

# RISING STARS



**For authors**  
**by authors**

Translated from the French by Vineet Lal

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# “Rising Stars! For authors, by authors” in words & figures

April 2018 saw the launch of our first-ever children’s short story competition, with the aim of discovering new children’s authors, supporting them through mentoring, advice and insights, and extending their networks within the field of children’s literature.

Each entrant had to write a short story aimed at 8-12 year olds, a maximum of 5,000 characters in length, on any theme and in any literary genre, with just one challenge: their story had to begin with the following words:

**I break open my piggy bank. It’s empty! Where’s my money?  
Instead, there’s just a folded piece of paper.**

.....

61 entrants  
12 winners  
6 mentors  
5,000 characters per short story  
3 hours of deliberations  
17 jurors including 8 children  
from the book club LékriDézados  
1,000 printed copies  
14 hours of training  
2 days of meetings at the Montreuil  
Children’s Book Fair

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The twelve winners benefit from a programme designed to help them become professional writers including:

- Copy-editing and revision of their stories by their mentors, all established authors.
- Two days’ training and workshops on: legal issues and author contracts by Emmanuel de Rengervé (Director of SNAC, the French national union for authors and composers); forging a career as a children’s writer by author Sophie Adriansen; and the craft of writing, and pitching new projects, by author and academic Sylvaine Jaoui.
- The publication of the collection you’re holding now, containing all 12 short stories.
- Specially-arranged meetings with publishers, professionals and industry experts at the Montreuil Children’s Book Fair.
- Literary events and the promotion of their stories in 2019.

## Editorial by Guillaume Nail

### Calling all collectors!

The publication you have in your hands is a rare gem indeed: a collection of all the winning entries from our first-ever “Rising Stars!” competition, organised “For authors, by authors”.

And what a journey it’s been, from our opening pledge to where we are now! A road paved with excitement, worries and sleepless nights. Would people send us enough short stories? Would they be up to the mark? Would the jury be too? Would they manage to make decisions between them, or would they end up at loggerheads? And what about the mentors? Would the chemistry work between them and their mentees? Not to mention the most important thing of all: would we manage to pull together a unified but charmingly eclectic band of writers, one that would guarantee a collection that was just as enriching in content yet varied in style?

Well, the answer has to be a resounding “yes”, a thousand times “yes”!

Our winners stand before us, all supremely talented, all eager to jump in at the deep end, and all set to meet with publishers at the next Montreuil Children’s Book Fair before we focus on their work in 2019.

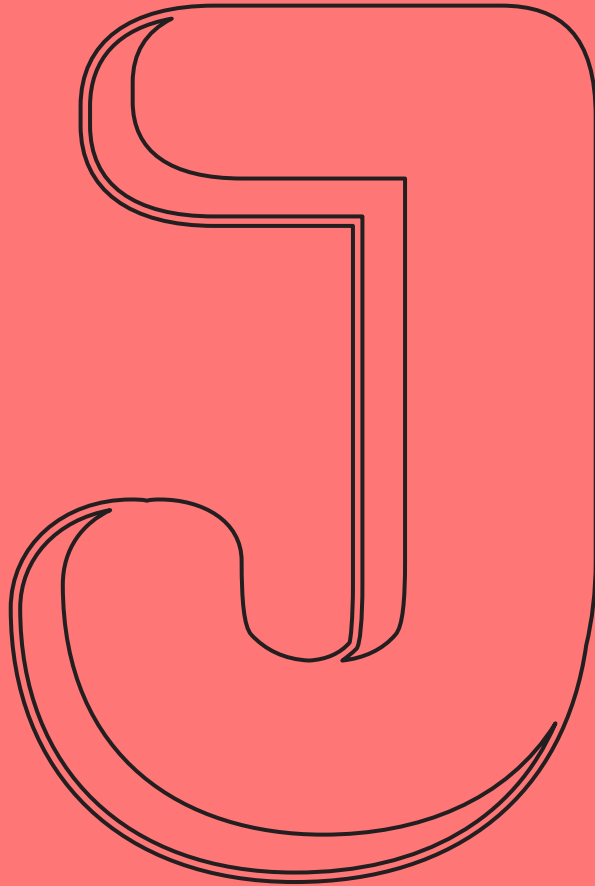


I should take this opportunity to say a huge “thank you” to everyone who’s made this madcap adventure possible: not just the jury and mentors, but also the staff at La Chartre, Gaëlle, Isabelle and Emmanuelle (hark the sweet chime of our rhyming belles!). And I’d also like to thank Carole Trébor, former Chair of La Chartre, for coming up with the brilliant idea for “Rising Stars! For authors, by authors” – a tiny seed that we’ve only just planted, but which will undoubtedly bloom and flourish in the years to come. Just as another of our projects, the “Bologna Book Fair Professional Programme”, aimed at illustrators and sponsored by La Chartre, has blossomed over time and now come of age.

So, enjoy these little tales, and do take note of the twelve names in this collection. You’re lucky enough to be witnessing the début of some very talented authors, destined to be the stars of tomorrow!

**Guillaume Nail**

Vice-Chair, Authors



## AUTHORS

**Clémentine Beauvais**

**Marie-Aude Murail**

## ON BEHALF OF LA CHARTE

**Camille Brissot**

**Guillaume Nail**

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE SPECIALISTS

**Valérie Beaugier & Marilyne Duval**

**Emmanuelle Chesnel**

**Tom Lévêque**

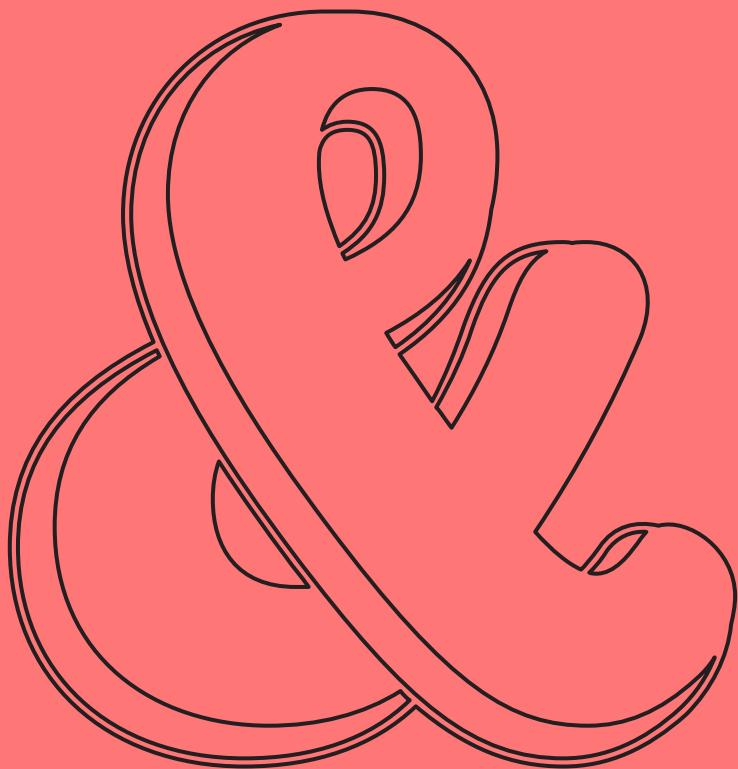
**Charlotte Rigaud**

**Céline Robert**

## CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

The Montreuil Library children's book club, LékriDézados, represented by: Augustin Brahim, Joséphine Brahim, Ella Effo, Margot Garnier, Nayéli Hulot, Thomas Levey, Louise Magnier and Olympe Steinbach.

# Mentors



**Marion  
Achard**

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Gaël Bordet  
Stéphane Botti

**Sophie  
Adriansen**

---

Judith Bouilloc  
Pierre-François Kettler

**Matthieu  
Sylvander**

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Damien Galisson  
Delphine Pessin

**Emmanuel  
Trédez**

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Aylin Manço  
Gilles Monchoux

**Flore  
Vesco**

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Lilie Bagage  
Laura P. Sikorski

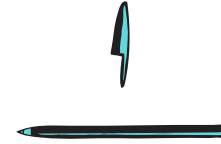
**Séverine  
Vidal**

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Betty Piccioli  
Frédéric Vinclère

# EPONYM'S MAGIC

Lilie Bagage



**I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.**

That's all Eponym can see. Nineteen words, a horrid curse, on a scrap of green paper she's found in place of her savings.

She'd been so looking forward to buying her first quill... And now, they're making fun of her, taunting her. Who's made off with her precious money? Beneath her golden locks, Eponym turns blue with sorrow. Claspng the wretched paper in her hand, she leaves her room and runs into her little brother, Fullstop. When he's not with his twin sister Comma, Fullstop always looks bored, with his droopy eyes and pursed lips. But as soon as Eponym appears, he starts to snigger. Ever since they were born, the twins have spent their time trying to annoy her. To be fair, they, at least, do know how to write magic down. The letters in their spells look so pretty, and they're all the same size. Eponym, however, can only manage a scrawl, and moreover she always forgets her punctuation. Her magic never does what it's told.

"Have you been stealing?" she snaps at her brother.

Fullstop, who's not used to seeing his sister cry before he's even opened his mouth, looks at her wide-eyed:

"Me...?" he replies, his voice tailing off so you can almost hear the "dot-dot-dot". "Why would I have done that? Mum already gives me more pocket money than you..." That's true. Because Fullstop works so hard at his writing, Mother's a lot kinder towards him. Eponym rushes forward to grab her brother, but he simply writes "I'm falling" in chalk on the wall—and there she goes, tripping over an invisible step like an idiot, while Fullstop seizes the opportunity to scamper off. Still feeling just as sad, Eponym picks herself up, hurtles down the stairs and lands up in the kitchen. Delicately-scented words, like "thyme" and "bay", float gently from the broth that's simmering on the fire. At the table, Uncle Metaphor is busy scribbling a poetic recipe with his quill. As his words take shape, they make the spice jars dance above the cooking pot. Eponym tugs at his sleeve to attract attention, and he makes a total mess of his paper. "Dash and double-dash!" he exclaims. Eponym's cheeks turn from blue to red with shame. "Uncle, someone's taken my money." "And?" "And I was meant to buy my apprentice quill with it. Today's the last day I can enrol at wizarding school..." Uncle Metaphor smiles apologetically, from below eyebrows as pointed as two upside-down Vs. "You know very well I can't help you. Those are the rules: each apprentice wizard must earn their place at school. Your pocket money was a medal, the indisputable proof of your worth. I refuse to tarnish its shine by buying the quill for you. And moreover, your mother would put us through hell if I were to show any favouritism." "But she does it a lot, with Fullstop and Comma!" "Not that much," replies Uncle, clearly annoyed. "The

spells cast by the twins sound like beautiful melodies to her, whereas yours... For goodness' sake, Eponym, can't you hear the commotion screeching out of your pencils!"

Hoots of laughter echo through the garden. Eponym leaves the house in tears. Her sister Comma is enjoying a game of leap-letter with her cousin Anaphora, who's conjuring up obstacles in the thick grass. "Hurry up, half pint! Hurry up!" chants her cousin as she traces Ms at top speed along Comma's path. "Hurry up, or you'll never beat Fullstop's record!"

Seeing them having so much fun, Eponym turns crimson with rage. She waves the bit of paper and shouts: "So which of you two's the thief?" Astonished, her sister and cousin stop dead in their tracks. Anaphora sneers, and snaps back cruelly: "Why don't you try writing a spell on the back of that paper to get your money back? Ah, yes, I forgot: you don't know how to write."

Eponym feels humiliated. Almost without thinking, her fingers start fiddling with the beastly note, twisting and folding it in all directions. Bit by bit, the crumpled green paper turns into a tiny little frog... which suddenly starts hopping around like a real one! Eponym only just manages to catch it. She doesn't dare breathe. Did that really happen? Making the most of her confusion, the frog wriggles through her fingers, jumps down the front of Anaphora's dress and begins tickling her! Her cousin, in utter panic, starts screaming and shaking her clothes. Dozens of coins come tumbling from her petticoats. It was her, the thief, she's been rumbled!



Eponym is speechless, and watches with astonishment as the origami frog escapes yet again and finally lands on her own head.

"Pure magic..." whispers Fullstop behind her, intrigued by all the shouting. "Without letters or words... just some paper."

"Incredible!" exclaims Uncle Metaphor from the front doorstep. "Your hands shall be your wizard's quills, my child. We've never seen anything like it, not in two thousand years! What will you call this new magic?"

Eponym has never felt so proud. She shall go to wizarding school after all, and become an apprentice without needing to write! As she picks up her coins in the grass, her cheeks turn yellow, the colour of joy:

"I shall name it after me," she replies. "Eponym!"



## Lilie Bagage

Lilie Bagage was born in 1985, and lives in Lyon where she studied for a science degree. She was captivated by imaginary worlds from an early age, and by authors including Ray Bradbury, Roger Zelazny, Philip K. Dick and Terry Pratchett. She has already published *Les larmes de Yada* ("The Tears of Yada") with Nestiveqnen Éditions in 2017, and two books in 2018 with Gulf Stream Éditeur in the "Puce et Globule" series, *Les mages Tétanox* (Volume 1, "The Tetanox Sorcerers") and *Les fées Lonies* (Volume 2, "The So-Un Fairies"). But more than anything, it's the sheer joy of escaping into other realms, through books, films or writing, that remains her abiding passion.

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# GRANNY'S UPPED STICKS AND GONE

Gaël Bordet



**I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.**

There's something fishy here. My life savings, all gone up in smoke... Farewell, my new roller-hockey stick, farewell fame and fortune, and *adieu*, Bérénice. I bet she'll end up with that scumbag Enzo. I'm barely twelve, and I'm already ruined. It's all over.

With my trembling fingers, it takes forever to unfold the paper. A tiny object finally slips out. I retrieve it from the shattered remains of my pink rabbit (well, it was about time I settled scores with that little fellow anyway). It's an old padlock key, covered in rust.

Is this a joke?

I turn the paper over and over, in all directions. No explanation, not even the faintest hint of a clue. Nothing. The pink rabbit's still grinning away. Mocking, taunting me. I wipe the smile off his face with a blow from my hammer. I rush onto the landing, the hammer in one hand and the key in the other, and yell, beside myself with rage: "Who did this?"

Deafening silence. My sister doesn't look up from her book; down on the ground floor, perched on a stepladder,

my father carries on whistling as he tries to rehang the living room curtain.

The front door slams and, from the hallway, we hear my mother's voice soaring through the air, filled with trills and a quaver or two:

"Daaarling! Amore miooo!"

My father gives a start. The stepladder wobbles, but remains on its feet.

My mother's a classical singer and always makes an entrance worthy of a diva at the Paris Opera, even when there's diddly-squat going on.

"Mother's disappeared!" she announces.

The curtain gives way. My father rounds off his little tumbling act and crashes onto the floor.

"You mean she's finally done it?" he asks, eternally hopeful as he massages his bottom.

"No. She's not vanished into thin air using one of her ludicrous 'magic' tricks. She really has disappeared, and taken her stuff with her. And stop staring at me like an owl, it's getting on my nerves."

Hope fades rapidly in my father's eyes, but his owlish look's not going anywhere. He always looks startled, even when there's zero cause for alarm. That's maybe why he's as rubbish at real life as he is at DIY. He writes stories. For him, a normal day consists of dreaming up the impossible lives of characters who don't exist, in worlds that haven't yet been explored. If I'm not mistaken.

My little sister puts her head through the railings of the banister:

"What's up?"

"Nothing, poppet. Your father's simply fallen off his

stepladder, and Granny's disappeared. You can go back to your book."

My sister does nothing but read all day, and it doesn't worry my parents in the slightest. At the moment, she's deep into a twelve-volume series about giant mermaids riding on giant seahorses in swimming pools filled with gigantic bubbles. If I'm not mistaken.

"Mum, Dad, I..."

"Later, Jacques-Nazaire. Can't you see your father's busy?"

"But I've found a..."

"I said laaaater!"

The curtain rod comes clattering down and misses my father by a whisker. I slip the key into my pocket as my father puts on his cycling helmet.

"What are you up to with a hammer, Jacques-Nazaire?"

"Nothing, Dad."

I go back to my room to think in peace.

To be honest, I'm not called Jacques-Nazaire. Well, yes, I am. But only by my parents. Otherwise, of course, I've got a perfectly ordinary name. One day, my grandmother, the one who's just disappeared, began calling me Merlin, and it stuck.

So, Granny's vanished. That's always been her dream, to make herself disappear. The Holy Grail for all magicians. She's been practising for a long time, and she's kept it a secret from my mother and six aunts who think her magic's far too weird, too much of a risk. Above all, they blame her, and her quirky little ways, for having already made Grandad disappear (spirited off to who knows where along with Paloma, Granny's ex-best friend).

Through the half-open door, I see my sister dashing past to shove her head between the railings again.

“It’s so cool, Dad, that first book in your series! And it’s just brilliant, your idea of a magic trunk under the sea!”

Leaving my sister to skip back to her room, it dawns on me that my father’s the author of that celebrated saga, *A Dozen Merquine Mermaids Versus Doctor Octopus*. But more importantly, I remember that an old trunk of my grandfather’s has been gathering dust in the cellar ever since he left.

I rush downstairs.

The dusty old trunk is indeed there.

The tiny key fits the mouldy padlock perfectly.

I open it up.

And I find an old wooden hockey stick, all chipped and scraped. Along with a tightly-rolled piece of paper. I unravel it, shaking like a leaf.

*“My dear Merlin, this stick is being returned to you. It belonged to your Grandad whom I’ve finally managed to track down – he’s been hiding out in the Corsican scrub with that witch of his. I went off to change them into woodlice. Don’t say a word to anyone: I shall reappear when the time comes.*

*I’m sorry about your money. I borrowed it for the plane ticket. But you don’t need anything to impress Bérénice anyway. And as for Enzo-the-Zitface, that dimwit will never be any match for you. Ever.*

*Your Granny.*

*PS Now you see me, now you...”*

## Gaël Bordet

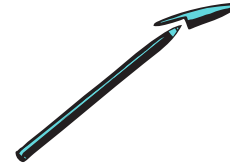


Gaël Bordet was born in 1975, and spent his childhood in the Ivory Coast and Senegal. He eventually became a sociologist, and dabbled in a wide range of activities including acting, teaching forest survival skills and hunting for antique drawings. The world of children’s literature has allowed him to satisfy his childhood curiosity, and fulfil those early dreams of exploration and derring-do. His first novel, *Le cas Rubis C (Petits contes à régler)* (“The Curious Case of Rubis C [Little Tails for the Telling]”), was published by Bayard Jeunesse in 2011 and won several awards, and was followed in 2013 by a second volume, *L’affaire Sherlock H* (“The Sherlock H Affair”). His forthcoming book *Les masques d’Ivoire* (“The Ivory Masks”) will be published by MeMo in 2019.

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# ANY MINUTE NOW

Stéphane Botti



**I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.**

"I've hidden your cash, so don't spend anything on my birthday! It's lovely outside, meet me in the park. Picnic at twelve."

I bury my head in the pillow so I can scream as loud as I like. It's not easy for me to hate my big brother. But his kindness makes me feel sick. It makes me realise just how selfish I am. I know he worries about me. After the car accident with our parents, two years ago, I came to live with him. The seizures began some time later. I was nine and a half. Antoine gave me his room and he sleeps in the living room. He said it's easier given his working hours, and moreover a good night's sleep is an ally in the fight against epilepsy... I feel guilty about stealing his life. He's twenty-three, he doesn't have a girlfriend, and it's all my fault! Antoine has a job so that we can make ends meet, and the rest of the time he looks after me. And now I've refused to go to school, and shut myself up in my room. What on earth was Antoine thinking? That such a ridiculous ploy could make me leave the house? They could start again any time! And I'll keep having them, if they don't find the proper treatment. Getting into secondary school, though, went off without a hitch. I slipped under the radar. Until that first seizure when we

came back from November half-term. The English teacher just couldn't bear it when I pushed her back, yelling "Tigress on heat!" when I regained consciousness... The incident sent shockwaves through the pupils. First they were scared, then they laughed. The story spread like wildfire in the breaks between classes. Group laughter, which I was excluded from and still echoes in my head. A wound, one of the multiple scars this illness has gouged into my soul.

As if to prove my decision was right, I'm getting a metallic taste in my mouth. I'm scared I'm about to have another attack. I brush my teeth to try and get rid of my fear. After each of my "absences", the world looks like an enormous rough sketch that needs tidying-up. Brushing my teeth is one of the "tricks" I've invented to help me focus and avoid seizures. That, along with the reassuring presence of Post-its. I stick them everywhere to keep me in touch with reality: I write down my name, age, memories...

Now I'm frowning. On the mirror, my brother has changed my Post-its: "The fridge is empty", "If you want something to eat, come to the park!" and MY OWN motto: "You must dare to dare!"

I sigh. His emotional blackmail finally wears me down. I draw the route from the apartment to the park on my arm with a marker. A bit like a tattoo on a lost dog. Reluctantly, I get dressed. Reluctantly, I go out. The park's five minutes away. I'm almost at the gates when the familiar symptoms reappear. My body stiffens, words

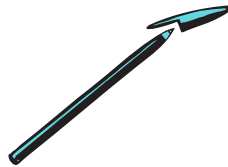
twist out of shape, my muscles relax, I fall and the final convulsions have me flat on the ground...

Beneath my palms, I can feel the cold surface of the tarmac. The smell of dust, exhaust fumes and warm asphalt fills my nostrils. The sky looks green and the harshness of the sun makes me screw up my eyes. I turn my head to one side, and a piece of gravel cuts into my cheek. I stare at a piece of pale pink chewing-gum trodden into the pavement as I gradually come round again. One last spasm, like a shiver, and I'm fully awake.

Shoes belonging to men and women in a hurry make a detour around me. A distraught young woman is on her knees and she's asking my name. A strand of hair, pale yellow like the Milky Way, has worked loose from her chignon and tickles my forehead. I think she's all the perfect big sister should be. My tongue's furred up, I've got a bitter taste in my mouth and I'm not confident of speaking. Despite everything I feel obliged to reply, and I mutter a few words. "Milky star hair." She gives me a worried look. I always need a few minutes to stick the pieces of reality back together, in the right order, and restore the logic of language – and of my own existence. "Do you have anything with your name on it?" she persists. I prefer to remain silent until language and I are friends once more.

The girl with star-spangled hair helps me sit up again. My body's aching all over because of the fall. After each serious attack, I feel a bit like Bambi: a little fawn discovering the mysteries of walking. My humiliation is complete when I notice the dark stain traced out

by urine on my trousers. I think about Antoine and I'm furious. That's when he decides to show up. He crouches down. "He's my brother," he explains to the girl. And that's when their eyes meet – and they can barely look away. I could take offence at being forgotten like that. But far from it: it feels like a weight's been lifted off my shoulders. I'm witnessing love at first sight! And I'm not just a witness – I'm the cause, the vital spark! Tiny pigeon wings sprout from my back, and I picture myself as a cute little Cupid wearing nothing but a bow, quiver and arrows! The god of epilepsy has scored. I don't need to worry about my brother's birthday present any more!



## Stéphane Botti

Stéphane Botti was born in 1974. After studying acting with Cours Florent, and a degree in drama from the University of Paris VIII, he tried his hand at the art of clowning, mime and puppetry. He eventually became an actor, director and scriptwriter for television and cinema. He has created a number of shows for younger audiences, including the slapstick mime solo *Une merveilleuse évasion* ("Flight of Fancy"). In parallel, he is a children's author and has written both plays and novels for teenagers – something that began at an early age, when his first short story was published by Castor Poche when he was only 15.

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SEN-

BA-

ZURU

Judith Bouilloc



I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.

Folded skilfully.

The paper's a little white bird, twitching and throbbing within what's left of my shattered pig. An origami bird, which I've now set free, fluttering around between my games console and my PC. Well I never! A bewitched Japanese crane... and I think we all know whodunnit!

It's Ori, up to her tricks again. At school, that snotty little so-and-so loves twisting and turning her maths worksheets into earrings for herself. In her hands, the tiniest scrap of toilet paper becomes a castle with roofs curved like wings... The rest of the time she's busy nicking my stuff.

At the start of term, I lent her a sheet of paper in our advanced incantation class. Instead of writing down her spells, like the rest of us, she folded it this way and that, and changed it into a peacock. Ori didn't listen to a word, but she still scored full marks in her oral exam. She recited a haiku she'd composed herself, and all the exercise books started to levitate above our heads. The teacher gave her a round of applause.



Since then she's carried on pinching my things, with no hint of shame. So, why don't I just take your ink eraser, and I'll help myself to your ruler and rubber while I'm at it, shall I? And yes, I let her do it because I wasn't immune to her zany, impish sense of humour. But today, she's managed to sneak her way into my home, into MY room! To swipe my little nest egg! I think I'll fold her into a crane, and see how she likes it!

I'm determined to try and catch the foul bird. But it's far too quick for me, and zips off through the window at lightning speed. I launch myself into the air as well, and chase it, soaring far above the tall blue trees. I'm within a feather's breadth of seizing the enchanted crane when it suddenly swoops down towards a house. Does it belong to our light-fingered friend? Bingo! From the sky, I can see Ori's face framed by the open window. The little devil's surrounded by a flock of cranes in all sorts of colours. It's not a bedroom – it's an aviary! The flapping of paper wings is making one heck of a racket... but Ori couldn't care less, she's too busy making more cranes! I must be dreaming!

I slip into her crazy witch's lair without warning. She doesn't look at all surprised to see me. Putting on a bold front, and trying to be heard over the dreadful commotion, I yell:

"Give me my money back!"

"Sorry, I've already spent it all," she replies, not sounding the least bit sorry. "I've bought a thousand priceless sheets of paper to make a Senbazuru."

"A Senba what?"

"A Senbazuru! Don't you know the legend? It's from

back home. Whoever manages to fold a thousand paper cranes will see their dearest wish come true."

"Very poetic, but it's stealing all the same!"

"Cool it, cheapskate! You'd have scuppered your cash on some stupid old video game. My dream's far more important!"

Before I have a chance to tell her she's really got some nerve, she carries on:

"If you help me finish my Senbazuru, I'll give you some green tea and some not-so-nice little cakes."

"Why do you buy cakes that are not-so-nice?"

"So I don't eat so many! But I end up scoffing them anyway, and they're really not that great. D'you want some?"

I bite into one of the little cakes with a sigh. True enough, they're not exactly brilliant. Everything is so surreal, and yet feels so comforting too, that I give in and apply myself to folding a crane, following Ori step by step. My origami bird, however, ends up looking like a turkey. It'll certainly never be able to fly, and I'll make a total hash of her Senbawhatsit. Ori sniggers discreetly, but takes my lumpy old bird anyway. She blows gently on the wings of the shapeless animal and it begins to flutter, somewhat awkwardly, surrounded by its graceful fellow creatures.

"Thanks, that's the thousandth crane!" exclaims Ori, in raptures. "There's every chance my wish will come true! If it does, the origami birds will fly off together into the sky. We'll leave the window open. OK?"

"So you want to know what I think now, do you!"

She snaps back, putting on a charming smile:

"I stole your money because, frankly, there wasn't any other way!"

"Any other way to do what?"

She says nothing. She frowns, then relaxes, calming down:

"Do you want me to open my heart to you?"

"Ugh! No way! That would hurt like mad, and besides we'd get blood everywhere!"

She's coming closer; I'm shaking, thrown off by her smile. And now she's just about to steal... a kiss, this time. Well, it's not really stealing... because in fact I'm totally up for it. I kiss her in turn, and finally set free all the sweet nothings bottled up inside me. I catch my breath. It's strangely quiet.

"Ori, what did you wish for?"

By way of an answer, she bursts out laughing and points to the cloud of colourful birds disappearing into the sky.



## Judith Bouilloc

Judith Bouilloc was born in 1988. She finds inspiration in classical literature, children's books and fantasy fiction of all kinds. A graduate of the Institute of Political Sciences in Aix-en-Provence, she has had several careers: medical secretary, librarian and PR manager. But it was in 2016, with the publication of her first novel *Les maîtres du vent* ("The Masters of the Wind") by Artège Jeunesse, that she decided to become a fully-fledged author. Her forthcoming book *L'arrache-mots* ("The Wordsnatcher") will be published by Hachette Romans in May 2019. She lives in the Lorraine region, surrounded by forests.

# THE LITTLE ORPHAN GIRL

Damien Galisson



**I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.**

I don't know how to read, but I can recognise the symbol pressed into the blue wax, at the bottom of the parchment. A sword in a stone: it's the seal of the Sovereign. The royal seal. Naively, I think to myself: doesn't the Sovereign have enough castles, gold and magic to come a-thieving my six hard-gotten coins? Me, Pinchette, the little orphan girl, who's been pinching and pilfering on our dodgy old streets ever since I learnt how to walk, the Sovereign's stealing from me? That's plain daft. The Sovereign wouldn't go and steal from a beggar girl who's only ten, and then put his name to his misdeed too.

I'm furious. Who's stolen my money?

The derelict attic I use for shelter is freezing, the snow's falling between the slats in the roof. Today all I've managed to nick is a loaf of rotten bread, I'm still hungry and my six coins have vanished.

Who would steal such meagre savings? Another street urchin? I'll bet anything it's Froglet, the little goblin from Butchers' Alley.

Of the umpteen races living in the city, the goblins are the craftiest of the lot, we all know that.

I scramble down the ladder and wriggle between two

loose planks. The street's empty. I head outside. Night is falling. The cobbles are covered in snow that crunches under my wooden shoes. It's so cold! I'm tempted to go back but I've got to find my coins. Without my little nest egg, I won't get through the winter. In summer, in the city, the stallholders toss away their over-ripe tomatoes, there's apples to pick up, passers-by aren't wearing as much and their purses are easy pickings. But in winter...

The streets are deserted, the snow has driven the hordes away, they're in taverns and huddled by fireplaces. In Butchers' Alley, nothing moves. I recognise the basement window that leads to one of the cellars, push open the double oak doors and slip inside. I creep forward, silently, through the darkness of the cellar. I detect a light snoring, and the glow of a candle. The little goblin is sleeping under a plank. I knock on the wood, he gives a start, bangs his head, gropes around, grabs a stick, sits up, and calls out, menacingly: "Who goes there?" "Calm down, Froglet! It's only me." "Pinchette?" I say nothing more. He puts down his stick, and yawns: "What-ya-doin-ere?" "None of your nonsense, Gobby! Give me back my coins!" He looks gobsmacked, and utterly gormless. He's pretty convincing: "Your coins?" I wave the parchment under his little green nose. He grabs it. "Whoa! Where-d'ya-get-that? Look, it's the emblem of the Sovereign! Wait, let me read it!" Goodness, this goblin's really got some nerve: not only does he

deny stealing from me, but he's pretending he can read too! "W... we, sa... salma... salmachiap, so-ve-reign of the ki... king... kingdoms of the east..." So he really *can* read, the fiendish little rascal! He muddles up the letters, and trips over words, but gradually the message takes shape. After a few sentences, Froglet reads it again, without stumbling:

"We, Salmachiap, Sovereign of the Kingdoms of the East, do hereby decree posthumously, in accordance with our laws, that:

- All princes and princesses in line to the throne,
- All those born out of wedlock, both official and unofficial,

Should appear Forthwith to pull on the sword within the throne-stone.

All their worldly goods are hereby confiscated through a Spell cast by the royal bailiffs, and shall be presented to the new Sovereign as a token of their loyalty."

"I don't understand this end bit," says the little goblin. "Ah... What about the beginning?" Me, I didn't get a thing. Apart from the fact that "post-humously" means the Sovereign's dead. Froglet starts again: "Position your index finger on the seal, in order to initiate your transport as soon as possible." "That's the bit I don't get," he says. "You dimwit, Gobby," I say. I seize the hand holding the parchment, and press my forefinger into the blue wax seal. "There, you see," I say. The paper crackles, there's a flash of blue light, and I can't

tell whether I'm getting smaller or the parchment's getting bigger, but it feels like it's grabbed me, I'm being wrapped up, crumpled, swung to and fro. Froglet's with me.

At least the cushions we land on have the virtue of being nice and soft.

I say "we" because I'm still holding Froglet's hand. Never have a goblin's eyes been open so wide. His mouth's not far behind. Nor is mine.

We're in a castle. Tapestries on the walls, tall painted ceilings, the Royal Guard standing to attention. People dressed in silk are waiting around a rock, in the middle of a room, a vast room. And there's me. And Froglet.

"Your Highness. If you would be so kind."

An elf in a sumptuous tunic holds out his hand, and helps me to my feet.

"Please step forward and take hold of the sword. You're the last."

The elf points to the throne-stone, easily recognisable by its famed granite sword. Only the guard and pommel are visible.

"I..."

I don't know what to say. Is this a joke?

"You have to pull it out."

Flanked by armed guards, I move forward, a tiny speck, as far as the sword.

It looks much too heavy for me, this is crazy. I turn round to face Froglet, deep in his cushions. His mouth's still wide open.

I place my fingers on the pommel, and the sword slides out all by itself, by magic, following my hand.

A drum roll. The row of guards fall to their knees.

I understand.

Little orphan girl, now I am Queen.



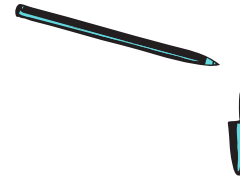
## Damien Galisson

Damien Galisson was born in 1978 to parents who were skilled artisans. Painting with acrylics was to fire his imagination at an early age, along with a very different form of creative expression – namely hardcore heavy metal, as part of the group Tanen. He was a participant in the Bidibull workshop programme in Saint-Benoît, where he first encountered the art of the comic book, and subsequently trained as a graphic layout artist. It was the sheer joy of illustrating, writing and telling stories to his own children that encouraged him to step into the world of children's literature. His first picture book, *À moi! À toi...* ("It's Mine! It's Yours..."), was published by Éditions Cédalion in 2018.

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# A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

Pierre-François Kettler



**I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.**

My teacher, Madame Richard, turns towards us. She's French, she's gentle and kind. On the blackboard, beside the date, 17 April 1999, is our holiday essay topic. I'm petrified. I'm nine. I'm in Year 6. I've skipped a year. But now I can't write at all.

I remember it all. Five years ago. To the day. Back home. A piggy bank.

A beautiful day. The sun rose at six. Like every day. Even though Mum and Dad are talking quietly with Uncle and Grandma, even though they look worried, I'm happy. My brothers and sisters are too. We're playing. And then there's banging on the door, and shouting and singing outside.

"Wait!" Mum says to Dad, who's anxious to go and open the door.

She takes me in her arms, and carries me into the room that I share with my three brothers. My piggy bank is there, beside my bed. Mum climbs onto a stool. She removes a board from the ceiling. She lifts me up to the opening. I wriggle my way inside. I'm flat on my tummy and I'm shaking, but I don't know why.

"I'm going to close the hole again. You'll hear lots of noise. You'll hear us yelling, crying, calling for help... But you mustn't move. You need to stay quiet. You have to stay here, out of sight. You have to stay alive!"

She gives me a kiss. She puts the board back. I can hear the front door breaking. And shouting. Lots of shouting. I recognise Anatole's voice, he's our neighbour, he's so nice and such a good laugh. Why does he seem so angry? "Get out, you filthy cockroaches!" he yells.

Feet running. Some light, others heavy. Strange noises. Like when you chop meat. Yelling. Crying. That's my brothers, Alphonse, Vénuste, my sister, Victoire. Why are they screaming so loud? They're hurt!

There's a crack in the ceiling where I'm hiding. I crawl towards it, very slowly. I look through. I can see my bedside table and, lit by a ray of sunlight, my piggy bank. It's a pink china pig who's always smiling. With a slot in his back to slip my precious things inside.

"There's two missing!"

Anatole is talking to another neighbour, just below my hiding place. He's our friend. He knows us well. He's a Hutu. We're Tutsis. Dad's often had a banana beer with him. I'm going to shout to him. He's going to help me.

"Gotta crush 'em all to bits, nasty little buggers!"

I watch as Anatole whacks my piggy bank with his club. It shatters from the shock. The notes spill out, and the coins tumble onto the floor. He grabs my money. There's a piece of paper left, folded up. He opens it, reads, and the man who used to be our friend bursts into laughter. Cruel, dirty laughter.

I don't move. I'm hardly breathing. I close my eyes. Prayers. Everyone I love. Laughter. Screaming: it's

Agathe, my oldest sister. I curl up and put my hands over my ears so I can't hear any more. I don't know how long I stay like that. Maybe I fall asleep.

When I open my eyes, it's dark. I look through the gap. A moonbeam lights up my bedside table, now cracked, my piggy bank, in pieces, and the bit of paper, lying open, the only ray of hope in this nightmare.

I move the board very quietly. I listen. Only the insects and the night birds answer my silent call. Down below, everything's destroyed, broken, torn apart. Except, on my bedside table, that piece of paper. I try getting down. I fall and hurt myself. But I don't make a sound. Or very little. I take the paper and put it in my pocket. I wander through the house. I call out very softly: "Mum! Dad!" No reply.

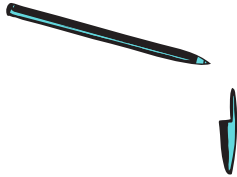
In one of the rooms, near an open window, I find Agathe. She looks like she's sleeping. I squeeze the paper in my pocket. I leave the house.

I walk all night. I arrive in the marshes. We had agreed we'd hide out there. I'm there now. The only one of my family. There are other Tutsis. They welcome me. They explain everything. At night, we can go out, looking for food. During the day, it's everyone for themselves, hiding in the marshes, under the water when the hunters turn up. We call them "the butchers" because they chop the limbs off the people they catch.

I don't know how long we live like this. Two, three months? I manage to stay alive. I'm thin and weak when we're picked up by some foreign soldiers. I give them my paper. They take us to a place where no-one chops off

your limbs, where there's no more screaming, or crying, or people dying. I show them my paper. "Do you really want to go there?" "Yes."

I catch Madame Richard's eye. She looks back at me kindly. I left Rwanda in August 1994. I came to live in France with an uncle. I still carry that paper with me. It was my father who'd slipped it into my piggy bank. He'd said: "It's very precious." Written on it is: "Liberty, equality, fraternity, that's the motto of France. It shall be mankind's too." How can I possibly say why I can't write?



## Pierre-François Kettler

Pierre-François Kettler was born in 1959. After studying for a science degree, he spent two years in Rwanda on national service where he taught mathematics and development economics. While there he discovered the world of theatre, and on returning to France he became an actor, director and drama teacher. He is passionate about fantasy fiction (and fantasy board games), and his first novel, *L'Arc de la lune* ("The Arc of the Moon"), was published by Éditions du Chemin in 2011. Equally keen on poetry, he has created the website "Entendre Victor Hugo" ("Listen to Victor Hugo") for which he recorded a poem every day for a year. He has three children.

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# LOUBNA RUNS AWAY

Aylin Manço



**I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.**

Mum puts her head round the door. The noise from the piggy bank has alerted her.

"Is everything OK, Sami?"

I nod, the paper hidden in my fist.

"Time to put out your light," she says. "You've got school tomorrow."

I turn off my bedside lamp, but it's still bright outside. Normally I hate that, because the light stops me from sleeping. But tonight, it lets me read the note without disobeying Mum.

*I needed money and you didn't! Sorry! Farewell!*

Loubna hasn't put her name, but I know full well it's her. Who else could it be? I only have the one sister.

It happened last year, Loubna was 10 and I was 8. All our classes had gone for a walk in the forest. We were meant to be observing the animals.

"With the racket our lot's making, there won't be a single creature to see," moaned Loubna.

Me, I was happy 'cos she was walking beside me. Usually, when I go anywhere near her at school, she

makes fun of me and calls me Cling-on.

"Remember that book where they disappear into a wardrobe and find a doorway into another world?" she asked. "The one with a lamppost in the middle of the forest."

"Narnia?"

Loubna took my hand.

"Let's go," she said as she pulled me towards the back.

"Where d'you mean?"

"In search of adventure!"

"But we're not allowed to leave the others!"

"Don't be such a scaredy-cat!"

Scaredy-cat's hardly any better than Cling-on, so I let her drag me away.

We never did find any magic kingdom in the end. We just got caught by a teacher who blew their top at us.

That was when Mum and Loubna began to argue. Or perhaps it had already started, and I just hadn't noticed? I don't know. What's clear is the more Mum argues with her, the more Loubna wants to run away to Narnia. And the more she wants to run away to Narnia, the more Mum argues with her.

Even the teachers at school have noticed. The day before yesterday, Loubna brought home her school report. It said:

"Loubna is a very able pupil. If only she would oblige us by coming down from the clouds and paying attention in class."

Ouch. Mum was livid. Especially because, the very

same day, Loubna broke a glass. She'd been telling me a story about Narnia, and she'd whirled her arms about really fast.

"JUST PAY ATTENTION TO THIS WORLD, WILL YOU" roared Mum before clearing up the debris.

Loubna had that dazed look she has when she's trying not to cry. Me, I thought a broken glass wasn't such a big deal, and certainly not big enough to go yelling like that. Besides, that's a huge responsibility, paying attention to the rest of the planet.

Me, I do pay attention to Mum. And that's already quite a lot. That evening, when she came to tuck me in, she was really upset. Loubna hadn't wanted her goodnight kiss.

I think I notice lots of things that Loubna and Mum don't. For example, Mum loses her temper because she's worried, that's all. Anyway, it's just not true, that Loubna doesn't pay attention to anything. If it were true, she wouldn't have taken my money. She wouldn't even have thought about it, she'd have left with her pockets empty, thinking she'd easily find a kind beaver to feed her along the way. I'd like to tell Mum that, to tell her Loubna really does think about things. Her head's not in the clouds all the time.

As Mum doesn't go into Loubna's room any more because of their arguments, she'll only find out tomorrow morning that Loubna's gone. Between her piggy bank and mine, she must have at least thirty euros. Thirty! I wonder how far she'll get with thirty euros and a whole night's head start?

Me, I'd be scared of sleeping outside in the cold. And I'd be scared it might rain. Loubna, though, she's not scared of anything. She'll sleep huddled up against a radiator in the ticket hall. Then she'll take the first train in the morning. Or maybe the doorway into Narnia opens right next to one of the ticket desks. It's like in the books: adventure will find you, if you've got the nerve to go looking for it. Loubna's sure to dive in head first. If I were there, I'd go with her, but only because there'd be two of us. In stories, it's always the boys who've got courage, and swords. But in reality, Loubna's a lot braver than me. If anyone's going to wave a legendary sword around, it's her. Me, I'd stay behind with my best friend who'd be a little bear cub, one that was a minstrel too. We'd sing harmonies and rounds. We'd care for the wounded. We'd sleep snuggled up to each other. I'd feel it move, and that would comfort me.

I open my eyes in the dark. There's someone in my bed. It's not a bear cub.

"Sorry about your money," she says. "I'll give it all back."

"You're back!"

"Did you tell Mum?"

"No, promise."

"Swear?"

"Swear!"

"It's cold outside, and it's raining, and the trees were whispering my name, I got scared."

"You're so brave."

"But I'm telling you, I was scared!"

"It's brave to come back."

She cuddles up against me. Her skin is cold and wet, but I don't care. Loubna's back home.



## Aylin Manço

Originally from Belgium, Aylin Manço was born in 1991 and now lives in Rouen. After studying engineering and a brief career as a consultant, she began a Master's in Creative Writing at the University of Le Havre in 2016. In 2018 she won the Young Writer's Prize for her short story "Les noms d'oiseaux" ("The Names of Birds"). She now divides her time between working in children's publishing and writing books for teenagers. Her first novel, *La dernière marée* ("The Last Tide"), will be published in January 2019 by Talents Hauts.

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# THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE PIGGY BANK

Gilles Monchoux



**I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.**

A smile poised on my lips, I turn to face my audience. My father, mother and brother, all summoned to my room. They've got better things to be doing, but right now they're listening to me—that's me, Raphaël, aged 11—as they do each time I put on my deerstalker.

I point to the table where I've laid out the items involved in the investigation. I draw their attention to a pile of pink china fragments.

"This is all that remains of the piggy bank in question. We're talking a standard model here, in the shape of a pig, the kind you can't take the coins out of. Please also note the hammer that was used to destroy it. A pretty nondescript tool, like any other."

I hear Dad sigh. To be fair, I'd called him here as soon as he got back from work. He's exhausted by his day, and mutters under his breath as he removes his tie.

"Put that back, Raphaël. It's not a toy."

"I promise, Dad. As soon as the investigation's over. Inside the piggy bank I found the piece of paper you see here. Nothing else."

We all stare at a bit of squared paper, folded several times onto itself. Mum furrows her brow.

"What did you think you'd find?" she asks.

She's wearing a flowery apron covered in stains. I answer her question by pointing to the last piece of evidence: a notebook. On its cover are the words "Raphaël's Account Book", traced in my neat handwriting.

"This is my log-book, where I've been keeping an accurate record of all transactions since the beginning."

I grab the notebook and open it.

"Look at the most recent one. A deposit of two euros three days ago. Therefore the balance in this piggy bank comes to 34.43 euros in coins and notes. But in fact, as you can see, it contains something rather odd indeed: a bit of paper!"

I exchange glances with my little brother Joseph. His eyes are bulging with curiosity.

"I wonder what's on that piece of paper," he says.

"Don't keep us in suspense," adds Dad. "Tell us everything."

Still smiling, I unfold the white square. A few words are neatly arranged in a line, inscribed in meticulous handwriting with gold ink.

*Thank you for the money. I shall make good use of it.*

*Signed: Célestin the Brownie.*

Joseph takes a step forward, and leans over to have a better look.

"*Célestin the Brownie*," he reads. "A piece of cake has stolen your money?"

I clear my throat.

"Brownies are goblins, Joseph. Haven't you read *The Encyclopaedia of Fairies*? But if you want my opinion, the real culprit is around 8 years old and about your height."

"Sorry?" says Joseph.

"Raphaël!" scolds Mum. "It's not nice to accuse your brother."

I'm not going to be swayed:

"Joseph, do you deny being responsible for this despicable theft?"

"It wasn't me!"

I let a few seconds pass before starting again.

"Remember, this piggy bank was given to me by Auntie Agathe last Christmas. It made Joseph green with envy. So much so that he was given the same present for his birthday, twelve days later. It's a well-known fact that Joseph has never saved a penny."

"That's so not fair!" exclaims my little brother, with indignation. "Of course I've got money!"

"You've got enough to buy some chewing-gum. And maybe a magazine. But certainly not the video game from that advert this morning. The one I said I wanted to break my piggy bank open for. So you swapped it for yours after slipping a note inside. You stole my savings!" This line of reasoning leaves my brother speechless.

"Joseph," says Mum. "Is this true, what Raphaël says?"

"No way."

Without saying any more, he dashes off to his room. I hear him rummaging through his mess. He comes back with the twin sister to my piggy bank.

"This is my one."

"Give it here," I say, holding out my hand.

Joseph hesitates. I try to reassure him.

"If that's not my piggy bank you've got there, it won't contain 34.43 euros in coins and notes, will it?"

He looks at his parents for support. Dad nods.

"It's not good to steal," he says. "But accusing someone

without proof is hardly any better. If you're innocent, Raphaël will buy you a new piggy bank."

My brother hands over his treasured possession. I place it on the table, well away from the items in the investigation. I raise Dad's hammer and give the china a whack. The pig cracks and splits open.

My confident smile evaporates. Not a single coin rolls out of the debris. Not one banknote comes flying out. Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper. I open it at once, and discover gold ink, meticulous handwriting and two short sentences:

*Thank you for the money. I shall make good use of it.  
Signed: Célestin the Brownie.*

My brother and I read the note together without saying a word. Then we turn our heads to look at each other. I break the silence.

"For the remainder of the investigation, I shall need an assistant."

Looking serious, Joseph nods.



## Gilles Monchoux

Gilles Monchoux was born in 1977 in Toulouse. Having trained as a scientist, he now works as a computer engineer. Playful and highly creative by nature, he uses his powers of imagination to great effect in his writing, and his first novel, *Les révoltés de Noël* ("The Christmas Rebels"), was published by Éditions du Carnet à Spirale in 2018. He is currently working on his second book, and lives in Tournefeuille with his wife and two sons.

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# THE INVESTI- GATION

Delphine Pessin



I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper. With my hands shaking, I unfold it and read:

*I'll take something that you really prize  
I'll give you something that has no price*

My blood's boiling over. Steaming. They've pinched my cash, and now they're just mocking me too! And to think I'd been planning to get myself that Pokedemon Krue! Kombat game! I'd been saving up Granny's pennies, and what I'd been paid for mowing the lawn. I'd been dreaming about it for ages, a nice long weekend playing on my console. And now, whoosh! All of my plans gone up in smoke! I'm fuming.

I pause to think. There's no question of giving up so quickly. I shall identify the culprit and give them the third degree. Or maybe even the fourth and fifth degrees too, because now I'm just mad. Hopping, frankly.

I have to lead this investigation.

I examine the scene of the crime. The burglar must have been poking around for a good while, because the piggy bank was hidden at the back of my wardrobe in the pocket of my Spiderman bag.

Having decided to solve the mystery, I lock my door and

draw up a list of suspects.

Who'd stand to gain by stealing from me?

→ My big sister. She's always complaining she's only got rubbish to wear. She might have nicked my money to buy herself the latest thing in jackets.

→ My mother. What if she wanted to make me tidy my room by stopping me having fun for two days?

→ My father. He's always pushing me to work hard. Basically, when he comes home in the evening, the very first thing he says is "You *have* done your homework, haven't you?"

They've all got a motive, but I need to find proof.

I'm starting with Mathilde. Her room's barricaded with an enormous "No Entry" sign. Too bad. I open the door and find her sprawled on her bed, texting on her phone.

"What d'you want, hobbit?"

She fires me a dirty look, and I pretend I've been shot in the heart. Boom! I slump down on the carpet as if I'm dead. She prods me with the tip of a manicured nail.

"What's up? You crying?"

I lift my head and give her my sad puppy dog look (it works every time).

"I'm bored."

She falls into the trap.

"OK, OK... Come on, let's have a game of Monopoly."

While we're playing (and I'm fleecing her, big time), I quiz her. She has a cast-iron alibi. She stayed over at Florence's and since she came back, they've been texting each other.

After playing for three hours, I know she's not to blame. I move on to the next target.

I hover around Mum as she's working on her computer. She

writes stories and spends her life typing on her keyboard.

"What's wrong, Titoun dear?"

Titoun is the ridiculous nickname she's been using for me ever since I was little.

"I've got nothing to do," I moan.

"Have you tidied your room?"

"Yes, Mum."

Well, to be fair, it's not "tidied" tidied, but I've got a mega-secret hiding place (the bottom drawer of my desk) to stash away everything that's lying around. I look at her as if to say "Seriously, is that the best you can come up with?" and, as predicted, she gives in.

"Oh, alright then. I needed a break anyway. What about going for a little ride?"

Going for a bike ride with your mother might seem a tad uncool. Except she loves cycling, like me. When we go out together, we tend to ditch the cycle paths and head off the beaten track.

I take advantage of a steep hill to push her to the limit. It's common knowledge that there's nothing like torture to extract a confession. As we're pedalling, I bombard her with questions about what she's been up to, and when. When we get to the top, she's out of breath but she's revealed nothing of interest.

She's not guilty, and I've just one person left to interrogate.

On Sunday mornings, Dad usually makes a cake. He simply loves rustling up tasty little dishes, and in fact he's rather good at it. I offer to help, and while I'm stirring the chocolate I give him a thorough grilling. The lion's share of a brownie later, I've taken down his statement: yesterday, he was making redcurrant jam, and it took him all day. He's innocent too.



I feel a bit deflated. No trace of a clue. Not a sausage.

Ilan, my best friend, calls me. He's thinking of dropping by this afternoon. Great idea, he'll know what to do, help throw some light on things. As I don't have my Playbox game, we head off to the City Stadium and round up our pals for a massive game of footie. We're having so much fun that it's evening before I realise I've forgotten to chat about my problem. We'll see tomorrow.

And then, the suspense is over.

When I get back to my room, the window's open. Someone's slipped a packet under my pillow. My money's all there, along with a note:

*Sorry to have played that trick on you,  
but you've got to admit we had a blast!  
Signed: Ilan.*

The cryptic message finally makes sense:

*I'll give you something that has no price*

There's no doubt this weekend's been priceless. I've spent quality time with my friends and family.

It was brilliant.

Suddenly I have an idea. I retrieve the note that was in my piggy bank and slip into my sister's room. I leave the folded paper there and nick her phone.

I wonder what she'll do to get it back.



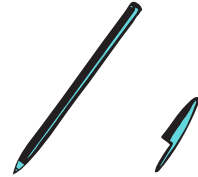
## Delphine Pessin

Delphine Pessin was born in 1973 in the Berry region. She studied for an arts degree and eventually became a secondary school French teacher. She has written two novels for children. The first, *La carotte et le bâton* ("The Carrot and the Stick"), was published by Talents Hauts in 2017 and arose out of a theatre project around the theme of bullying in schools. The second, *Dys sur 10* ("Dys is Me"), was published by Pocket Jeunesse and looks at the challenges faced by a teenager with dyslexia trying to fit into society.

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# TO LIBERTY AND BEYOND!

Betty Piccioli



I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.

"Who did that? Come on, who was it?"

The little girl levels an accusing finger at us. I turn my head towards Bubble. I've always wondered if he can hear anything when people speak to him, or whether the water absorbs every sound.

"It was you, Bernie, wasn't it? You swallowed the notes, and the coins too?" she continues, angrily.

I swivel my eyes round to look at the massive dog. He's pawing the floor eagerly, like when he's about to wolf down his food. Even if he does understand every word humans say, this fellow's clearly decided it'll never dampen his spirits.

"One of you's gonna have to own up! There's four of you, and I know one of you's guilty!" the child persists.

Lola, the Persian cat, takes this as her cue to rub against the little girl's legs. I think cats must be my favourite animals. Narcissistic beyond belief, and yet everyone loves them!

"I'd put all my money in this piggy bank! My parents have only gone for the day, and you lot, whaddaya do? You gobble up every penny!"

She's waving the folded paper she found inside the china unicorn. There's nothing on it, and I can tell from her face she's furious she can't use it as evidence. That was my little wheeze: making her think it was a note left behind to explain the theft, but leaving it blank in the end. I knew it would drive her nuts!

"As soon as Mum and Dad get back, I swear I'll... I'll give you all the third degree! I'll get my money back, you bunch of... of... of four-legged bandits!"  
Charming, but not terribly considerate given Bubble doesn't have any feet. Thankfully, the human's concluded her sermon and storms off to sulk in her room, slamming the door behind her.

Bernie springs up immediately, revealing the money he'd stashed under his bottom. I've no need to signal to Lola, who dives through her cat flap. As for me, I escape from my terrarium through the hole I've been digging for weeks. Bernie opens the front door in a single leap and the Persian reappears, now with a beach bucket in her mouth. Bubble's looking at me nervously, as if we were going to leave him there. Which just goes to show, everything they say about the memory of goldfish simply isn't true!

Lola jumps onto the desk to join us and, with a few skilful swipes of her paws, slides the fish into the bucket along with some of the water from his aquarium. It's Bernie's

turn now. He places his paws on the table and, with one move of his head, slips the handle of the bucket around his neck. I climb onto his snout and position myself on his back.

As for Lola, she's already put all the money in the bumbag we've stolen from the leader of the humans, Mum. We mustn't forget the note I wrote yesterday with the little one's ink pads, while everyone was asleep. I attach it to Bernie's collar, and then jump onto the Persian's back.

My two friends set off. My heart skips a beat as we go through the front door. I've never left the house before. A ray of sunlight gently warms my reptile scales. How good that feels, proper sunshine! So different from the UV lamp the humans had installed in my terrarium.

Don't get me wrong: we've nothing against the family that kept us in captivity. But if you'd lived your whole life locked up, wouldn't you do everything you could to win back your freedom?

Lola and Bernie walk a few hundred metres before arriving at the bus station. Passers-by do a double take when they see us, but we've no time to lose. The departure platform awaits, and the bus for La Rochelle is already there. My canine chum jumps on first, taking care not to tilt Bubble's bucket. In just a few hours, our fish will discover the ocean he's never known. The driver looks bemused, so he speaks to the humans behind us.

"Whose are 'em pets, then? Madam, they yours?"

"No, they're not. But look, there's a note attached to the dog's collar... It says: *"we are travelling alone please do*

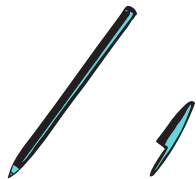
not inform the animal welfare people money to pay for our tickets is in the cats bag”.

A tad surprised, the driver leans over to Lola and opens the bumbag. He takes out two 5 euro notes and a few coins.

“Crikey, never seen nuffin’ like it... A dog, a cat, a goldfish and a chameleon, all ’ere on me bus...”

We go to the back of the vehicle. He moves off, still amazed by what he’s just seen, and I think I detect a smile on the faces of my companions.

We are free, at last.



## Betty Piccioli

Betty Piccioli was born in Avignon in 1991, and grew up in the region around Bordeaux where she still lives. Her love of Harry Potter was to fire her imagination and she began writing as a teenager. However, it was not until she finished her studies, ten years later, that she completed her first novel *A.I. (Amis Imaginaires ('I.F. [Imaginary Friends])*, published by Castelmore. She is passionate about young adult literature, finding inspiration in the worlds of fantasy and the animated films of her childhood. She is now entirely focused on writing for children of all ages.

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# VER- MIL- ION

Laura P. Sikorski



I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.

On top, I can read Mum's narrow, sloping handwriting which says:

*"I'm so sorry, darling. Adults can make mistakes. The important thing is to admit it. So take a look under your pillow!"*

\*

Last weekend, my sister Lylia and I had organised a party at home, with our friends, for our tenth birthday. The celebrations were in full swing. We'd just finished eating, and the moment we'd all been waiting for had finally arrived: giving out the presents. Éva and Khadija beamed as they handed my twin sister the present which they and their parents had bought. Lylia eagerly tore open the parcel and her face lit up. She'd received a huge box of children's make-up. She rushed to kiss her friends, and then all three girls slipped away into a corner of the living room to play with their new toy.

Then it was my turn to open the gift that Walid and Ernesto had proudly given me. The parcel contained a set of little remote-controlled cars. My friends dragged me

into the garden where they wanted us to race each other. Mum thought I looked a bit upset, and brushed her hand gently through my hair. I forced myself to smile back at her. But it wasn't my fault for looking sad. I really don't like cars. I'd rather play with Playmobil with my sister, or even with dolls. We both love making up stories, and telling them as well. I think I'd have preferred a book.

After a few races, my two pals, who were sick of me being such a poor competitor, went off looking for a new challenger among the girls. Lylia, who's far more competitive than me, didn't hesitate for a second and grabbed my remote with her rainbow-tipped fingers. My sister was beautiful, with her colourful nails, her thickly-powdered face and her smudged lipstick. Dad had frowned when he saw her copying the girls in adverts. "Leave her alone," Mum had said, "she's having fun."

As for me, I wasn't having much fun, now I'd been left out of the races. So I went to sit on the terrace where the two make-up girls had already taken their seats, so as not to miss any of the car race taking place in the garden. Éva and Khadija had each finished doing their nails and were now busy drawing all sorts of shapes on their sequinned faces. Just then I happened to notice the different shades of nail polish lined up in the box. One of them was labelled *vermilion*. The word sounded magical, it made me think of knights and *pavilions*, or the stars in the sky, people said there were *millions*. I grabbed it, pulled out the brush and began painting my nails the way I'd seen Mum do so often.

The result was hideous. The red had smeared over the edges on half of my nails, and made horrible lumps

on the other half. But me, I was happy, and grinning from ear to ear. Khadija was smiling too, while Éva was actually chuckling out loud. The racing drivers, intrigued by the hoots of laughter, came running in our direction.

"Incredible! We really are twins for real!" exclaimed Lylia when she noticed I'd chosen the same colour of polish as her. *Vermilion*.

Ernesto looked at me scornfully, as if mocking me, but Walid immediately asked the girls to do his nails too. "Except I want the Bordeaux team colours!" he added. That was when Mum burst in.

"What on earth's that?" she roared, horrified, pointing at my fingers.

"Vermilion!" I explained, proudly.

But she didn't seem amused. She grabbed me by the arm and dragged me to the bathroom. We had to take everything off before Dad saw it. She rubbed my nails vigorously with cotton pads that smelled really awful. The same smell I find in the bathroom on Sundays, when I go to have a wash after Mum. The smell Dad says she stinks of.

"Listen, William, you're not to put on nail polish, do you hear?" she began.

"Why?"

She hesitated.

"Well, because it's for girls. And you're not a girl. And anyway, it's your sister's present, not yours."

"But you let Lylia play with my cars and never said anything!" I screamed.

And I ran away crying and shut myself in my room. The party was over.

\*

Tonight, after school, as I've announced to my parents, I shall run away with my savings. I shall go and live with a family where I'm allowed to have my own nail polish. So I break open my piggy bank. It's empty. Instead of my money, there's just a folded piece of paper on which I recognise Mum's narrow, sloping handwriting:

*"I'm so sorry, darling. Adults can make mistakes. The important thing is to admit it. So take a look under your pillow!"*

I look under my pillow.

*Vermilion.*



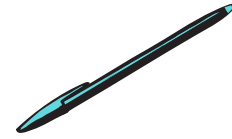
## Laura P. Sikorski

Laura P. Sikorski was born in Nantes in 1994, and has been writing since she was a child. She is passionate about literature and mythology, and is currently working towards a PhD at the University of Nantes. She specialises in shorter works exploring a number of literary genres including science fiction, fantasy and children's literature. She has had three short stories published: "Anankê" with Nutty Sheep in 2017, and "La Bête" ("The Beast") and "Le petit Marcel" ("Little Marcel") with Alter Real in 2018.

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# THE OGRE

Frédéric Vinclère



**I break open my piggy bank. It's empty! Where's my money? Instead, there's just a folded piece of paper.**

Panic's making my heart race even faster. Seeing Kevin in the distance will have the same effect tomorrow, when I can't give him the five euros he gets every day. My hand's shaking as I unfold the paper, covered in writing that I recognise at once. "Hey, Paulie," is what Jonathan's written, top left. My eyes start to fill up. I almost don't want to read any more. He can say whatever he likes, it won't make one bit of difference to the pain, and embarrassment, I'll have to suffer just because of him. I'm gonna get beaten up, and it's all his fault.

*"you're probably thinking you'll get a total hammering at school because of me. But the truth's staring you in the face: no, Paul, because in fact they're already making your life hell. I've got nothing to do with it. The bad guys here are the ones laying into you, not the one who's trying to stop you paying the brutes off. You might find that weird, but I'm doing it for your own good, trust me!*

*Right now, you're also wondering how I know all about it, aren't you? Did you really think no-one would notice? Our family's totally messed up, sure, but we're still a family... Ever since you began secondary school, you've*



not been the same. You've gone all quiet, and before you were such a chatterbox. To begin with I thought you were simply growing up, that was all. The penny began to drop the day Granny said you'd lost weight. She was right. Your nice round cheeks had sunk in, over just a few weeks. It was like the loose end on a ball of wool: all I had to do was pull, and the whole story began to unravel.

For example, I couldn't see any new stickers in your football album. But if you weren't buying any, why the constant demands for pocket money? Like some kind of greedy ogre? I finally understood everything when you asked Dad to lend you some cash and he said no. That terrified look in your eyes gave you away. The ogre really does exist, but it's not you. As for the rest, how and why, that's fairly easy to guess.

I can also imagine how angry you're feeling, this very minute: so how come I didn't do anything to protect you, if I knew all along? Well, 'cos I'm not there, in case you hadn't noticed. It's hardly my fault if I can't stand our parents, if they've packed me off to boarding school and the only rule in this family is silence. Hey, that's a point: that rule's surely why you don't breathe a word either, even when they shove your head down the bogs at school. Because they do, don't they? The guys who're beating you up. Am I wrong? I've got to admit I wasn't sure how to tackle the subject with you. We're no good at talking, neither of us. We're simply carrying on the way Mum and Dad showed us how. It wasn't easy knowing what to say with so little to go on.

You should have seen your little face at the thought of not having any money... This whole racket was getting pretty serious. So you went hunting for cash where you'd be sure to find it: your piggy bank. God, you've no idea the hassle I went through to empty it without breaking it! But I wanted you to consider the consequences. 'Cos I'm guessing it's lying in bits by your feet now? And you were so scared, you smashed it without thinking? That's a shame, isn't it? But it's not you. It's the ogre.

Believe it or not, Paulie, I stole your money for your own benefit, just before I left. To stop you from giving in to blackmail. Because giving the ogre what he wants means giving him the right to carry on. And if you keep doing what he says, you'll end up like your piggy bank.

I don't really have a solution to your problems. Except you'll have to find all the courage you've got: not to face up to the monsters, but to tell others about them. You've got to speak to an adult: someone neutral, someone you can trust. Not our parents. They won't help. They think we're just millstones round their necks. Ones they can pay to get rid of. Avoid them.

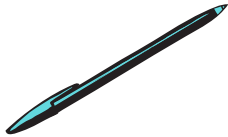
Go and speak to a teacher, or a school monitor, or your coach or Uncle, or even your neighbour, but sort yourself out, and fast, because you can't carry on suffering. It's not you who should be paying, but this ogre who thinks he can get away with anything.

Now, I need to warn you, 'cos there's already a little devil on your shoulder, he's getting restless, egging you on, making you see things all wrong. I know just what he's

like, I've got one too. He's busy whispering in your ear, he's telling you there's another way to get some money. Don't listen, focus on what I'm saying. Yes, you could go and pinch it from Mum's handbag. She's always got cash. But that'd be the easy way out, and, believe me, you shouldn't. Don't make the same mistake as me.

And above all, never, ever, ever think you're alone, because that's not true. I'd have gone and smashed their faces in, if I could. I'm far away, but I'm there for you.

Your big brother,  
Jonathan"



## Frédéric Vinclère

Frédéric Vinclère was born in 1982 in Brittany, into a working-class family. He discovered the joys of reading in childhood, through works such as Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* and Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island*, and later as a teenager through the Oulipian marvels of Georges Perec. Remaining within the world of books, he became a bookseller, and went on to train those learning the trade while continuing to write in parallel. The birth of his first son gave renewed energy to his writing career, and his long journey towards becoming an author led to his first novel for children, *Fête sauvage* ("The Savage Feast"), published by Éditions Thierry Magnier in 2018.

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## Vineet Lal



Vineet Lal is a literary translator from French to English, based in Scotland. He has degrees in French from the University of Edinburgh and Princeton University, and a degree in Translating and Conference Interpreting from Heriot-Watt University. His wide literary interests take in the French *nouveau roman*, childhood in French cinema and children's literature in translation. His previous academic research has ranged from the work of Michel Tournier and the fairy tales of Charles Perrault to the theme of growing-up in Diane Kurys' *Diabolo menthe*. In 2010 he was awarded one of the first-ever Mentorships in Literary Translation by the British Centre for Literary Translation, and in 2011 published his first full-length translation, *Lacrimosa* by Régis Jauffret. He has also interpreted at the Edinburgh International Book Festival for many years, for writers including Goncourt winner Alexis Jenni, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Michel Bussi and children's author-illustrator Barroux. A passionate devotee of C.S. Lewis, Alan Garner and Tove Jansson, he is currently a Trustee of Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature.

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