk to the same doorstep four times in a row.

Two cats had a fight, made up, had the fight again, and made up again, in a sort of furry time loop.

Old Mr. Twiddlepocket sneezed, and the sneeze travelled backwards UP his nose, which gave him the hiccups for three minutes the wrong way round.

And worst of all — every time someone fibbed, somewhere in town, a tiny golden pocket watch went PING! and vanished into thin air.

Wendell saw it happen with his own eyes. Mrs. Pumpernickel pulled out her watch to check the time, told a fib about her cherry pies — and POP-FIZZ-WHIRRRR! — the watch leapt out of her hand, sprouted tiny brass wings (yes, WINGS), and flew off in the direction of Cog Hill.

Towards the museum.

Towards Sir Reginald.

"AH-HA!" said Wendell out loud, then quickly looked around to make sure no one had heard, because saying AH-HA in public is the sort of thing that gets eleven-year-olds patted on the head.

He sprinted home, notebook flapping like a startled pigeon.

His Gran was in the kitchen, baking. She was the only adult in Cogglesworth Hollow that Wendell trusted absolutely, because she had once told him, very seriously, that she didn't know everything — which, Wendell felt, was the most honest thing any grown-up had ever said.

"Gran," he panted, "the town is going backwards."

"I noticed, love," said Gran calmly, taking a tray of biscuits out of the oven. "I made these biscuits twice already this morning."

"It's Sir Reginald," said Wendell. "He's collecting magic watches. He wants to bottle time and sell it."

Gran considered this for a moment. Then she pushed a biscuit towards him.

"Then you'd better stop him, hadn't you, dear?"

Wendell ate the biscuit. It was extremely good. (It tasted, somehow, of THIS MORNING, which was a peculiar flavour but a pleasant one.)

"How?" he asked.

Gran tapped her nose. "Find the first watch, love. The one it all began with. Magic things always have a beginning."



CHAPTER 4

THE ATTIC ABOVE THE CLOCKMAKER'S SHOP

The oldest building in Cogglesworth Hollow was Whippety-Snip's Clockmaker's Shop, which leaned slightly to the left as if listening for gossip.

It had been boarded up for fifty years, ever since old Mr. Whippety-Snip had disappeared (some said he'd gone off to invent a clock that ran on giggles, others said he'd been eaten by a particularly large grandfather clock — both stories were widely believed).

Wendell stood outside it, hands on hips, eyebrows fully deployed.

"Right," he said. "This is where it began."

He squeezed through a gap in the boards (he was small, and rather bendy, like a particularly determined liquorice stick) and tumbled into the dusty shop.

PLOP! went Wendell, onto a pile of old velvet curtains.

The shop smelled of brass and tea and very, very old time.

Cobwebs hung in lacy curtains from every clock, every cog, every cuckoo. The clocks themselves were silent — not ticking, not tocking, just frozen at twenty-three minutes past four, the exact moment Mr. Whippety-Snip had vanished.

Wendell tiptoed up a creaky staircase. The stairs went EEK, OOK, SQUEAK, GROAN, like a chorus of grumpy mice.

At the top was an attic.

And in the attic was a workbench.

And on the workbench, sitting in a little velvet cushion, was a

pocket watch.

But it wasn't like the others. This one was DOUBLE the size, made of rose gold, and engraved with a single word:

TRUTH.

Wendell's heart went BUMP-BUMP-BIDDLE-BUMP.

He reached out very slowly. The watch was warm to the touch, as if it had been sitting in someone's pocket only a moment ago. Its hands were ticking — forwards — calmly, sensibly, like a grandfather telling a bedtime story.

A note was tucked under the cushion. Wendell unfolded it. The handwriting was spidery and old:

To whoever finds this:

I made the Truth Watch as a gift to the town, and from it I made one hundred little brothers and sisters — pocket watches that would chime when lies were told, so that Cogglesworth Hollow might always be a HONEST place.

But honesty is dangerous when greedy hands come knocking. I have hidden the Mother Watch here, and gone away. Should the little watches ever be misused, wind the Mother Watch FORWARDS — and all the others will come home.

— Whippety-Snip

Wendell read it twice. Then three times. Then he wrote in his notebook:

OBSERVATION #8: The Mother Watch. Wind it forwards. Calls all the little watches home. THIS IS THE PLAN.

OBSERVATION #9: Sir Reginald is going to be VERY cross. Possibly explode. (Note to self: stand back.)

He picked up the Mother Watch and slipped it carefully into his pocket.

CREAK! went the floorboards.

But it wasn't Wendell who had creaked them.

A tall, thin shadow stretched across the attic wall.

A shadow with a waxed mustache.

"Well, well, well," purred a voice like oily marmalade. "What have we HERE?"

Wendell whirled around.

Sir Reginald Tockwell stood at the top of the stairs, his clock-hand waistcoat ticking like an excited beetle, his mustache curling with menace.

"I have been HUNTING that watch," he hissed, "for THIRTY YEARS. And you, you grubby little SQUIRREL, have just delivered it to me."



CHAPTER 5

A CHASE THROUGH BACKWARDS STREETS

Sir Reginald LUNGED.

Wendell DUCKED.

The curator's long fingers swiped through empty air with a SWISH like a curtain in a draughty hallway, and Wendell, quick as a fish that has spotted a heron, slid right between his legs and TUMBLED down the attic stairs.

BOMP-BOMP-BIDDLE-BOMP-SPLAT!

He landed at the bottom in a heap of cobwebs and old curtains, the Mother Watch still safe in his pocket, ticking calmly as if to

say Good show, dear boy, carry on.

"COME BACK HERE, YOU IMPERTINENT TURNIP!"
bellowed Sir Reginald.

Wendell did not come back. Wendell, in fact, did the precise opposite of coming back. He scrambled to his feet and BOLTED out into the street, his ears flapping like little jug-handle sails.

The streets of Cogglesworth Hollow were, by now, in absolute disarray.

People were popping in and out of doorways like cuckoos in a particularly drunk cuckoo clock. A horse and cart kept arriving at the same crossroads over and over, and the horse looked like it might write a strongly-worded letter to its employer.

A baker was decorating the same cake for the seventh time in a row.

Two old ladies kept saying goodbye to each other and then meeting again three seconds later.

Wendell zigzagged through them all, panting, the Mother Watch warm against his ribs.

Behind him pounded Sir Reginald, his clock-hand buttons CLINKING and CLANKING, his mustache streaming behind him like an angry caterpillar caught in a hurricane.

"STOP THAT BOY!" he howled. "HE HAS STOLEN MY PROPERTY!"

The watch in his own pocket went BACKWARDS so violently that the curator briefly aged in reverse by about four seconds. His mustache fluttered. His hat reappeared on his head from where he'd dropped it three streets ago.

OBSERVATION #10: (Scribbled while running.) Sir Reginald just told a BIG fib. The watch is angry. GOOD.

Wendell skidded around a corner —

— and ran SMACK into Mayor Bumblethorpe, who was standing in the middle of the road giving a speech about how everything was perfectly under control.

"AHEM!" boomed the Mayor. "CITIZENS! There is absolutely NO TIME PROBLEM in Cogglesworth Hollow! Everything is FINE!"

WHIRRRRR-WHIZZZ-FIZZLE! went every watch within twenty feet.

The whole street rewound by SEVEN MINUTES.

Wendell found himself, suddenly, BACK in the attic, with Sir Reginald looming at the top of the stairs.

"OH, BOTHER," said Wendell.

But this time he was ready. This time, the moment Sir Reginald lunged, Wendell was already DUCKING, and the moment he hit the bottom of the stairs he was already RUNNING, and this time he avoided the Mayor by ducking down a side alley behind Mrs. Pumpernickel's Pie Shop.

He crouched behind a stack of pie crates. He held his breath.

CLINK-CLANK-CLINK-CLANK went Sir Reginald's

waistcoat as he stalked past, muttering: "Where are you, you little SPROCKET? I shall pluck you like a chicken! I shall pickle you like a herring! I shall — "

And then the curator was past, and Wendell breathed again.

He pulled out his notebook.

OBSERVATION #11: He's going back to the museum. That's where he's keeping all the captured watches. If I'm going to wind the Mother Watch, I have to do it WHERE the babies are. Otherwise they won't hear her call.

OBSERVATION #12: I am going to break into a museum. Gran will be so proud.

Wendell crept out from behind the pie crates, dusted himself off, and looked up at Cog Hill.

The museum loomed against the evening sky — except it wasn't evening anymore, it was MORNING again, because Bishop Whifflewhistle had just announced (untruthfully) that he'd "never tasted finer sherry."

Cogglesworth Hollow was tumbling backwards faster and faster. Tuesday was rapidly becoming Monday. Monday was looking nervously over its shoulder at Sunday.

If Wendell didn't act soon, the whole town would vanish into last week entirely.

He squared his small shoulders.

"Right," he said. "Time to wind things up."



CHAPTER 6

MIDNIGHT, OR POSSIBLY LAST TUESDAY

Wendell waited until the moon came up.

Then he waited until the moon went down again (because the town had rewound itself another two hours, courtesy of Mrs. Pumpernickel telling a customer that her custard was "homemade with love" when it was, in fact, from a packet).

Then the moon came up AGAIN, looking thoroughly fed up.

Finally, around midnight (or possibly last Tuesday — it was hard to tell), Wendell crept up Cog Hill.

The museum loomed above him, dark and silent, except for the

faint TICK-TICK-TICK of a thousand clocks behind its walls.

Wendell circled the building. The front door was locked. The windows were barred. The chimney was —

The chimney was just the right size for a small, bendy, jug-eared boy.

"Splendid," whispered Wendell.

He shimmied up the drainpipe (he had been practising drainpipe-shimmying for years — it was one of his hobbies, along with eyebrow-raising and eavesdropping). He reached the chimney. He took a deep breath. And he WRIGGLED.

SCRITCH-SCRATCH-SCROOOOOPE!

Down he slithered, like a small soot-flavoured sausage, until — WHUMP! — he tumbled out of the fireplace into the museum's main hall.

He coughed. He spat out a beetle. He stood up.

And he gasped.

Because the museum had been transformed.

In the centre of the room, where once there had been a glass case full of sundials, there now stood an enormous brass machine. It looked like a cross between a clock, a milking machine, and a very confused octopus. Tubes spiralled out of it in every direction, and at the top sat a great glass dome — and inside that dome, swirling like golden fog, was TIME ITSELF.

Around the machine, in neat little rows, sat all the captured pocket watches. There were nearly a HUNDRED of them, each one ticking miserably BACKWARDS, each one drained of its sparkle, each one with its little brass wings clipped.

It was, thought Wendell, the saddest thing he had ever seen.

OBSERVATION #13: The Time Machine is bottling the stolen minutes. There are jars and jars of them along the back wall. Each jar labelled with a price. The most expensive one says "ONE ENTIRE AFTERNOON — £50,000."

OBSERVATION #14: Sir Reginald is asleep in a chair next to the machine, snoring like a walrus with a head cold.

Wendell crept forward on tippy-toes.

The Mother Watch in his pocket was thrumming now — getting warmer and warmer, as if she could feel her babies nearby. The little watches on the shelves began to TICK a little faster, a little hopefully. One of them gave a soft, eager PING!

Sir Reginald stirred in his sleep.

Wendell froze, one foot in the air, like a very small flamingo.

The curator muttered something about millionaires and rolled over.

Wendell tiptoed onward.

He reached the centre of the room. He pulled out the Mother Watch. Her hands glowed gently in the moonlight. He found the little winding key on top, and began, very slowly, very carefully, to wind her FORWARDS.

TICK.

TICK.

TICK.

The captured watches began to glow.

TICK-TICK-TICK.

They began to RATTLE on their shelves.

TICK-TICK-TICK-TICK-TICK!

They began to BOUNCE.

And then — PIIIIIIING! — a hundred tiny brass wings burst open at once, and the captured watches rose into the air like a great glittering swarm of mechanical butterflies.

Sir Reginald sat bolt upright.

"WHAT —? WHO —? WHAT THE BLITHERING

BARNACLE IS — "

His eyes fell on Wendell. They bulged like two pickled eggs.

"YOU!" he shrieked. "YOU LITTLE — YOU IMPERTINENT
— YOU — "

His mustache quivered like an angry caterpillar that had just
been sat on by a very large grandmother.



CHAPTER 7

THE BIGGEST FIB IN COGGLESWORTH HOLLOW

Sir Reginald lunged for the Mother Watch.

Wendell sidestepped neatly, and the curator went SPLAT into a velvet cushion.

"Give me that WATCH!" howled Sir Reginald, struggling upright. "It is MINE! I FOUND it! I DESERVE it! I — I — I INVENTED it!"

The Mother Watch in Wendell's hand gave a thunderous TOCK.

Every clock in the museum went WHIRRRRRRRRR-CLANG! and span backwards by a full TWENTY MINUTES.

"You did NOT invent it," said Wendell calmly. "Mr. Whippety-Snip did. And you know it."

"LIES!" screamed Sir Reginald. "FILTHY LIES! I am the GREATEST CLOCKMAKER in all of — of — of — "

WHIRRRRRRRR-BONG-CRASH!

The clocks rewound another half hour.

The swarm of liberated pocket watches circled overhead like furious metallic bees. They were getting brighter and brighter. Their wings were beating in unison now:
TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK.

Sir Reginald, panicking, made a terrible mistake.

He looked up at the swarm. He stretched out his arms. And he bellowed:

"I AM YOUR MASTER! I MADE YOU! I LOVE YOU! I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A FRIEND TO TIME ITSELF!"

There was a moment of perfect silence.

Then —

KA-WHIRRRRRRRRRRR-BOOOOOOM!

It was the biggest, fattest, most enormous fib ever told in the history of Coggesworth Hollow.

The clocks didn't just spin backwards. The clocks went HAYWIRE.

The hour hand of the great museum grandfather clock came SHOOTING off its spindle and embedded itself in the ceiling, quivering like a thrown dart. Cuckoos exploded out of cuckoo clocks and flew around the room shrieking "CUCKOO! CUCKOO! CUCKOO!" in tones of pure outrage.

The Time Machine in the centre of the room began to SHAKE.

The glass dome on top began to CRACK.

And the swarm of liberated watches —

— ALL ONE HUNDRED OF THEM —

— turned, as one, and looked at Sir Reginald.

"Now, now," said the curator nervously, his waistcoat ticking like a bomb. "Let us be reasonable. Let us be — be — honest with each other — "

TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK!

The swarm DIVE-BOMBED.

The watches flew straight at him — not to hurt him, not exactly, but to ATTACH themselves.

One landed on his nose. Another wrapped its little chain around his ear. A third settled on the top of his head like a small brass hat. Another, then another, then another — until Sir Reginald Tockwell was completely covered, head to toe, in furiously ticking pocket watches.

And they were all running BACKWARDS.

The combined backwards-power was so enormous that Sir Reginald began, very gently, to AGE IN REVERSE.

His mustache shrank.

His waistcoat loosened.

His voice went UP an octave, then two, then three.

"Stop it!" he squeaked. "STOP IT! I'm — I'm — I'm GETTING YOUNGER!"

FIZZ-POP-WHIZZ!

The Time Machine exploded.

Bottled minutes burst free in every direction. Stolen afternoons came whooshing out in great golden clouds. A bottled Tuesday escaped and flew straight out of the window, off to find its proper place in the calendar.

And in the middle of it all, Sir Reginald continued to shrink.

He was forty.

He was thirty.

He was twenty.

He was twelve.

He was eight.

He was three.

When the dust settled, there sat a small, red-faced, sticky toddler in a vastly oversized green waistcoat, sucking his thumb and looking very cross indeed. His tiny mustache (he still had one, somehow) quivered like an angry baby caterpillar.

Wendell, who had been sheltering behind a sundial, stood up slowly.

"Well, blithering barnacles," he said. "I did not expect THAT."

The Mother Watch in his hand gave a satisfied TOCK.

CHAPTER 8

WINDING THINGS RIGHT

The watches, having dealt with Sir Reginald, now turned to Wendell.

He swallowed. (One never knew, with magic things, whether they might decide to deal with you too.)

But the Mother Watch in his palm gave a gentle, motherly TICK, and the swarm settled. They drifted down around him in a soft golden snow of brass and starlight, and one by one they nestled around the Mother Watch like ducklings around a duck.

"Right," said Wendell. He pulled out his notebook one final time.

OBSERVATION #15: Need to:

1. Return all the stolen time to where it came from.
2. Return the watches to their owners.
3. Hand the Mother Watch over to Gran (she'll know what to do).
4. Decide what to do with one (1) toddler-shaped ex-villain.

He pocketed the watches. He picked up the very cross toddler (who immediately tried to bite him). And he marched out of the museum just as the sun was rising on what was, finally, a proper TUESDAY again.

In the marketplace, all of Cogglesworth Hollow had gathered, blinking in the morning light. The clocks were ticking forwards again. The pigeons were no longer flying backwards. Mrs. Pumpernickel was selling pies that had only been baked ONCE.

Mayor Bumblethorpe stepped forward, looking sheepish.

"Wendell, my boy," he said. "It seems we owe you an explanation — "

"It seems," said Wendell politely, "you owe me the TRUTH."

The Mayor coughed. The Mayor squirmed. The Mayor, very slowly, looked at the watch in his pocket — and then admitted, in a small voice, that he had known about Sir Reginald's plans for weeks and had done nothing because the curator had promised him a free Tuesday off whenever he wanted one.

The watch in his pocket did NOT spin backwards.

It gave, instead, a sort of approving TOCK.

The crowd gasped.

Wendell smiled.

One by one, the citizens of Cogglesworth Hollow came forward. One by one, they collected their pocket watches from Wendell's outstretched hands. One by one, they shamefacedly admitted to small fibs and large fibs and medium-sized fibs.

The clocks ticked forwards through every single confession.

By lunchtime, Cogglesworth Hollow was, perhaps, the most honest town in all the land.

And Sir Reginald Tockwell?

Gran took one look at the cross little toddler and said, "Well, he's clearly someone's responsibility now. I suppose he can come and live with me until he grows up again, and this time we'll make sure he turns out properly."

She tied a bib around his neck. She fed him porridge. She made him say PLEASE and THANK YOU.

The toddler tried to bite her ONCE.

Gran gave him a Look.

He never tried again.

She kept the green waistcoat with the eleven embroidered clock-hands folded neatly in a drawer, ready for the day he was

big enough — and good enough — to deserve it again. (Gran is a patient woman. She has, after all, raised worse.)

Wendell took out his notebook — the one with the brass cog on the cover — and wrote, in his careful, slightly inky hand:

OBSERVATION #61: Time only ever runs forwards for people who tell the truth. Everybody else just keeps living the same sorry Tuesday over and over until they finally own up. (Note: Gran was right. Gran is ALWAYS right. File under: things I really must stop being surprised about.)

And the moral, ticking and true, was this: you cannot wind a clock backwards to undo a lie — you can only tell the truth, and let time carry you kindly forwards.

CHAPTER 9

IN WHICH COGGLESWORTH HOLLOW KEEPS EXCELLENT TIME

Cogglesworth Hollow never did go back to normal, which suited everybody splendidly, because normal had been getting rather dull.

The fourteen-faced town-hall clock was repaired, re-wound, and solemnly re-christened the Honesty Clock — and to this day it keeps perfect time, except for one curious quirk: if anybody within earshot tells a whopping great fib, it lets out a single, disapproving CUCKOO, no matter what the hour. (The Mayor resigned shortly after the third cuckoo of his own farewell speech. He now keeps bees, which cannot tell when he is lying and therefore do not mind him in the slightest.)

Sir Reginald Tockwell grew up all over again — slowly, properly, and this time with a great deal more porridge. By the age of nine (the second time) he had become a rather kind boy who mended broken clocks for free and went distinctly pink whenever anybody so much as mentioned a waistcoat.

As for Wendell Sprocket, he was made Keeper of the Honesty Clock — the youngest in all of Cogglesworth history. He still has ears like jug handles. He still keeps his notebook in his pocket. And every evening, when the church bell chimes its waltz-time goodnight, Wendell winds the great clock forwards by exactly one minute — just to remind the whole tick-tocking town which way time is meant to go.

Forwards. Always, always forwards.

(Which, as any reader of this book now knows, is the only direction worth going.)

The End

MEET THE CHARACTERS

WENDELL SPROCKET



Eleven-year-old investigator with jug-handle ears and a notebook.

SIR REGINALD TOCKWELL



*Sneering museum curator with clockwork waistcoat and
waxed mustache.*

GRAN SPROCKET



Wise, calm grandmother who bakes excellent biscuits.

MR. GRIMBLE



Round, fibbing greengrocer with a guilty pocket watch.

MRS. PUMPERNICKEL



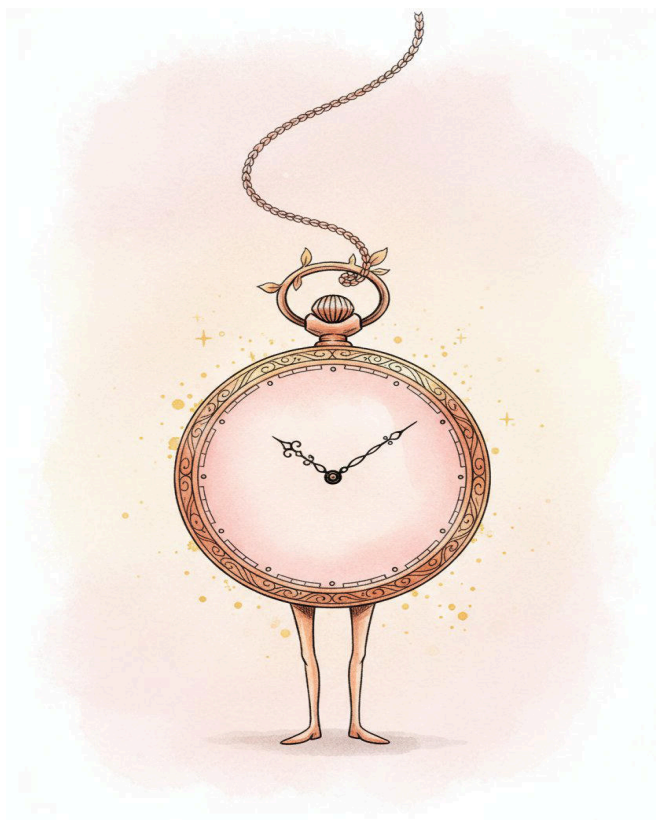
Plump pie-shop owner with floury cheeks.

MAYOR BUMBLETHORPE



Pompous mayor with golden chain and guilty face.

THE MOTHER WATCH



Glowing rose-gold magical pocket watch.

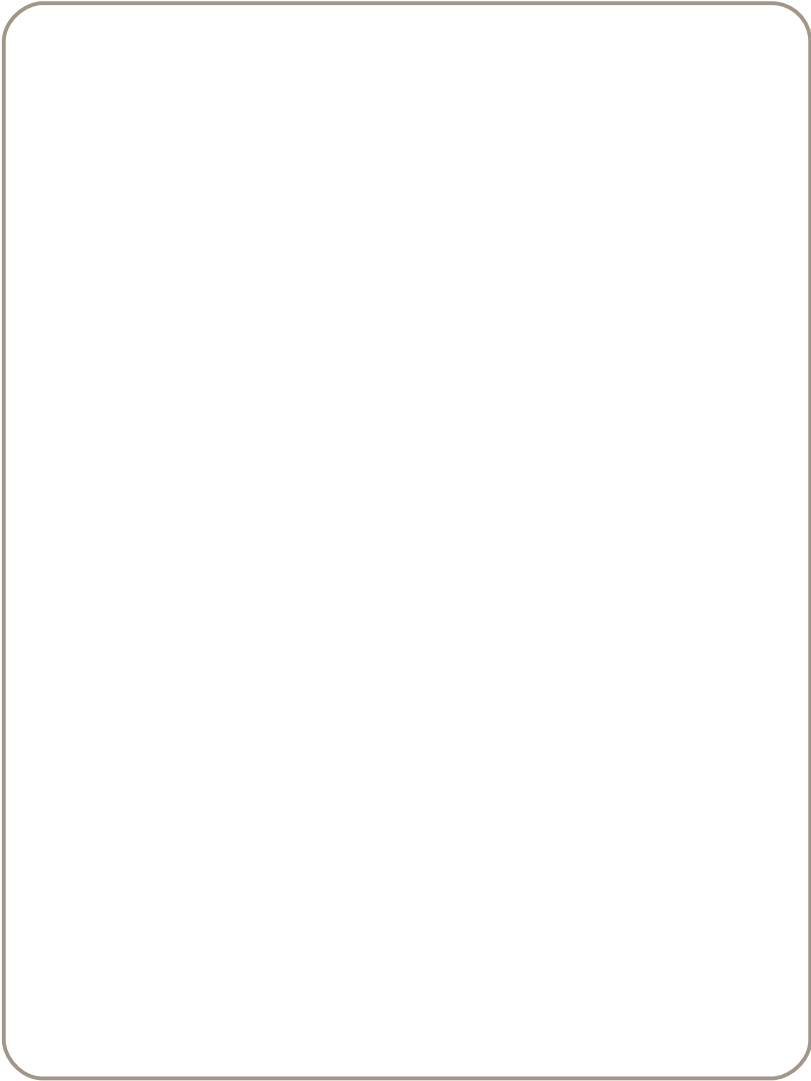
YOUR TURN TO WOBBLE

Draw Wendell Sprocket!



YOUR TURN TO WOBBLE

Draw your favourite moment from the story!

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for drawing. The box is outlined in a thin, dark brown line and occupies the central portion of the page, providing ample space for a child to draw their favorite moment from the story.

YOUR TURN TO WOBBLE

Design your very own Wobble character!



MORE FROM WOBBLE BOOKS



Muffin Man

Sammy Sprocket thought the villain business was over — until a secret message turned up baked inside his breakfast muffin. Now Sammy and his crumb-detecting best friend Penny must follow a trail of clues, catastrophic baking, and impending doom before Jellybean Junction gets itself into another sticky mess. Whatever you do, don't trust the muffins.

ALSO BY M.C. WOBBLE



The Baffling Bubblegum Beast

Giant pink blobs are oozing through Sweetwhistle, and the grown-ups are blaming children (as usual). But twelve-year-old Mia Muddlepuck has spotted something the adults haven't — the blobs grow bigger every time someone grumbles, and one of them just squeaked at her. Can Mia crack the gloopy mystery before the whole town gets stuck for good?

ALSO BY M.C. WOBBLE



The Bothersome Bubbles

When the Pufferton Floaty Factory starts belching out bubbles that shimmer in colours nobody's ever seen before, Blunderburg-Upon-Fizz wakes up to floating cats, bobbing lampposts, and a mystery that smells of lemonade and pencil shavings. Twelve-year-old Clementine Snodgrass has her notebook ready and her best yellow wellies on — because somebody needs to find out what's inside those bubbles before the whole town drifts

ALSO BY M.C. WOBBLE



The Dastardly Doughnuts

Gigglefest is ruined, the whoopee cushions are flat, and every grown-up in Jellybean Junction is queuing for doughnuts with a glazed look in their eyes. Sammy Sprocket knows something is horribly, stickily wrong — especially when his best friend Penny, who once called doughnuts 'sugar-coated tyranny,' tells him to try one. Behind the counter, the dastardly Dr. Dipple is cooking up something far worse than pastry.

ABOUT M.C. WOBBLE

M.C. Wobble writes books about the sort of characters nobody ever puts in books — blobs, beasts, and things made entirely of baked goods. The stories are silly on the outside and surprisingly warm on the inside.

Every Wobble Book is designed with dyslexic readers in mind — not as an afterthought, but from the first word. Because every child deserves a book that feels like it was made for them.

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