

A short message about the paper we *didn't* use to make this book

The plan was to use trees from Grubtown Forest to make the paper for this book. That was the plan. Unfortunately, the author of **Grubtown Tales**, Beardy Ardagh, had a serious falling out with Grubtown Forest's chief forester. Not just falling out as in 'having an argument' but also falling out as in 'falling out of an aeroplane'.

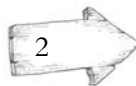
Fortunately for Beardy Ardagh, it was only Hardfast Tendril (the forester) who actually fell from a plane. Unfortunately for Beardy Ardagh, Hardfast Tendril accused him of



PUSHING him out. Beardy Ardagh denies this, which is why the two men fell out (in the argument sense).

Mr Ardagh isn't saying that he didn't hit Mr Tendril on the back with his hand, just that it was 'a friendly slap-on-the-back rather than a shove'. Hardfast Tendril sees it rather differently (from his hospital bed).

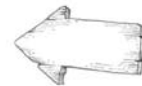
Beardy Ardagh has apologised for the accident but Hardfast Tendril has refused to 'let a single twig or leaf have anything to do with one of Beardy's stupid books'. So it's been printed on some different paper altogether. The paper that's now in your hands.



A world from Beardy Ardagh

Those of you who've already read *Stinking Rich and Just Plain Stinky* will be familiar with most of the people who appear in this Grubtown Tale. Young Jilly Cheeter is back (though she's no longer Grubtown's resident duck-gatherer). Her friend Mango Claptrap is here again too (and he's still wearing his strangely short shorts). There's the mayor Flabby Gomez, the chief of police Grabby Hanson and – oh, yes – there's ME.

For those of you who don't already know me, SHAME ON YOU!!!! (Perhaps you've had your head stuck in a beehive for the past



I-don't-know-how-many-years, or were snatched by aliens and left stranded in the luggage hold of a spaceship?) I'm a life-loving (and very bearded) author and resident of Grubtown. And don't believe a word about my being a bit grumpy and rude sometimes. That's just a story made up by a bunch of knuckleheads who couldn't tie their own shoe-laces if they *had* lace-up shoes, which they don't. (They can only manage Velcro ones, and they even find those tricky to manage.) Enough said.

Enjoy *The Year That It Rained Cows*. It is a work of true genius.

Beardy Ardagh ●

Grubtown



The inhabitants of Grubtown

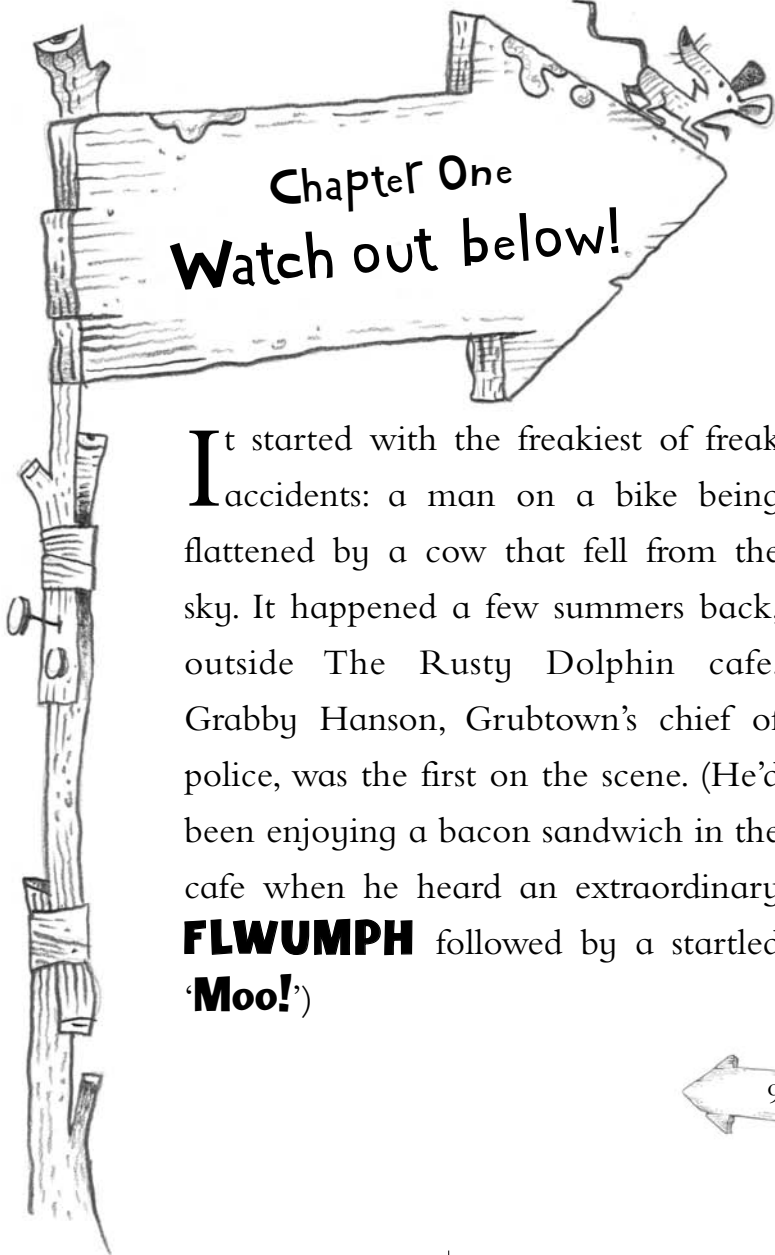
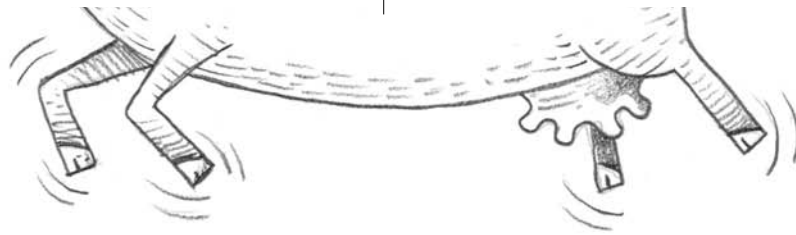
At the back of the book (starting on page 123), you'll find a list of some of the people who live in Grubtown, including Jilly Cheeter and Mango Claptrap but NOT Hardfast Tendril, for obvious reasons. If he's going to upset me – I mean that lovely Mr Ardagh – with those false accusations about a friendly back-slap being a shove, he can't expect to be included, now, can he?



Wait a minute! Wait a minute! I asked you a question!

C^{an he?} Oh, never mind. Let's get this story
started . . .





Chapter One Watch out below!

It started with the freakiest of freak accidents: a man on a bike being flattened by a cow that fell from the sky. It happened a few summers back, outside The Rusty Dolphin cafe. Grabby Hanson, Grubtown's chief of police, was the first on the scene. (He'd been enjoying a bacon sandwich in the cafe when he heard an extraordinary **FLWUMPH** followed by a startled **'Moo!'**)

Running outside, he found the man and the bike both under that cow I just mentioned. And I don't care if you don't believe me because it's true.

'Are you all right under there?' he asked Limbo Goulash, who was the man in question.

'It came out of nowhere!' groaned Mr Goulash. 'It fell from the sky!'

Hanson unclipped his police radio from his



shiny black police belt and muttered a few police words into it. Moments later, Constable Gelatine came out of the cafe wiping a milky foam moustache from his (policeman's) top lip with the back of his hand.

'What is it, Chief?' he asked.

Grabby Hanson nodded in the direction of the cow on the man on the bike. 'Fell from the sky,' he said.

'Both of them?' asked Constable Gelatine.



‘Just the cow.’

‘Are you all right, Limbo?’ asked Grabby Hanson. Funnily enough, he’d climbed through an open window into Limbo’s house and taken a few of his things just a couple of days before. (Our chief of police is forever stealing things, but he always, *always* gives them back.)

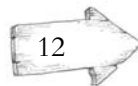
‘I’m a bit squashed,’ said Limbo Goulash. ‘Any chance of getting it off me?’ He felt short of breath and his ribs hurt.

‘I’ll do my best,’ said Grabby Hanson, ‘but I don’t know much about cows.’

‘Me neither,’ admitted Constable Gelatine. ‘I reckon we’ll either have to pull from the front or push from the back.’

‘Good thinking, Gelatine,’ said Grabby Hanson.

‘What about a carrot?’ suggested a voice from among the on-lookers now gathering around the fringes of the accident. It



belonged to Luminous Shard who was wiping his filthy hands on his favourite dirty mechanic's cloth.

'What *about* a carrot?' asked Constable Gelatine.

'I mean, couldn't you wave a carrot in front of her face?' said Shard.

'How do you know it's a she?' asked Grabby Hanson.

'All cows are shes.'

'You have a point there,' admitted the chief of police. 'And, no, I don't think cows eat carrots.'

'You're probably thinking of donkeys, Luminous,' said Limbo Goulash from his position (flat astride the bicycle) under the cow. He was on good terms with Luminous Shard since the mechanic had managed to fix the lawnmower he'd been left by a distant cousin.

'Shouldn't someone call a doctor?' said Jilly

Cheeter, a girl who had been fishing off the jetty with her friend Mango Claptrap when they'd heard the **'FLWUMPH -Moo!'** and come to see what was going on. (Jilly and Mango are about the same age, but she always looks older because he's a bit smaller and will insist on wearing shorts.)

'A doctor?' said Chief of Police Grabby Hanson. 'An excellent idea!'

'I'm not so sure . . .' said Limbo Goulash. 'Doctors are expensive.'

'Then why not send for Dr Fraud?' Mango Claptrap suggested.

'Good thinking!' said Goulash and Hanson at almost exactly the same time.

(Dr Fraud is the cheapest doctor here in Grubtown. That's probably because he's not a real doctor, but he's very popular with his patients. Even those of them who've died in his care have never said a word against him afterwards.)

While they waited for Dr Fraud to arrive, everyone joined in helping first to push and then to pull the cow. She wouldn't budge.

'Perhaps she's injured too,' said Luminous Shard. 'After all, she did fall from the sky.'

'Then again, she landed on something fairly soft,' said Limbo Goulash. 'Me.'

'Good point.' Luminous Shard nodded. A great big pink tongue suddenly flicked out of the cow's mouth and began licking the top of Shard's (totally bald) head.

'Cows like salt,' said Mango Claptrap, who knows all sorts of strange things. 'It must be your sweat she's after.' It was a hot sunny day.

'Actually, it feels rather nice,' said Luminous Shard. The headache he'd had all morning – not helped by the loud '**FLWUMPH-Moo!**' a short while back – was suddenly feeling a lot better.

Dr Fraud stepped out of his sleek black motorcar and hurried over, clutching his



impressive-looking doctor's bag. 'Where's the patient?' he asked.

'He's the one under the cow,' said Jilly Cheeter, raising her eyebrows.

'Of course,' nodded Dr Fraud. He bent down next to Limbo Goulash. 'How are you doing, Limbo?'

'I can't feel my legs,' said Goulash.

'And what would you want to feel your legs for anyway?' asked Dr Fraud. 'I've been out and about all day and I haven't stopped to feel my legs once. Feeling my top pocket to check I've got my eye-glasses? Yes. Feeling my

trouser pockets to check I've got my keys? Yes. But feeling my legs? Never.'

'He's right you know!' said Mrs Awning, who was now standing immediately behind Mango Claptrap and Jilly Cheeter. If there was an accident to be had, it was usually she who was slap-bang in the middle of it. *Not* to be the injured one must have been an unusual feeling for her.

She turned suddenly and poked herself in the eye with the end of Mango's homemade fishing rod.

'Ouch!' she yelped.

There. Much better.

