

THE WHISPERING WELLIES

A Squelchy Seaside Adventure

By

M.C. WOBBLE

INDEPENDENT PUBLISHER

Copyright © 2025 by M.C. Wobble.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, digitalized, or transmitted in any form without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews.

Publisher: Independent Publisher

ISBN Placeholder

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	4
A Town Built on Fibs	6
The Sploshing Bakery	12
The Lighthouse of Lies	18
Operation Splurge-the-Truth	25
The Town Meeting (Underwater)	32
The March of the Mostly-Honest	40
The Master Crate	47
Pickled, Pinched, and Properly Punished	54
In Which Sprinkleton-on-Sea Airs Its Laundry (Literally)	59

DEDICATION

For everyone who has ever fibbed about eating the last biscuit
— your secret is safe with me (mostly).



CHAPTER 1

A TOWN BUILT ON FIBS

Sprinkleton-on-Sea was the sort of seaside town that looked, from a distance, like a wedding cake somebody had dropped onto a beach. Pink cottages. Blue shutters. A pier that creaked in eleven different keys depending on the weather. And gulls — oh, the gulls — who screeched as though they had personally been insulted by the wind.

It was also a town stuffed to its salty rafters with secrets.

Mrs. Plumtart at the bakery secretly sold yesterday's scones as today's. Mr. Barnacle the postman secretly read every postcard before delivering it (he claimed it was "quality control"). The mayor secretly wore a wig that looked like a small, alarmed

badger. And Old Captain Filibuster pretended he had three legs, which was a peculiar secret to keep, but there you are.

Into this town of fibbers waddled a boy named Barnaby Whifflepuff.

Barnaby was ten years old, had hair like a startled hedgehog, and carried a green notebook everywhere he went. He wrote things down. He noticed things. Grown-ups underestimated him constantly, which was, as far as Barnaby was concerned, their problem.

On the morning our story begins, Barnaby was crouched on the pebble beach watching a wooden crate bob in on the tide.

SLOSH. THUNK. SLOSH.

The crate clattered against the pebbles like a drunk walrus knocking on a door. Stamped on the side, in faded red letters, were the words:

PROPERTY OF NOBODY IN PARTICULAR — HANDLE
WITH HONESTY

"Well, that's odd," said Barnaby, who had a knack for understatement.

He pried open the lid with a bit of driftwood. Inside, packed in seaweed, were twelve pairs of wellington boots. Yellow ones, red ones, polka-dotted ones, one pair that appeared to be knitted (don't ask). They smelled faintly of brine and something else — something fizzy, like the air before a thunderstorm.

Barnaby flipped open his notebook.

OBSERVATION #1: Boots washed up in crate. Twelve pairs. Smell suspicious. Nobody loses twelve pairs of wellies by accident.

Before he could write more, a shadow fell across him. A long, lurching shadow with a peaked cap and a mustache that — Barnaby couldn't help but notice — quivered like an angry caterpillar on a hot griddle.

"Boy," said the shadow.

"Hello," said Barnaby.

It was Keeper Crustwhistle from the lighthouse, peering down through a monocle made from a flattened sardine tin. He smelled of fish oil and ambition.

"That crate," said Crustwhistle, his mustache twitching dangerously, "belongs to me."

"Does it?" said Barnaby. "It says property of nobody in particular."

"Yes, and I am Nobody in Particular," said Crustwhistle, which was, frankly, a terrible lie. He scooped up the crate, tucked it under one arm like a stolen ham, and marched off toward the lighthouse.

Barnaby watched him go.

OBSERVATION #2: Crustwhistle wants the boots VERY badly. Question: why?

That night, Barnaby couldn't sleep. The wind howled. The gulls grumbled. And somewhere, very faintly, he thought he could hear the sound of sloshing — as though somebody, somewhere,

was filling a boot with seawater.

He just didn't yet know it was every boot. In every house. All at once.

In Sprinkleton-on-Sea, secrets don't stay secret — they squelch.



CHAPTER 2

THE SPLOSHING BAKERY

By breakfast time, Mrs. Plumtart's bakery was in a state.

A state, in this case, meant ankle-deep in seawater, with three confused crabs scuttling across the floor and a halibut flapping miserably on top of the Victoria sponges.

Barnaby pressed his nose to the window.

SPLASH. GLUG. FLOP.

Mrs. Plumtart stood in the middle of the bakery, shrieking like a kettle that had spotted a mouse. On her feet were a pair of pink polka-dotted wellies — wellies which, Barnaby noticed

with a small jolt, looked exactly like the ones from the crate.

The wellies were overflowing.

Saltwater gushed out the top with the enthusiasm of a fountain at a fancy hotel, splashing onto the floor, the counter, the scones. Every time Mrs. Plumtart took a step, SPLORCH, more water came out, as if her boots were secretly connected to the entire English Channel.

"My scones!" she wailed. "My beautiful scones!"

"Mrs. Plumtart," said Barnaby, pushing the door open against the tide, "where did you get those boots?"

"From Keeper Crustwhistle! He sold them to me this morning! Said they were waterproof — HA!"

A particularly large wave SPLOOSHED from her left boot and knocked a tray of jam tarts off the counter.

Barnaby pulled out his notebook.

OBSERVATION #3: Crustwhistle is SELLING the boots. To EVERYONE. They fill with seawater. But why only sometimes?

He watched carefully. Mrs. Plumtart, in between wails, was muttering. "Don't tell them about the scones, don't tell them about the scones..."

SPLORCH! Another gush.

"Mrs. Plumtart," said Barnaby slowly, "what about the scones?"

She froze. Her cheeks went the color of strawberry compote.

"Nothing!" she squeaked. "Absolutely nothing about the scones! Certainly NOT that yesterday's scones are sold as today's and I have been doing it for SEVEN YEARS —"

GLOOP. SPLOOSH. WHOOSH.

The boots erupted like two small, indignant volcanoes. The bakery flooded another inch.

"— oh blast," whispered Mrs. Plumtart.

But then, the strangest thing. The moment she finished confessing — actually confessing — the boots stopped. Just like that. The water settled. A crab looked around, embarrassed, and scuttled out the door.

Barnaby's pencil scratched furiously.

OBSERVATION #4: THE BOOTS FILL UP WHEN PEOPLE KEEP SECRETS. CONFESS = STOP. This is HUGE.

OBSERVATION #5: Sprinkleton has approximately one billion secrets. Town is doomed.

He looked out at the high street, where, all up and down the cobblestones, he could hear it now — that telltale SPLORCH and GLUG and SLOSH from every shop, every cottage, every passing fisherman.

Mr. Barnacle the postman waddled by, his boots overflowing so violently he left a trail like a slug made of saltwater. He was muttering, "I do NOT read the postcards, I do NOT read the

postcards —" SPLOOSH.

The mayor scuttled past, his wig askew, his boots gushing like twin garden hoses, hissing, "It's REAL hair, it's REAL hair —" GLUG GLUG GLUG.

And high above it all, on the lighthouse balcony, stood Keeper Crustwhistle, hands clasped behind his back, watching the chaos with a smile as smug as a cat in a creamery.

Barnaby narrowed his eyes.

"He KNOWS," he whispered. "He knows exactly what they do."

A town of fibbers and a boot full of brine — what a deliciously soggy combination.



CHAPTER 3

THE LIGHTHOUSE OF LIES

Sprinkleton's lighthouse stood at the end of the pier like a tall, striped finger pointing rudely at the sky. Its red and white paint was peeling. Its windows were grimy. And atop it, like a cherry on a very suspicious sundae, was Keeper Crustwhistle's living quarters.

Barnaby crept along the pier at dusk, notebook tucked under one arm, heart thumping like a rabbit on a trampoline.

The lighthouse door was, helpfully, ajar.

(Crustwhistle, like most pompous villains, believed nobody would dare sneak into his lair. This was, as Barnaby was about

to demonstrate, a mistake.)

Inside, the lighthouse smelled like fish that had given up on life. Crates were stacked everywhere — boot-shaped crates, marked with peeling labels:

FOR THE WIDOW PILCHARD

FOR THE FISHMONGER

FOR THE INNKEEPER (extra-leaky pair)

Barnaby crept up the spiral staircase, which creaked like a haunted accordion.

CREAK. CREEEEAK. SQUEAK.

At the top, he peeked through a keyhole. There was Crustwhistle, hunched over a desk, his mustache quivering like an angry caterpillar that had just been poked with a stick. He was scribbling in a ledger and chuckling to himself with the wet, gurgly laugh of a drain.

"Heh heh heh," gurgled Crustwhistle. "Soon. SOON. The fishermen's cottages will flood. They'll have to sell. CHEAP. And then I, Bartholomew Crustwhistle, shall own every salt-stained inch of this barnacle-encrusted town!"

Barnaby's eyes widened. His pencil flew.

OBSERVATION #6: VILLAIN MOTIVE CONFIRMED.
Wants to flood out the fishermen and buy their cottages cheap.
WHAT A ROTTER.

OBSERVATION #7: He found the boots somewhere. He KNOWS the secret rule. He's giving them to people who have the most secrets.

Crustwhistle stood up suddenly. Barnaby ducked.

"Now then," said Crustwhistle, "I do believe I shall have a celebratory herring."

He opened a tin. He pulled out a herring. He held it up — and at that exact, unlucky moment, Barnaby's foot slipped on a wet step.

THUD. CLATTER. OOF.

The keeper's head snapped up. His sardine-tin monocle glinted like the eye of a furious goldfish.

"WHO GOES THERE?" he bellowed.

Barnaby scrambled back down the staircase, but it was too late. Crustwhistle came thundering after him, herring waving in one hand like a smelly sword.

"YOU!" roared Crustwhistle. "THE WHIFFLEPUFF BOY! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN!"

Barnaby burst out the lighthouse door, but Crustwhistle was faster than he looked. He grabbed Barnaby by the collar and lifted him up, dangling him like a kitten over a pond.

"You," hissed Crustwhistle, his mustache twitching furiously, "are a nosy, blithering, turnip-headed little nuisance."

"Thank you," said Barnaby politely.

"I have a special pair of boots just for YOU," said Crustwhistle. He produced, from behind his back, a tiny pair of black wellies. "Try them on. They're a GIFT."

He stuffed them onto Barnaby's feet.

Now here is the thing about Barnaby Whifflepuff. He had, in his short life, very few secrets. He had never lied to his mother (well, once, about a biscuit). He had never cheated. He had never even told a fib about brushing his teeth.

But he did have ONE secret. A small, embarrassing one. And the moment those boots touched his feet —

SPLORCH. SPLOOSH. GUSHHHHH.

Barnaby was suddenly standing in his own personal puddle.

"HA!" laughed Crustwhistle. "Even YOU have something to hide! Off you go, little Whifflepuff! Squelch back home and STAY OUT OF MY WAY!"

Barnaby squelched away down the pier, water gushing from his

ankles with every step. But he was not defeated. Oh no. He was THINKING.

A boy with one tiny secret may still have a great big plan.



CHAPTER 4

OPERATION SPLURGE-THE-TRUTH

Barnaby squelched all the way home, leaving behind a trail of salty footprints that several confused crabs began to follow, hoping for snacks.

In his bedroom, he peeled off the wretched boots. Immediately, the gushing stopped.

He sat on his bed and wrote, very carefully:

CONFESSION (Whifflepuff, B., age 10): I once told Granny I loved her knitted jumper that looked like a vomiting octopus. I did not love it. I hated it. I'm sorry, Granny.

He waited. He put one of the boots back on. Nothing happened. Not a drop.

"Right," said Barnaby. "The rule is confirmed. Confess and the boots stay dry. Now I just need every single person in Sprinkleton-on-Sea to do the same thing."

He flipped to a fresh page in his notebook. At the top, in large determined letters, he wrote:

OPERATION SPLURGE-THE-TRUTH

Then he made a list.

Suspected Secrets of Sprinkleton (a partial inventory):

1. Mrs. Plumtart — yesterday's scones (CONFESSED)
2. Mr. Barnacle — reads postcards
3. The Mayor — wig (badger-shaped)
4. Captain Filibuster — only has TWO legs, not three

5. The Widow Pilchard — keeps fourteen cats in her attic (illegal)
6. The Fishmonger — sells cod as halibut
7. The Innkeeper — waters down the lemonade
8. Miss Twiggins the schoolteacher — afraid of geese
9. The Vicar — secretly LOVES heavy metal music
10. Old Mr. Crumpet — DEFINITELY ate the prize-winning marrow at last year's fair

The list went on for three pages.

By the time Barnaby finished writing, it was nearly midnight, and outside, Sprinkleton-on-Sea was making a terrible noise. A sloshing, glugging, gushing noise — the noise of an entire town's worth of boots overflowing at once.

He looked out his window.

The high street was a river. The bakery was an island. Mr. Barnacle's postbag floated past, with Mr. Barnacle paddling after it in a tin bathtub, muttering, "I do NOT read the postcards, I do NOT read the postcards —" SPLOOSH.

Lights flickered in cottage windows. The pier groaned. And somewhere in the distance, you could just about hear the wet, gurgling laugh of Keeper Crustwhistle.

Barnaby clenched his fists.

"Right," he said. "Tomorrow, I start with Mrs. Pilchard."

The next morning, he sloshed through knee-deep water to the Widow Pilchard's cottage. He knocked. SPLISH. The door opened. The widow, a tiny woman shaped like a cottage loaf, peered out. Her wellies were positively GEYSERING.

"Mrs. Pilchard," said Barnaby gently, "how many cats do you have?"

Mrs. Pilchard went pale. "One!" she squeaked. SPLOOSH. "Three!" SPLOOSH. "Seven!" SPLOOOSH. "FOURTEEN!"

IT'S FOURTEEN! THEY'RE ALL IN THE ATTIC AND ONE OF THEM IS CALLED GERALD AND HE PLAYS THE HARMONICA!"

The boots stopped instantly. A relieved silence fell over her cottage.

"Oh," whispered Mrs. Pilchard. "Oh, that feels SO much better."

"It usually does," said Barnaby kindly, and ticked her off his list.

By lunchtime, he'd got the Fishmonger to admit the cod-as-halibut scandal (the boots stopped mid-gush, mid-fish). By teatime, the Innkeeper had confessed about the lemonade (with a sob and a hiccup). By sundown, the Vicar had not only confessed but performed an enthusiastic air-guitar solo in the middle of the high street, which was deeply embarrassing for everyone but stopped his boots completely.

But there was a problem.

For every secret Barnaby coaxed out, three new boots seemed to appear. Crustwhistle was still selling them, faster than ever. The streets kept flooding. Children were canoeing to school. Someone's grandmother had been spotted floating past on an ironing board.

The water was winning.

You can't bail out a town faster than its villain can flood it.



CHAPTER 5

THE TOWN MEETING (UNDERWATER)

By the third day of the Great Squelching, Sprinkleton-on-Sea was, frankly, a mess.

The high street was a canal. The post office had a fish living in it (a flounder named, somebody had decided, Brian). The mayor had taken to riding through town in a small rowing boat, his badger-wig askew, declaring loudly that "EVERYTHING IS FINE, CITIZENS, EVERYTHING IS COMPLETELY FINE" while a small geyser of seawater shot out of his left boot like a fountain in a French garden.

Adults, as adults so often do, were panicking in completely unhelpful ways.

The mayor wanted to BUILD A WALL.

The fishmonger wanted to BLAME THE FRENCH.

The vicar wanted to PRAY ABOUT IT.

Old Captain Filibuster wanted to FIRE A CANNON AT THE SEA, which was such a magnificently stupid idea that everyone agreed not to mention it again.

Nobody listened to Barnaby. He was, after all, only ten.

"Excuse me," said Barnaby at the emergency town meeting, which was being held in the church (the only building still mostly dry). "Excuse me, I think I know what's happening —"

"NOT NOW, BOY," boomed the mayor. "ADULTS ARE TALKING."

"But the boots —"

"Faulty manufacturing!" snapped the mayor.

"The Belgians!" shouted the fishmonger.

"It's a TIDE thing!" insisted the innkeeper.

Barnaby sighed the deep, weary sigh of a child who has realized, for the seven hundredth time, that grown-ups are not always the brightest barnacles on the rock.

He climbed up into the church bell tower.

OBSERVATION #18: Adults are useless. Will have to do this myself. As usual.

OBSERVATION #19: Plan: get EVERYONE confessing at once. The bell. RING THE BELL.

The church bell of Sprinkleton-on-Sea was enormous — a great bronze barnacle of a thing called Old Gertrude, who hadn't been rung in years because the vicar said she was "too loud for delicate ears." Barnaby grabbed the rope, planted his squelching feet, and PULLED.

CLANG.

CLANGGGGG.

CLAAAAAAAAANNNNGGGGG.

Old Gertrude bellowed across Sprinkleton like a very large, very cross cow. Windows rattled. Gulls fled. The mayor's badger-wig leapt off his head in fright and tried to swim away.

Every soul in town poured into the church square (well, the church lagoon, by this point).

Barnaby clambered onto a barrel that was bobbing in the doorway. He cleared his throat.

"PEOPLE OF SPRINKLETON!" he shouted. "THE BOOTS ARE MAGIC!"

"PHOOEY!" shouted someone.

"NONSENSE!" shouted another.

"FAULTY MANUFACTURING!" shouted the mayor, still wigless.

"They fill up when you keep secrets!" Barnaby went on. "And they stop when you confess! WATCH!"

He pointed at Mrs. Plumtart, whose feet were now perfectly dry.

"Mrs. Plumtart confessed about the scones! Mrs. Pilchard confessed about the cats! The Vicar confessed about heavy metal! THEIR BOOTS HAVE STOPPED!"

A murmur went through the crowd. Several people looked down at their own gushing boots.

"This is the work of Keeper Crustwhistle!" cried Barnaby.

"He's selling the magic wellies to flood your cottages so he can buy them cheap! He's a SCOUNDREL and a TURNIP and a SCALLYWAG!"

"PROVE IT!" yelled the mayor.

"I will," said Barnaby. "But first — EVERYONE CONFESS SOMETHING. RIGHT NOW. ANYTHING. Just so you can WALK to the lighthouse without DROWNING."

There was a long, awkward pause.

Then, very quietly, Miss Twiggins the schoolteacher whispered, "I'm... I'm afraid of geese."

SPLOOSH — and her boots went silent.

"I ate the prize marrow," confessed Old Mr. Crumpet.

SPLOOSH. Silent.

"I've only got two legs," sobbed Captain Filibuster. "The third one was always a broom handle."

SPLOOSH. Silent.

One by one, like dominoes made of guilt, the people of Sprinkleton confessed. The water in the streets began, slowly, to recede. The flounder named Brian flopped sadly back toward the sea.

Barnaby grinned.

"Now then," he said, "to the lighthouse."

Truth, it turns out, is the world's finest bilge pump.



CHAPTER 6

THE MARCH OF THE MOSTLY-HONEST

The townsfolk of Sprinkleton, now considerably lighter of conscience and drier of foot, marched down the pier toward the lighthouse like a wobbling, slightly damp army.

At the front strode Barnaby Whifflepuff, notebook in hand.

Behind him came Mrs. Plumtart with a rolling pin. Mrs. Pilchard with a cat (Gerald, the harmonica-playing one). The Vicar with an air-guitar pose he refused to drop. Old Captain Filibuster on his TWO legs, looking lopsided but liberated. The mayor, slightly damp around the wig area, trying to look as though he'd been in charge the whole time.

They thundered down the pier — STOMP STOMP SQUELCH STOMP — and pounded on the lighthouse door.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

No answer.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

"GO AWAY!" came Crustwhistle's muffled, gurgly voice. "I'M BUSY BEING IMPORTANT!"

Barnaby tried the handle. Locked.

"Hmm," he said. He pulled out his notebook.

OBSERVATION #22: The lighthouse has only one door. But there are LOTS of windows. And LOTS of boots inside.

OBSERVATION #23: Crustwhistle hoards the boots. He must have hundreds. If they ALL filled up at once...

A slow, dangerous smile spread across Barnaby's face — the

sort of smile a child gets when they've thought of something a grown-up would never think of in a million years.

"Mrs. Plumtart," he said. "How big are Crustwhistle's secrets, do you reckon?"

"OH," said Mrs. Plumtart, eyes shining. "ENORMOUS. He's the biggest fibber in town!"

"Right," said Barnaby. "Then we just need to MAKE him keep them. And keep them. And keep them. Until..."

The townsfolk grinned. The Vicar struck a power chord on his invisible guitar.

Barnaby cupped his hands and shouted up at the lighthouse:

"KEEPER CRUSTWHISTLE! Did you, or did you not, deliberately flood our town?"

A window opened high above. Crustwhistle's mustache poked out, followed by Crustwhistle. His sardine-tin monocle flashed.

"CERTAINLY NOT!" bellowed Crustwhistle.

A faint SPLOORCH echoed from inside the lighthouse.

"Are you, or are you not, planning to buy the fishermen's cottages cheap?"

"ABSOLUTELY NOT!" roared Crustwhistle.

SPLOOSH. A louder gush. Barnaby could see, through one of the lower windows, water beginning to pool around the crates.

"Did you find these magic boots, you scoundrel, and KEEP them all to yourself?"

"I FOUND NOTHING! I KNOW NOTHING! THE BOOTS ARE COMPLETELY ORDINARY!"

GUSH. GUSH. GUSH.

Now Barnaby could hear it clearly — the unmistakable sound of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of magical wellies all filling up at once inside the lighthouse. Crustwhistle, you see, had been

telling whoppers for so long he'd stopped noticing. Each one was a fib. Each fib filled another boot. And every single boot was inside that round, tall, very narrow building with him.

"Crustwhistle!" Barnaby shouted. "Confess! Confess now and you might save yourself!"

"I HAVE NOTHING TO CONFESS!" shrieked Crustwhistle, his mustache quivering like an angry caterpillar having a tantrum on a trampoline. "I AM AN HONEST KEEPER OF A HONEST LIGHTHOUSE AND I HAVE NEVER DONE ANYTHING WRONG IN MY ENTIRE LIFE!"

GUSHHHHHH.

From every window of the lighthouse, water began to pour. First a trickle. Then a stream. Then a torrent. The lighthouse looked like an enormous striped shower, with Crustwhistle's furious face poking out the top like a sour cherry on a soggy cake.

"You see, Keeper," called Barnaby cheerfully, "every lie fills another boot. And you've told an AWFUL lot of lies."

"BLITHERING BARNACLE OF A BOY!" Crustwhistle shrieked. "I'LL — I'LL — I'LL —"

GUSH. GUSH. GUUUUUSH.

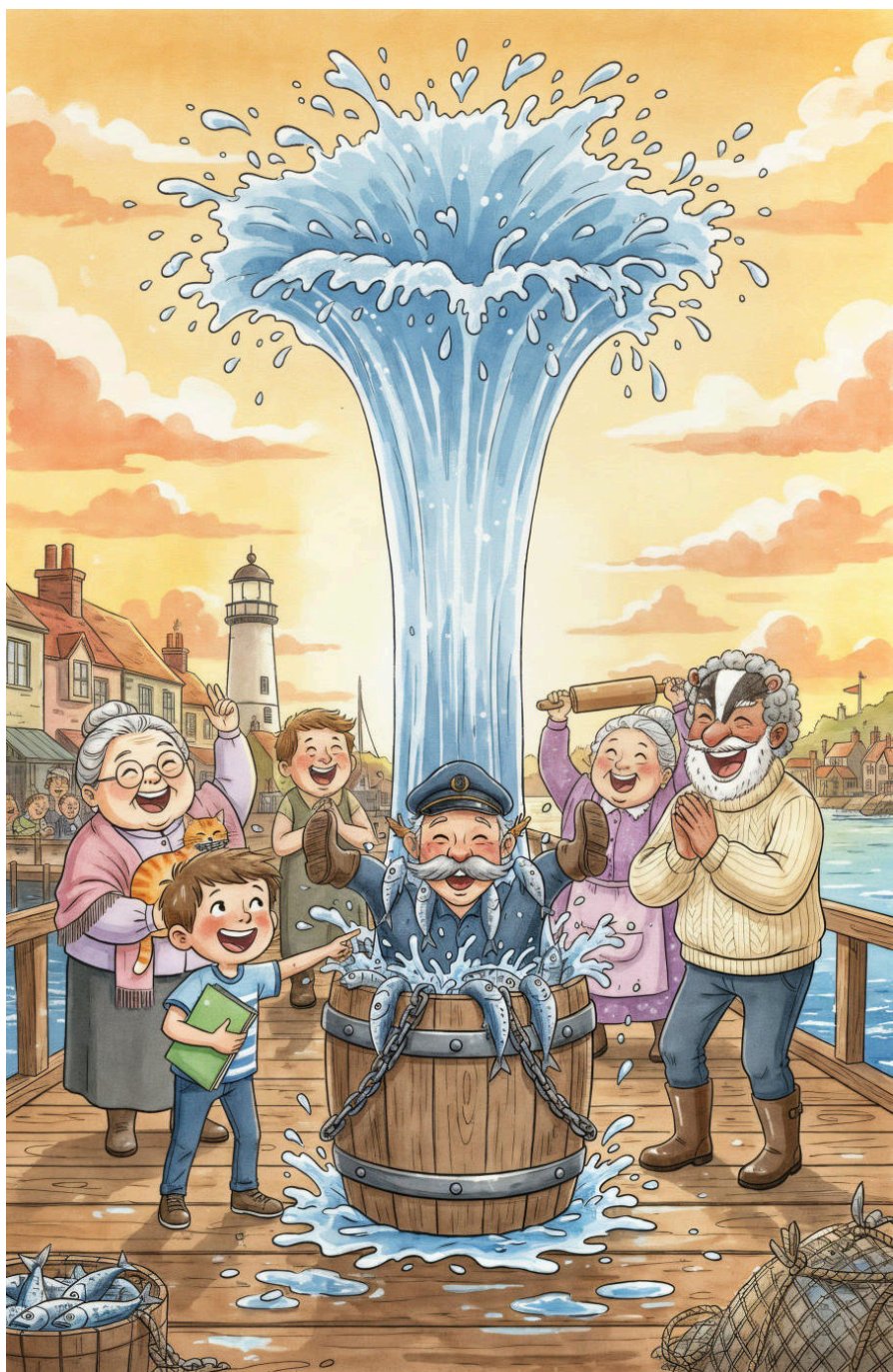
The crowd cheered. Mrs. Plumtart waved her rolling pin. Mrs. Pilchard's cat played a triumphant honk on the harmonica.

But Crustwhistle wasn't done yet.

He disappeared from the window. Moments later, the lighthouse door burst open — and out staggered the keeper, half-drowned, dragging a single, enormous trunk behind him.

"You think you've won, Whifflepuff?" he snarled. "Behold — THE MASTER CRATE."

A liar trapped in a lighthouse is, it turns out, his own worst plumbing problem.



CHAPTER 7

THE MASTER CRATE

The trunk was enormous. It was the size of a small horse. It was bound with rusty chains and stamped with the words:

**ORIGINAL BATCH — DO NOT OPEN UNLESS
PREPARED FOR CONSEQUENCES**

(Which is, frankly, the sort of label that practically dares people to open it.)

Crustwhistle, soaked from cap to boot, wheezing like a kettle full of seaweed, hauled the trunk to the edge of the pier.

"I shall flood your ENTIRE TOWN!" he gasped. "Not just the

streets — the cottages! The bakery! The CHURCH! Every single boot in the original batch is in here, and every single one is connected to every secret ever told in Sprinkleton's HISTORY!"

The crowd gasped. Mrs. Plumtart clutched her rolling pin tighter.

"That's THREE HUNDRED YEARS of secrets!" wailed the mayor. "Granny Sprinkleton's affair with the postman of 1742! Uncle Tobias and the missing church silver! The TRUE recipe for our famous toffee!"

"EXACTLY," hissed Crustwhistle. He produced a key shaped like a fish. He fitted it into the lock. "Once I open this, the water will not STOP. Sprinkleton will be UNDERWATER by morning. And every cottage will be MINE."

He turned the key.

CLICK.

The lid of the trunk creaked open an inch. A single drop of

seawater oozed out. Then another. Then —

"WAIT!" shouted Barnaby.

Crustwhistle paused, hand on the lid. "What?" he sneered.

"Going to BEG, Whifflepuff?"

"No," said Barnaby calmly. He flipped his notebook to a fresh page. "I just want to read you something."

He cleared his throat and read aloud:

OBSERVATION #24: Crustwhistle thinks he understands the boots. But he doesn't. The boots only fill when you keep a secret. They keep filling until you tell the truth. And they fill with the secrets of whoever is WEARING them — or HOLDING them. Or, perhaps, CHAINING THEM TO ONESELF.

Crustwhistle blinked. "What rubbish is this?"

"Look at your hand, Keeper," said Barnaby.

Crustwhistle looked. His hand was gripping the lid handle of the trunk. And from his wrist, where the chain of the trunk had wound itself, a faint blue glow pulsed — the same glow that Barnaby had seen flickering around the original crate on the beach.

"You've claimed them all," said Barnaby. "Every boot in there. Every secret is now linked to YOURS."

"S-so?" stammered Crustwhistle.

"So," said Barnaby, "what's YOUR biggest secret, Keeper?"

The lighthouse keeper's mustache began to twitch like a caterpillar having an electric shock. His sardine-tin monocle popped right off his face and clattered onto the pier.

"I — I — I have NO secrets!" he bellowed.

The trunk shuddered.

SPLORCH.

"I am a HONEST and UPSTANDING citizen!"

The trunk groaned.

GUSH. GUSH. GUSHHHHH.

"I FOUND THESE BOOTS BY HONEST MEANS!"

The trunk began to RUMBLE. The lid bulged. Water began to spurt out in jets — one, two, six, twelve — like a fountain made of guilt.

"Keep talking, Keeper," said Barnaby pleasantly. "What about the cottages? What about your plan?"

"I HAVE NO PLAN! I LOVE THE FISHERMEN! THEY ARE MY DEAREST FRIENDS!"

GUSHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

The trunk EXPLODED.

KA-SPLORCH!

It was the loudest, wettest, most magnificent splosh in the history of Sprinkleton-on-Sea. Three hundred years of compressed, secret-soaked seawater geysered up out of the trunk in a single colossal column — and that column, that vast roaring tower of brine and lies, was aimed directly upwards, then arced gracefully, then came crashing back down ENTIRELY on top of Keeper Crustwhistle.

SPLOOOOOOSH!

The wave hit him like a truckload of cold porridge. It knocked his cap off. It knocked his mustache loose at one end (revealing it to be — gasp — partly fake). It swept him off his feet, tumbled him head over heels down the pier, and deposited him with a tremendous SPLAT directly on top of the town's main fish-gutting station.

He landed in a barrel of three-day-old herring guts.

Up to his ears.

In herring.

Guts.

The townsfolk stared, open-mouthed.

Crustwhistle slowly raised his head. A herring slid off one ear. Another flopped from his collar. His false-mustache hung tragically from his chin like a wet caterpillar that had finally given up on life.

"Bother," he said weakly.

Three hundred years of secrets and a barrel of herring guts make for a singularly memorable comeuppance.

CHAPTER 8

PICKLED, PINCHED, AND PROPERLY PUNISHED

The townsfolk of Sprinkleton-on-Sea stood at the edge of the pier and stared, in awed silence, at the spectacle of Keeper Crustwhistle marinating in herring offal.

Then, all at once, they began to laugh.

Not polite laughter. Not chuckles. Great big BELLY-WOBBLING, KNEE-SLAPPING, GULL-STARTLING peals of laughter. Mrs. Plumtart laughed so hard she dropped her rolling pin. The Vicar laughed so hard he played an entirely silent air-guitar solo. Old Captain Filibuster laughed so hard he fell over (only having two legs and being out of practice).

"Get... me... OUT," gurgled Crustwhistle, spitting out a herring tail.

"Oh, I don't think so," said Barnaby, climbing down from the pier and producing his notebook. "First, we have some confessing to do."

He stood over the barrel like a small, neat judge.

"Keeper Crustwhistle. Did you find the original crate of magical wellies washed up on the beach two months ago?"

"...yes," whispered Crustwhistle.

"And did you," Barnaby went on, licking his pencil, "keep those wellies for yourself, instead of handing them to the harbourmaster as the law plainly requires?"

"...yes," whispered Crustwhistle, sinking a little lower into the herring.

"And did you discover that the wellies WHISPER — that they say out loud every secret their wearer is hiding — and did you

then use them to learn the private business of every soul in Sprinkleton-on-Sea, so you could blackmail them out of their pocket money, their pasties, and Mrs. Plumtart's prize-winning pier?"

The barrel was silent except for the slow glop of offal.

"...YES," wailed Crustwhistle, and burst into tears that smelled, regrettably, of herring.

His moustache — long, grey, and pickled — quivered like an angry caterpillar that had fallen into a jar of vinegar and could see no way out.

The crowd gasped. Mrs. Plumtart clutched her rolling pin. The Vicar stopped his silent air-guitar mid-solo.

"So THAT'S how he knew," breathed Mr. Barnacle the postman. "He knew I read the postcards!"

"He knew I sold yesterday's scones!" cried Mrs. Plumtart.

"He knew I have never, not once, actually sailed a boat,"

admitted Old Captain Filibuster, to absolutely nobody's surprise.

Barnaby held up the wellies — the real ones, the whispering ones — and the whole town went very quiet indeed, because everybody had a secret and nobody fancied hearing it shouted across the pier.

"Here's the thing about secrets," said Barnaby, in his small, neat, judge-ish voice. "They only have power while they're hidden. The moment you say them out loud yourself — they're just things that happened. Boring, even."

And he pulled the wellies on.

The whole town held its breath.

The wellies thought for a moment. Then, in a soft, squelchy voice, they announced Barnaby's deepest, darkest secret:

"BARNABY ... IS SECRETLY ... TERRIFIED ... OF JELLYFISH."

There was a pause.

Then Barnaby laughed. And because he laughed, everyone laughed. And the secret, said out loud, simply popped — like a bubble, like a herring belch, like a Mayor made of toffee — and was gone.

One by one, the townsfolk of Sprinkleton-on-Sea stepped up and whispered their own secrets out loud, on purpose, until there was nothing left for anybody to blackmail anybody with. By teatime, the most honest town on the coast was also, somehow, the very happiest.

Barnaby took out his notebook (slightly damp) and wrote:

OBSERVATION #71: A secret is only heavy because you carry it alone. Say it out loud and it weighs nothing at all — sometimes it even makes people laugh, which is the best magic there is.

And the moral, salty and sea-blown, was this: the only thing a whisper truly fears is being said out loud, kindly, in the daylight.

CHAPTER 9

IN WHICH SPRINKLETON-ON-SEA AIRS ITS LAUNDRY (LITERALLY)

Keeper Crustwhistle was hauled out of the herring barrel, hosed down (twice), and sentenced to one full year of Public Honesty, which meant he had to begin every single sentence with "The truth is..." It very nearly killed him. By spring, oddly, he rather liked it — and turned out to be a perfectly decent fellow underneath all that pickle, which only goes to show.

The whispering wellies were given pride of place in the Sprinkleton Museum, where children dare each other to try them on during the holidays. (The record is held by a small girl named Nutmeg, whose secret — "I LIKE BROCCOLI" — so scandalised the town that they talked of nothing else for a fortnight.)

And every year, on the anniversary of the Great Confessing, Sprinkleton-on-Sea holds a festival called Secrets Day, where everybody tells one true thing they've been hiding, and then they all eat scones (today's scones, fresh — Mrs. Plumtart insists).

Barnaby is the Guest of Honour every single year.

He still keeps his notebook in his pocket.

He is still, just between you and me, absolutely terrified of jellyfish.

But he isn't ashamed of it anymore — and that, as any reader of this book now knows, is the whole entire point.

The End

MEET THE CHARACTERS

BARNABY WHIFFLEPUFF



Ten-year-old boy detective with green notebook

KEEPER BARTHOLOMEW CRUSTWHISTLE



Pompous, lying lighthouse keeper villain

MRS. PLUMTART



Plump baker with polka-dot wellies

THE MAYOR



Pompous mayor in badger-shaped wig

WIDOW PILCHARD



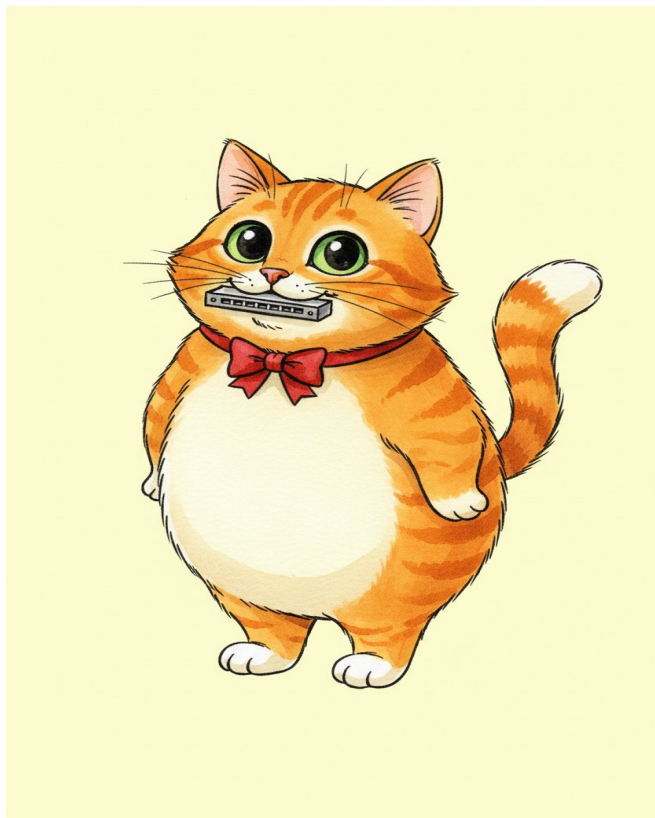
Tiny cottage-loaf widow with cats

CAPTAIN FILIBUSTER



Old sailor who faked a third leg

GERALD THE CAT



Ginger harmonica-playing cat

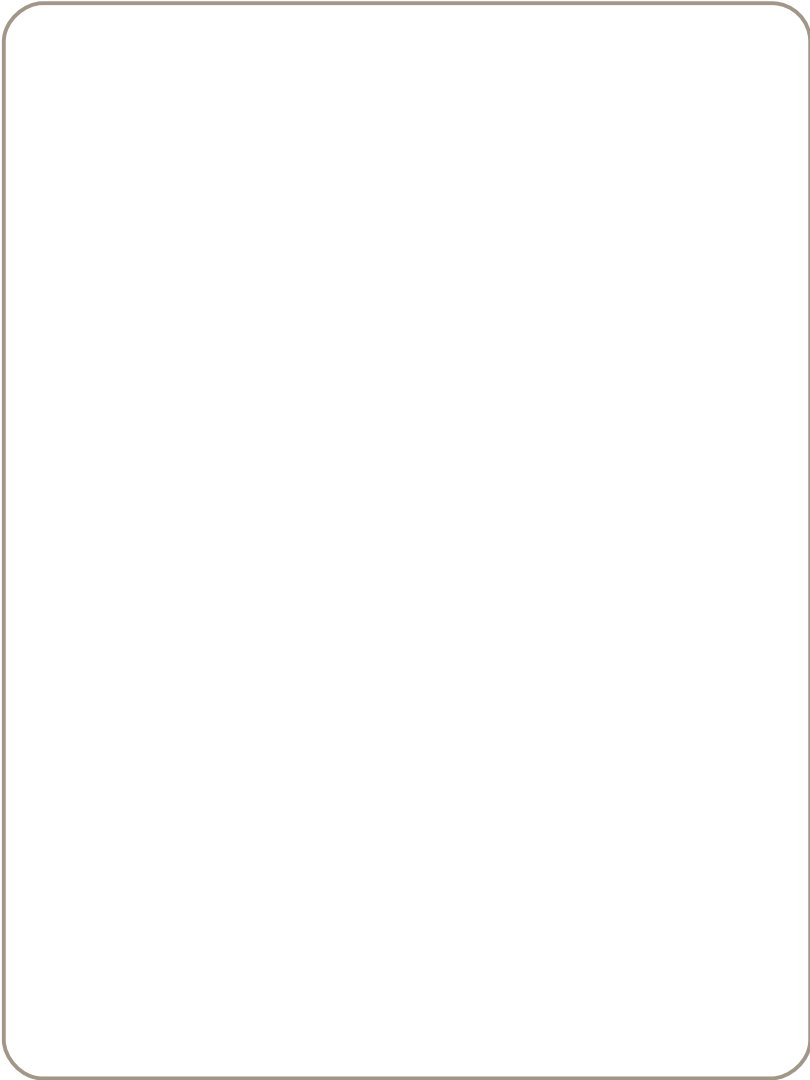
YOUR TURN TO WOBBLE

Draw Barnaby Whifflepuff!



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 below the instruction text.

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.

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.

Find the whole wobbly library at wobblebooks.com