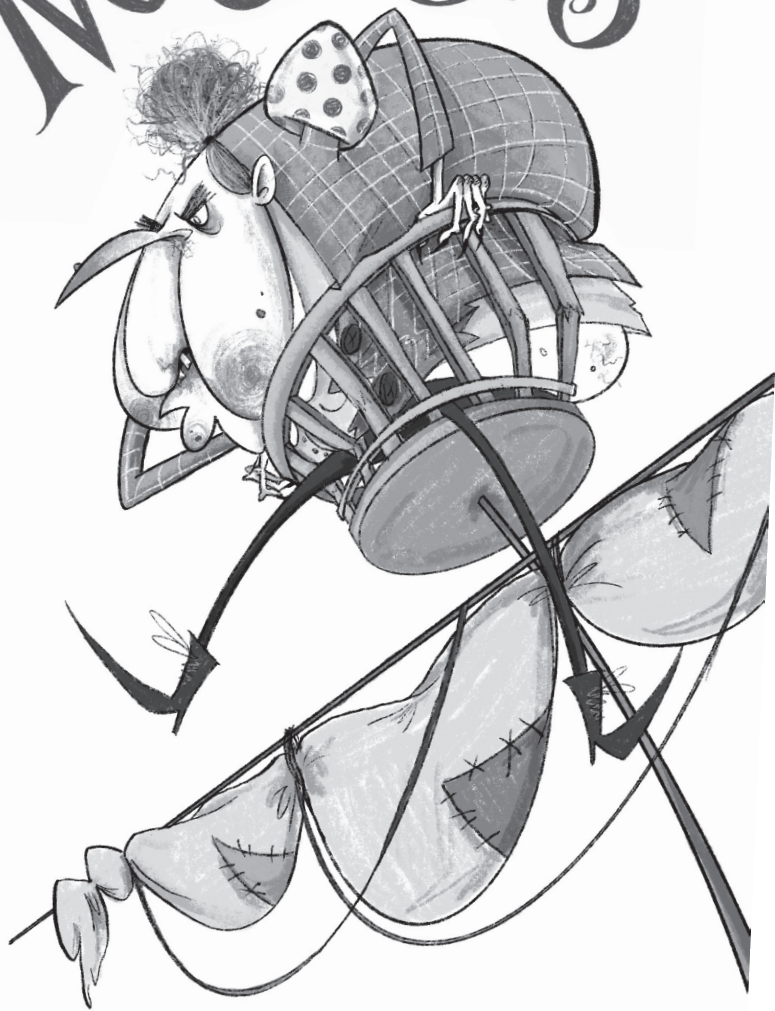


The NotWitches



A MESSAGE FROM CHICKEN HOUSE

Whoa! These aunts are more than a little horrible. Almost suspiciously horrible . . . After all, it's not as though they're witches – are they?! Luckily, Melanda gets some magic help in Gary Panton's hilarious, outrageous adventure, the first in a delightful series for younger readers, with lots more laughs from pictures by Dotty Sutton!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Cunningham', with a stylized, flowing script.

BARRY CUNNINGHAM

Publisher


Chicken House

The NotWitches

GARY PANTON
Illustrated by Dotty Sutton



2 PALMER STREET, FROME, SOMERSET, BA11 1DS



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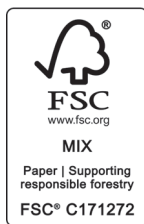
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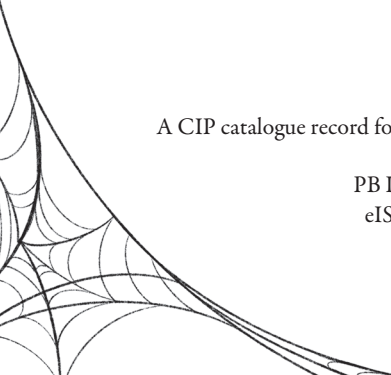


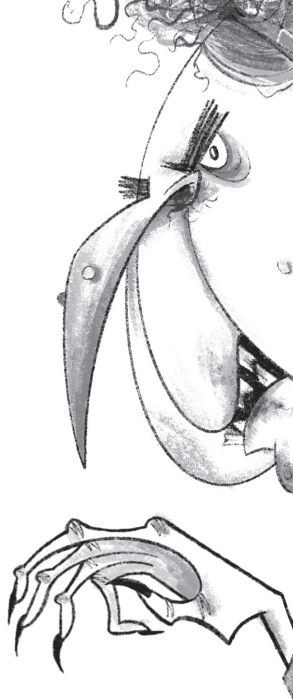
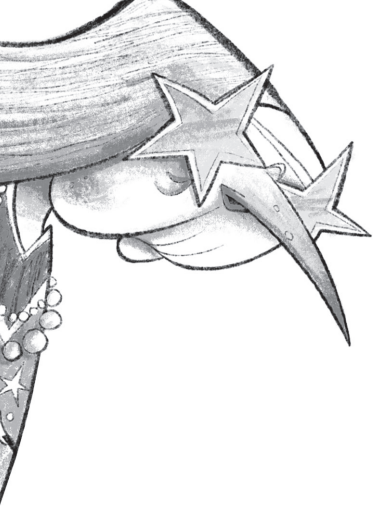
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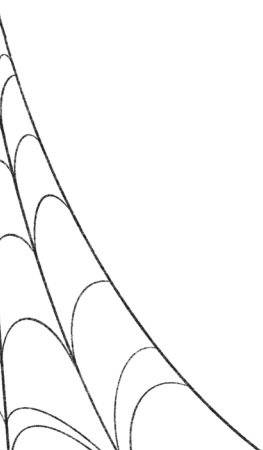
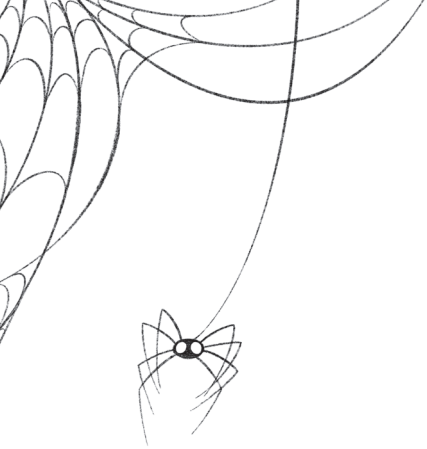
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For Delithea





The Crunchy Man

by Melanda Notwitch

The CRUNCHY MAN walks with a CRUNCHY NOISE.

CRUNCH.

CRUNCH.

CRUNCH.

That's the sound of his old bones CRUNCHING together as he walks towards your bed.

He's 209 years old, and only comes out at night, because if sunlight touches his skin it will crumble up into crusty crumbs. His face is all stale and bumpy like bad bread, and he has a straggly moustache that dangles down over

his mouth and gets in the way when he tries to eat soup. One of his eyes is the size of a peanut, and the other one is the size of a fat orange.

His long, narrow legs hang down from his bum like bendy drainpipes, and he has way too many pairs of knees.

On his head he wears a tall, battered hat. The hat is missing its top, so when the wind blows past the open end it makes a peeping sound, like this:

PEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP!

On his feet he wears a pair of scuffed ghost-skin boots that he stole from a haunted

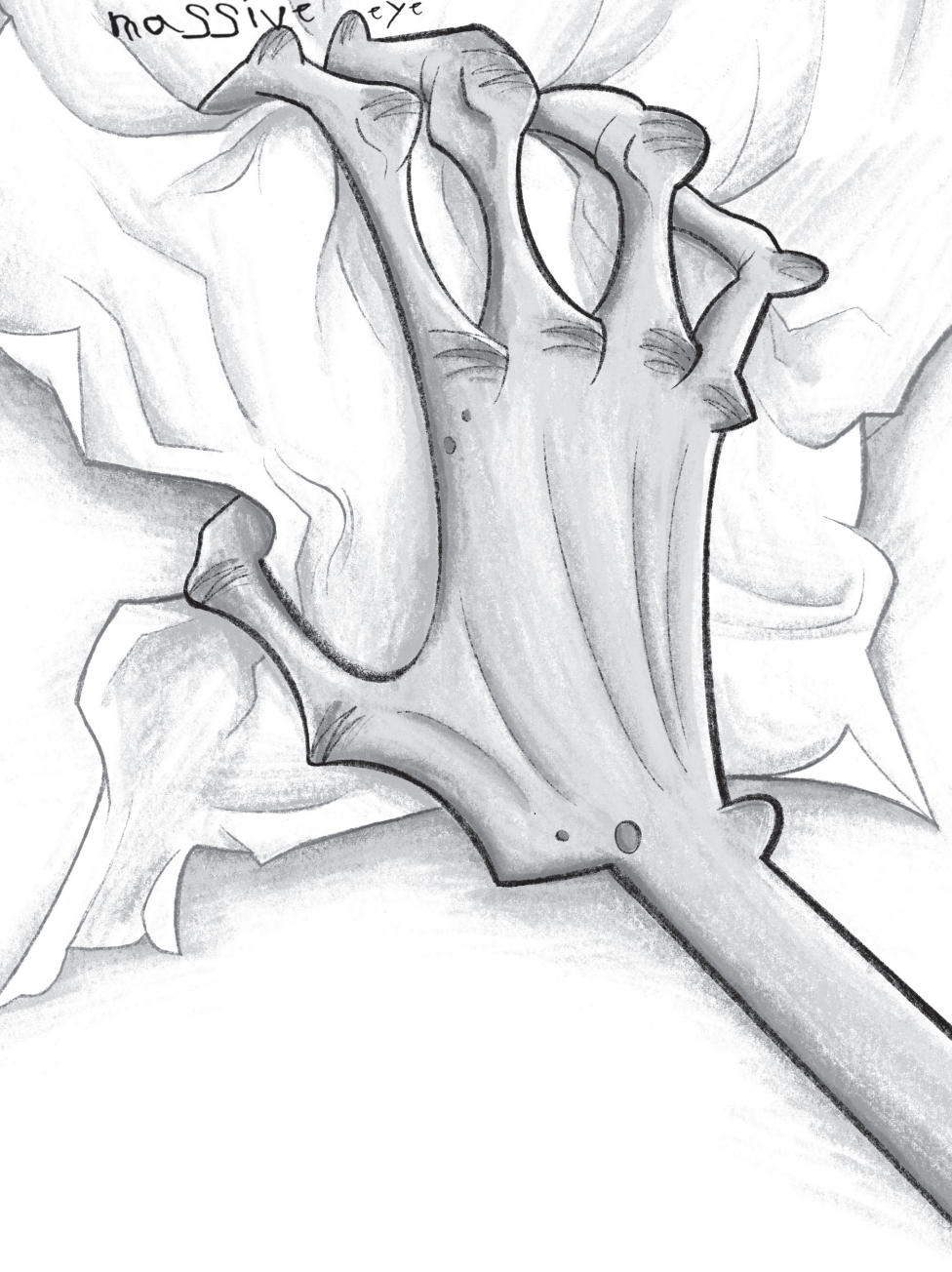
Fairground. The boots wait when he walks, and he waits too, because they're two-and-a-half sizes too small for him and they hurt his toes.

The Crunchy Man never goes on holiday, but if he did, no one would want to sit next to him on the plane. (Firstly because he'd spread his legs out really wide, and secondly because he smells of graveyards.)

He doesn't have his own bed, so he never sleeps and he is always very tired.

That's why he lurks in the corners of bedrooms, waiting for you to fall asleep so he

can CRUNCH his way towards
your comfy pillows and close his
massive eye





CHAPTER 1

THE THREE AUNTS

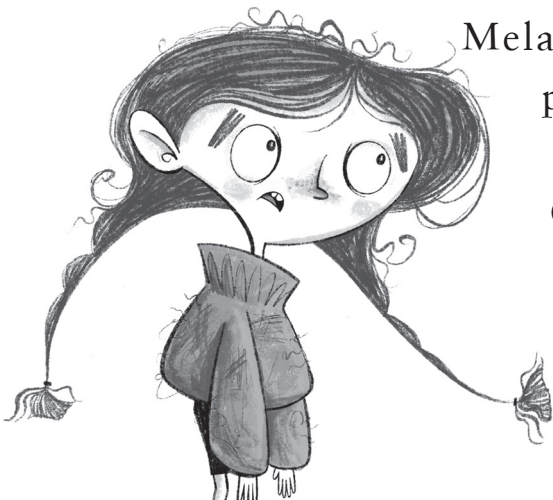
A thin, bony hand grabbed Melanda Notwitch's writing paper, scrunched it up into a crinkly ball, and thrust it towards a set of brown, rotting teeth. These were the teeth of Aunt Claggy, and they were teeth that were well used to the practice of munching down stationery. Pens, pencils, rulers – Aunt Claggy had munched them all in her time. Once, in the dead of night,

Melanda had even seen her hunched over the kitchen table nibbling on a roll of sticky tape.

This time, however, the deliciousness of the paper was a mere bonus. Aunt Claggy hated all reading and all writing, and despised the sight of Melanda sitting deep in thought, smile on face, pen in hand, conjuring up wonderful worlds of her own creation. So, if she could put a stop to such nonsense, while at the same time benefiting from a lovely snack, it was a good day for Aunt Claggy.

For not the first time in her eleven years, Melanda felt completely helpless.

‘ENOUGH OF THIS!’ Aunt

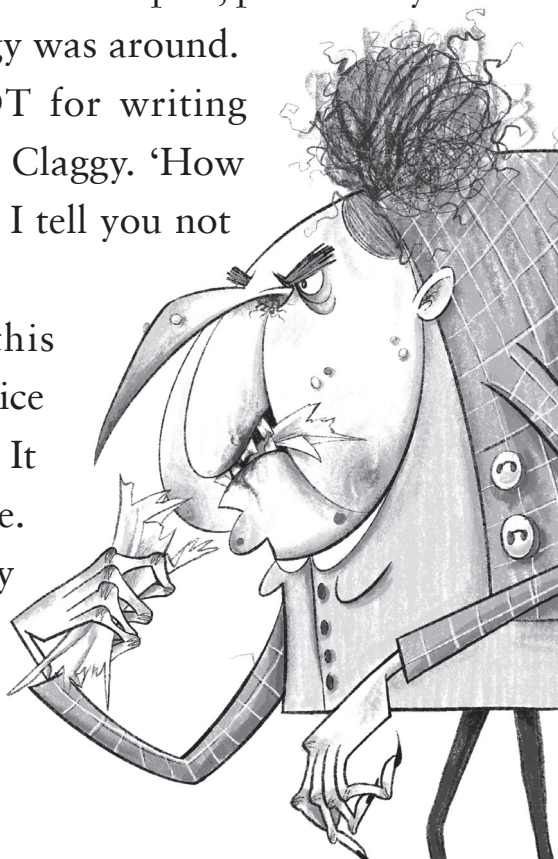


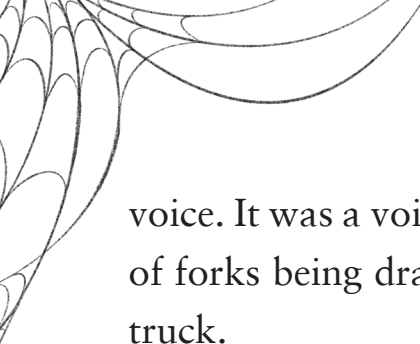
Claggy shrieked once she had finished gulping the paper down her neck like an angry turtle. ‘Enough of these stories! Enough of this writing! Monsters! Ghosts! Crunchy men! It’s not appropriate!’

‘*You’re* not appropriate,’ Melanda said under her breath, tears forming in her eyes. Melanda often felt sad or upset, particularly when Aunt Claggy was around.

‘Paper is NOT for writing on!’ ranted Aunt Claggy. ‘How many times must I tell you not to waste food?’

‘What’s all this noise?’ came a voice from the hallway. It was a mean voice. It was a scratchy





voice. It was a voice that sounded like a bag of forks being dragged underneath a heavy truck.

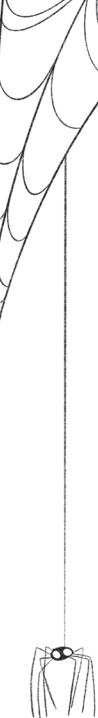
At this point, it is probably important to point out that Melanda Notwitch was in a very unfortunate situation. You see, while a lot of girls or boys in storybooks have one or two horrific grown-ups to deal with, Melanda had three. There was Aunt Claggy, whose long and scrawny limbs protruded from a tubby middle stuffed with half-digested office supplies. There was Aunt Rear Admiral Barbara Notwitch, once of a glorious naval career but now of a miserable outlook and a left side coated entirely in barnacles. And there was Aunt Thumb, whose bright and baggy clothing might have suggested she was someone with a warmer personality, were it not for the fact that she

had stolen all of it from some tents at a music festival.

The voice from the hallway belonged to Aunt Rear Admiral Barbara Notwitch. She had just emerged from the bathroom. That was where she spent most of her time, on account of all the barnacles. Despite having left her seafaring days behind long ago, she still dressed from head to toe in her full navy uniform, complete with golden shoulder tassels and two-cornered hat (which she wore all the time, even when she was in bed). Her jacket was decorated with multiple medals, which she'd been awarded for honours ranging from arm-wrestling a squid to correctly naming all the bits of a boat.

‘What’s going on?’ she rasped, marching into Melanda’s cramped bedroom.

‘It’s this horrible little monster,’ snapped



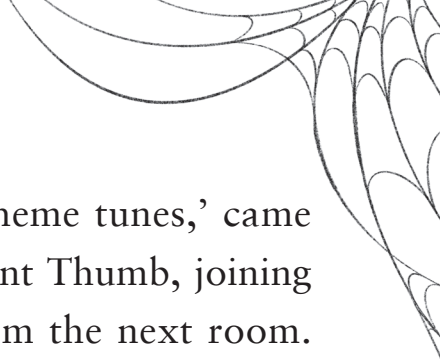
Aunt Claggy, looming over Melanda like a nasty spider. ‘You’ll never guess what she’s been doing. **WRITING!** Writing **AGAIN!** After all the times I’ve told her not to. There’s me, sitting downstairs, my poor tummy all of a rumble, and all the while this disgusting little puke is up here destroying my dinner with her silly stories.’

‘Is this true?’ asked Aunt Rear Admiral Barbara Notwitch, leaning forward so that her waspish eyes bored into Melanda’s flustered face.

‘Yes, it’s true!’ said Melanda. ‘I love writing and I love stories, and you can’t stop me! I’m writing a book! My very own book.’

‘**PAH!**’ snorted Aunt Claggy. ‘It’s not a book! *You* can’t write a book.’

‘*It is* a book,’ responded Melanda, looking hurt. ‘It’s even got a theme tune.’



‘Books don’t have theme tunes,’ came the muffled voice of Aunt Thumb, joining in through the wall from the next room. Aunt Thumb often preferred to communicate through walls, on account of her being afflicted with a deep laziness that made it difficult for her to move from one room to another.

‘My one does,’ Melanda called back. ‘It goes:

*Here comes The Crunchy Man,
His face is as old as mouldy Flan,
He’s got more knees than sixteen bees,
And an eye as big as a watering can.’*

‘That’s quite good actually!’ Aunt Thumb responded.

‘ENOUGH!’ barked Aunt Claggy, cutting Melanda off just as she was about to sing the next verse. ‘You should be spending

your time making my dinner, you selfish little ferret. All that paper would make a lovely stew.'

'Exactly,' chimed in Aunt Rear Admiral Barbara Notwitch. 'And you should be helping me with my . . . my . . . er . . . my problem.' On the word 'problem', she glanced forlornly down at the barnacles encrusting her left hand.

'And you should be mopping up, and dusting down,' came Aunt Thumb's muffled voice from the room next door. 'And shaving us.'

'Now get to work!' yelled all three aunts at once. Aunt Claggy and Aunt Rear Admiral Barbara Notwitch turned around and marched victoriously from Melanda's bedroom, knowing that they, as always, had won.

As the aunts slammed the door behind them, a defeated Melanda resigned herself to yet another horrific afternoon of boiling notepads, mopping up, dusting down and carrying out various other tasks that no child, or grown-up, for that matter, should ever have to experience.