



ALEX MILWAY

HOTEL
FLAMINGO
FROSTY FIESTA

Hotel Flamingo: Frosty Fiesta

HALF TITLE
TO COME



Hotel Flamingo: Frosty Fiesta

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Hotel Flamingo

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TO COME

Alex Milway





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For Sonny





Welcome to Animal Boulevard

- KEY:**
- Grazing Land
 - Coastal Path
 - Watering Hole

**HOTEL
FLAMINGO**



A Quiet Hotel

The nights were growing long and dark, and Hotel Flamingo was preparing for a winter without many guests.

‘Why is it so quiet?’ asked Anna, hovering near the reception desk. ‘We could really do with more bookings.’

Lemmy shrugged. ‘Less sun means less fun. See it as a chance to put your feet up, miss.’



Anna sighed and surveyed the empty hotel foyer. It was as sad and lifeless as a party after everyone had gone home. Perhaps a rest *would* be good for her, she thought.

But at that very moment the lift chimed and Mrs Turpington – the hotel’s resident tortoise – appeared.

‘Good evening, my dear,’ she said to Anna. ‘I was wondering if you might help me?’

‘It would be my pleasure,’ said Anna, excited to have something to do. Mrs Turpington had been Anna’s first guest at Hotel Flamingo, so she always felt extra fond of her.



‘At this time of year I must hibernate,’ said Mrs Turpington, ‘and before I go to sleep for the cold winter months all my fellow long-sleepers and I like to throw a little party. We give presents – usually nice treats to eat upon waking – and talk about our hopes for the coming year.’

‘That sounds delightful,’ said Anna.

‘It always is,’ agreed the tortoise, ‘so, you see, I was hoping we could hold it in your restaurant.’

‘We’d be honoured,’ said Anna – never one to pass up a business opportunity.

‘I hoped you’d say that,’ said Mrs Turpington joyfully. ‘We’ll need gentle food to line our stomachs, of course – nothing spicy or gassy that might make us restless.’

‘Of course!’ said Anna. ‘A green salad perhaps?’

‘Oh yes,’ said the tortoise. ‘And maybe a *little* cake?’ Mrs Turpington gave a naughty smile.

‘I’m pleased to hear it!’ laughed Anna. ‘And how many guests would it be for?’

‘Oh, let me see,’ said Mrs Turpington. She took out a little address book from her handbag and flicked carefully through the pages. ‘There would be Svetlana, Henri, Tinks and Winnie. I may have forgotten a few; my memory isn’t what it was . . .’

‘So let’s say ten for safety’s sake,’ said Anna.

‘Perfect,’ said Mrs Turpington. ‘I’m getting sleepier by the day, so is Friday suitable? That should be enough time for

me to send out invites. Perhaps if I pass the details to you, you could contact everyone for me?’

‘Certainly. I’ll write it in the diary now,’ said Anna.

‘Good, good,’ said the ageing tortoise, and with a satisfied nod she walked through the reception and into the restaurant for supper.

‘Well, that’s something!’ said Anna.

‘I’ll book it in and make arrangements with Madame Le Pig,’ said Lemmy, a bit annoyed that *his* plans for a lie-down had to be put on hold.

As Lemmy wrote down the details in the diary, Stella Giraffe came running down the staircase with her toolbox swinging at her side.

‘Have you heard the news?’ she said.
‘We’re in for a cold snap! A real arctic storm is coming in tonight!’

‘Urgh!’ said Lemmy. He hated the cold.

‘I suppose it *is* almost winter, after all,’ said Anna.

‘They say it won’t be just any old cold spell,’ said Stella. ‘Blizzards, freezing temperatures, the works! It’ll be unlike

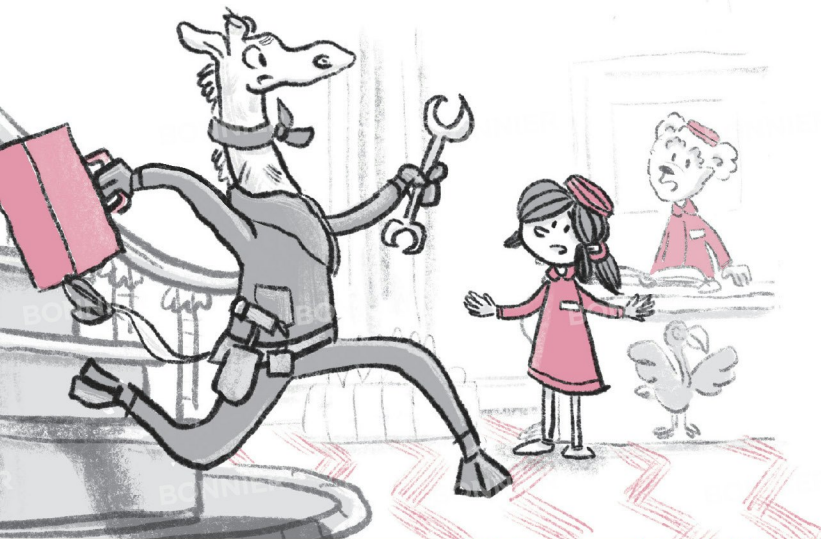
anything Animal Boulevard has ever seen – and it could last for weeks, so they reckon!’

‘Goodness,’ said Anna. ‘That does sound serious.’

Stella jabbed the air with a spanner. ‘Nothing wrong with being prepared,’ she said. ‘I’ll check the boiler and start lagging the pipes. This old place isn’t cut out for proper cold . . . It may also be worth cleaning out the chimneys and fireplaces!’ She continued ticking off an invisible list of chores on her hooves, and then, with her plans in place, marched away.

‘Winter is the worst,’ said Lemmy. ‘It’s too cold to do anything, let alone think!’

‘I’m sure it won’t be as bad as Stella



made out,' said Anna. Cold winters were rare in their neck of the woods, but, even so, she was quite excited by the thought of snow.

'I'd better call a meeting!' she said. 'Just like Stella said, it's better to be safe than sorry. There'll be lots to do.'

'I'll pass the word around,' said Lemmy, resentfully.

Anna stepped out on to the street to see if the weather really was changing. A brisk wind carried a crisp chill, and it whipped through Anna's dress, giving her the shivers.

Animal Boulevard was busier than ever. Cars were stuffed with boxes, and shoppers were overloaded with food and supplies: word was clearly getting around about the oncoming storm.



‘It smells like it’s going to be a chilly night, miss,’ grumbled T. Bear, who was brushing aside a messy scattering of old brown leaves.

‘It certainly feels it,’ said Anna, rubbing her arms. She looked up at the brooding sky. ‘Unlike anything we’ve ever seen before, so they say!’

T. Bear stretched and gave a huge yawn. ‘Our hotel is made of stern stuff,’ he said, patting the blue wall with his big paw. ‘As long as I keep the entrance clear, we’ll be all right.’

Anna exhaled and watched a cloud of her breath form then disappear in front of her face. ‘What would I do without you, Mr Bear?’

‘This hotel runs itself these days,’ said

T. Bear. ‘You’d get by!’ He clapped his paws together and rubbed them for warmth.

‘Maybe I should turn the heating up?’ said Anna.

‘I would, miss,’ he replied. ‘Even if it won’t be the sunniest, then it can definitely be the warmest hotel on Animal Boulevard, can’t it?’

‘You’re right,’ said Anna. ‘Don’t stay out too long. There’s a meeting in ten minutes!’

‘Right you are, miss,’ said T. Bear.



Emergency Planning

‘Everyone, listen,’ said Anna, circling the room. ‘Winter is on its way!’

All the staff were present and were listening intently except for Madame Le Pig.

‘It is an abomination!’ she cried, stomping her trotters on the soft carpet, which didn’t have quite the effect she hoped for. ‘A deep freeze?! Here on



Animal Boulevard?! What is happening to this world?’

‘We can’t control the weather,’ said Anna calmly, ‘so we have to take precautions no matter what.’

‘What sort of precautions?’ asked Squeak the mouse. Squeak spent most of his time working the lift and he was uncertain as to whether there was much more he could do for that small space.

‘For example,’ said Anna wisely, ‘if we get snowed in, do we have enough food?’



‘Of course we do!’ spat Madame Le Pig. ‘I keep my restaurant stores and fridge stocked up to the ceiling!’

‘Excellent. And the heating?’ asked Anna. ‘Can we keep warm?’

Stella sucked in a short burst of air. ‘I reckon so,’ she said. ‘The boiler is good. And I’ve checked our fuel. There’s an old store of firewood and coal in the basement if we need them for extra oomph.’

‘Excellent,’ said Anna.

‘And woollen blankets,’ said Eva Koala. ‘We’ve plenty of them to go round. I could put them in bedrooms or fold them over chairs and benches for guests?’

‘Good thinking,’ said Anna.

‘And I’ll also make a special hot drinks list,’ said Eva. ‘Mocha-choca-cino lattes, hot chocolates with marshmallows, herbal teas – that sort of thing!’

‘Delicious,’ said Anna.

‘I’ll wrap up the palms and trees round the pool,’ said Jojo the otter. ‘They won’t like this cold one bit and need protecting.’

‘Just like me!’ said Lemmy with a doomed expression. ‘Can you wrap me up while you’re at it?’

‘There are some thicker hotel jumpers and coats in the big storeroom if you need them,’ said Hilary Hippo. ‘They’re hung near my vacuum cleaner, among all my cleaning products.’

Lemmy could already feel the cold creeping up his tail. ‘Don’t mind me . . .’ he chirped, as he skipped away to go looking for extra layers.

‘And maybe we should drain the pool?’ added Anna. ‘We don’t want it turning to ice.’

Jojo shook her head furiously. ‘No, no! People love an icy dip these days,’ she said. ‘It’s good for the mind and body!’

‘Then just make sure the poolside is safe,’ said Anna. ‘We don’t want any accidents. No icy paths or staff and guests slipping over, please.’

‘You bet,’ replied Jojo.

Anna took a deep breath. ‘That seems to be everything then,’ she said. ‘I fear it will be a late night for us all!’

Lemmy reappeared wearing many extra layers topped by a thick coat with a furry hood and trim. He looked very,



very happy – at least his eyes did, as the rest of his face was covered.

‘I hope you left some for everyone else,’ said Anna.

‘Mmmffuff!’ he replied, and waddled off to the reception desk.

Anna followed Jojo out on to the garden terrace to help wrap up the

giant palms. It was hard work, and as the evening rolled into night, the air grew colder and colder. Finally, as they prepared to return to the hotel, a peculiar silence descended on the world. Anna watched tiny flakes fall from the sky, just a few at first, drifting down like petal blossoms in spring. Her heart leapt. ‘Snow!’



‘It’s sure been a while,’ said Jojo, sticking out her tongue to catch one.

Within seconds the snow was falling in bigger, fatter flakes, and Anna could barely see past her outstretched arm. She copied Jojo, catching a snowflake on her tongue, and soon found herself zigzagging about the terrace to catch more. It was intoxicating!

‘I guess this is it,’ she said happily.

‘Proper winter,’ said Jojo, laughing at how cold her tongue had become.

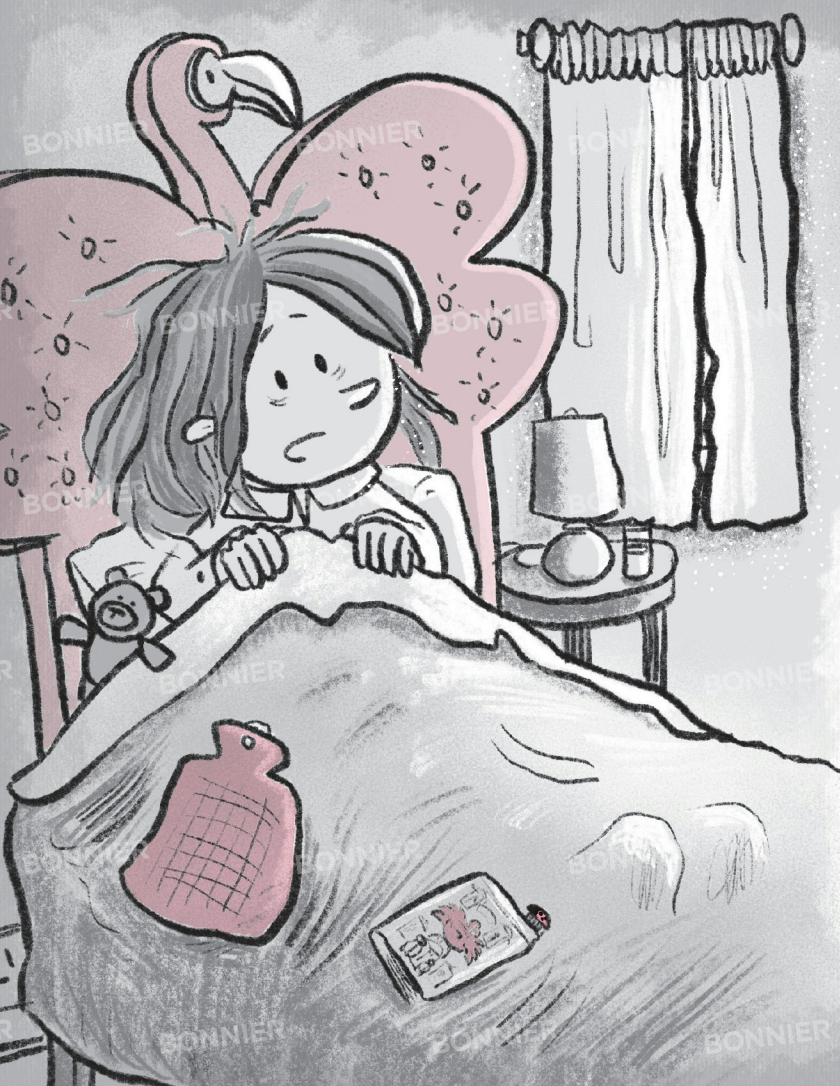
Anna didn’t want to stop having fun, but she knew they had a lot of work ahead of them. She walked back inside and shook the snow off her clothes.

‘It’s settling already!’ said T. Bear, calling it a night.

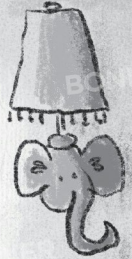
‘And falling heavily,’ said Anna. ‘Sleep well.’

‘And you, miss,’ said T. Bear.

With Hilary’s help Eva had placed blankets everywhere and laid the fireplaces. Anna was content that they had done all they could. She retired to her bedroom feeling strangely excited about the snow. Tomorrow couldn’t come soon enough!



Snowed In!



Anna woke up to a silent world. There was no traffic outside, no people on the street, and even the hotel seemed peculiarly quiet.

She bravely drew back the bedsheets and immediately regretted it, as she suddenly felt the cold draught racing through her room.

‘Yikes!’ she said, sliding her feet into her slippers. She threw on her dressing

gown and opened the curtains to find her window completely obscured with snow!

Her heart started to race. Something magical had happened overnight! With a fizzy giddiness, Anna ran out into the corridor and skipped upstairs into the foyer.

‘Miss Anna!’ said T. Bear, who was staring dolefully at the entrance. ‘We’re completely snowed in!’

‘Completely?’
echoed Anna.

‘I can’t even
open the door,’

replied T. Bear. He pushed at the revolving door but it wouldn’t budge. ‘There is snow right up to our first floor!’

‘Can *that* much really have fallen?’
asked Anna.

‘See for yourself!’ said T. Bear.

Anna ran up the staircase and walked to a large window that overlooked the town. The window ledge was covered with a layer of snow, but despite glistening with frost, the window was clear. Anna opened it wide and leaned out.

She gasped as the bracing cold stung her face; under a dull grey sky Animal Boulevard had all but disappeared.

‘SNOW!’ cried Anna, flapping her arms up and down in excitement. ‘SNOW! SNOW! EVERYWHERE!’



The street was a gentle rolling landscape of sparkling white, its edges lifting up and blending into the shops and houses – many of which were now nothing more than a few darkened windows and rooftops. The tops of lamp posts occasionally popped out of the snow,

but there were no cars, bikes or lorries, and not a soul to be seen or a sound to be heard for miles on end.

Anna breathed it all in, knowing that such an event would probably never happen again.

‘It’s wonderful,’ she said.



‘It is, miss,’ said T. Bear, joining her. ‘But we really should try to get the door clear. It’s not a hotel if people can’t get in or out!’

This was the wake-up call Anna needed – she still had a hotel to run!

‘You’re right, Mr Bear!’ she said, running off to get dressed. ‘There’s so much to do!’

When Anna returned to the foyer in her uniform, she found Lemmy hunched over the phone with the receiver clasped to his ear.

‘Is that a booking?’ she asked, when he finally put down the phone.

‘A booking?’ he said, laughing. ‘It’s the thirty-first booking in the past fifteen

minutes! You wanted guests, you’ve got them!’

Anna’s face paled. She was perfectly happy to have things quieter if the weather was going to be quite *this* bad. ‘But you said less sun, less fun!’

‘I did!’ said Lemmy. ‘Boy, was I wrong!’

‘But why are they suddenly coming?’ she asked desperately. ‘What’s changed?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Lemmy. ‘I didn’t ask.’

Anna scratched her head furiously. ‘So when are they arriving?’



‘Today, miss,’ said Lemmy.

Anna almost fell over in shock. ‘But . . . but there’s so much snow you can’t even see the road!’ she cried. ‘How will they even get here?’

The phone rang again with another potential guest. Lemmy lifted the receiver and gave Anna a shrug.

Anna strode up and down, restlessly planning a strategy. ‘I need to get outside and I need to get outside now,’ she said.

‘It’s too high for a ladder,’ said Anna, looking down from a first-floor window to what had once been the hotel entrance. ‘We’ll need a rope.’

‘I’m not sure that’s such a good idea, miss,’ said T. Bear.

‘We have guests arriving any minute,’ she replied. ‘We’ve got to do something. STELLA!’ she shouted.

‘I’m coming, I’m coming!’ said Stella, clambering the staircase.

She was ready for action in full winter gear. A rope was slung over her shoulder, numerous shovels and spades were curled under one arm, and a long ladder was tucked under the other. ‘What do you need?’ she asked.

‘Let’s start with a rope,’ said Anna. ‘Tie it round my waist and drop me out through the window.’

‘Miss,’ said T. Bear, ‘are you certain this is safe?’

‘It might as well be me as anyone,’ Anna replied.

Stella tied a rope to Anna's waist and handed her a shovel.

'Hold tight!' said Anna, sliding out and down on to the soft snow, with T. Bear and Stella following her.



Though pristine snowy world was so calm and quiet, three of them wasted no time in getting to work. They dug down and down, and, after a lot of shovelling, a wide hole had been formed that descended all the way to the ground.

'It'll soon be clear!' said Anna, hot and bothered despite the cold, and as the hotel's doorway was finally revealed, T. Bear's smile returned.

'There she is!' he said, scraping snow from the glass panels of the door. He took a step back to admire his work. 'Hotel Flamingo is back in business!' he said proudly.



The New Arrivals

It was just a little after lunch and T. Bear was clearing a path while watching some young animals play in the snow, building igloos and snowdogs. He dumped another load of snow out of the way, only to hear a strange swooshing noise further up the road.

‘Well, I’ll be!’ he said.

T. Bear tightened his scarf and tramped out into the snowy road. A long procession

of animals was heading his way. Some were skiing, some were sledging, some were on snowboards, and all were having the time of their lives.

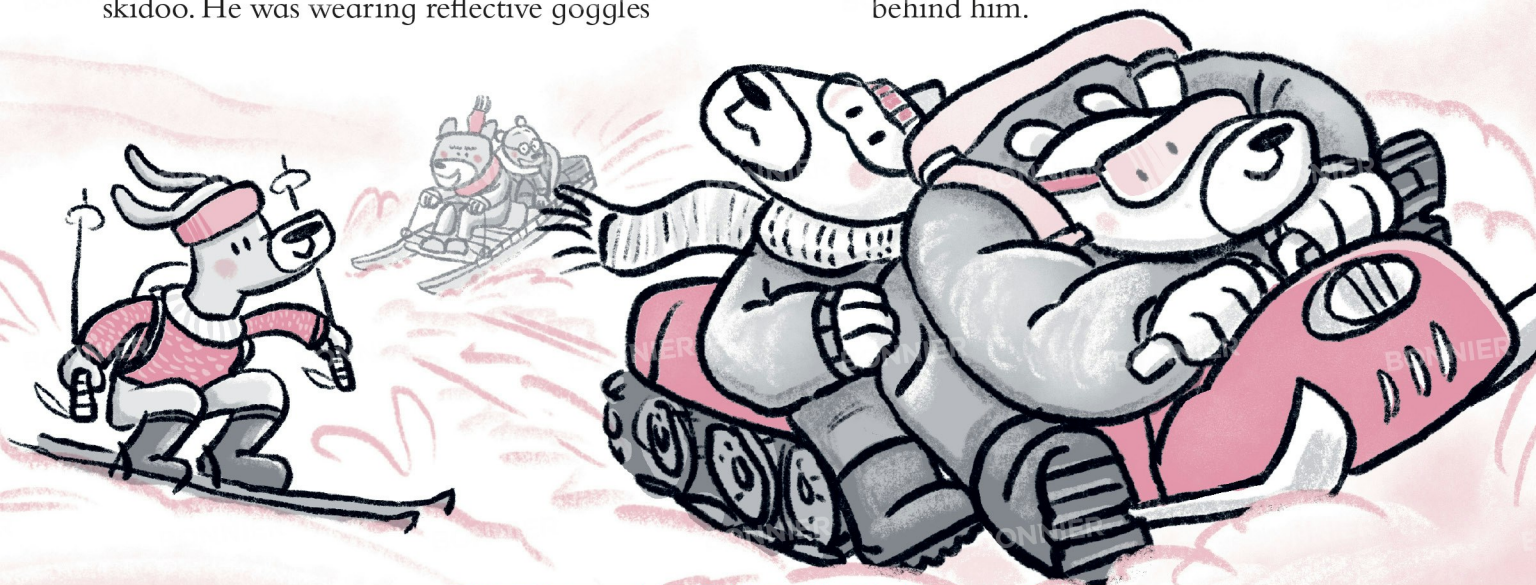
When they reached the hotel, they slid to a halt, kicking up walls of snow.

‘IS THIS HOTEL FLAMINGO?’ shouted a large polar bear on a noisy skidoo. He was wearing reflective goggles

and carried a big backpack. Sitting behind him was another polar bear with goggles and a bright neon headband. Her stomach had a peculiar round bulge.

‘That’s us,’ said T. Bear.

‘I’m Mortimer Blake,’ said the polar bear, shaking his paw in greeting. ‘And this is Windy.’ He thumbed to the bear behind him.



‘How pleased am I to be here!?’
said Windy, clambering off the skidoo
carefully. She patted her stomach. ‘Little
Squirt here is keen to see the world . . .’

‘Now, now, there’s still a good few
weeks left till he arrives,’ said Mortimer.

‘How do *you* know?’

asked Windy, furrowing
her brow. ‘And besides,
Squirt could just as
easily be she.’

‘Oh, sure, sure!’

replied Mortimer
apologetically. ‘Anyway,
thanks for taking us all on at
such short notice.’

‘Everyone’s welcome here, even bumps,’
said T. Bear. ‘That way to reception,’ he



said, pointing to the hotel entrance.

‘Thanks, dude,’ said Mortimer.

T. Bear turned back to the approaching
animals, only for two rabbit snowboarders
to veer sharply towards the hotel, speed up
a bank of snow and flip over in mid-air
above his head. They landed safely with
a sideways skid, punched the air and
high-fived each other.

‘Awesome hang time,’ said the one
wearing a blue helmet.

‘You were flying!’ said
the other, who was in
a red helmet.

‘Good afternoon,’
said T. Bear, warily
eyeing the acrobatic
rabbits in case they



made any more outrageous moves.

‘I’m Steely,’ said the rabbit with a blue helmet, holding out her clenched paw.

T. Bear wasn’t sure what to do, but he gave her paw a little tap in return.

She nodded coolly.

‘Fly,’ said the other rabbit, also holding out her paw to touch T. Bear’s.

He dutifully returned the action. ‘Welcome to the sunniest ho—’ He stopped himself. ‘Welcome to the *snowiest* hotel in town!’

‘Yeah,’ said Steely. ‘This place is so much snowier than up the mountains. They are super barren this year!’

‘Too true,’ said Fly. ‘I mean, the views aren’t as neat down here, but it’s perfect for shredding.’

‘It’s a total powder town,’ said Steely.

‘Oh yeeeeaaaaah . . .’ groaned Fly in pleasure.

T. Bear wondered if they were speaking a foreign language. He went to usher them inside when an out-of-control white ball came rolling across the snow with two skis sticking out of it at peculiar angles. It glanced off a hidden snow-covered lamp post and careered towards T. Bear.

‘WATCH OUT, DARLINGS!’ cried a bright pink flamingo in flamboyant après-ski dress. She was skiing just behind at breakneck speed – and not fully in control – attempting to catch up.

T. Bear would have recognised that voice anywhere. It was Ms Fragranti, queen of all things theatrical! He gulped

as the ball of white hit him squarely in the chest. He caught it in his big paws but the speed was such that it knocked him backwards.

‘Uh-oh!’ he said, stumbling into his towering mound of freshly shovelled snow. There was an ominous grumbling sound and suddenly the snow collapsed on to them.

Ms Fragranti cried out, ‘OH MY! MR BEAR! HURRY! DIG THEM OUT!’

Anna heard the commotion and came charging out of the hotel to find a group of chattering penguins and a friendly walrus digging at the snow.

‘Ms Fragranti?’ she said, spotting her old friend.

‘Ms Anna!’ declared the flamingo,

flapping her wings furiously.

Anna immediately spotted everyone’s snowboards, skis and other equipment. ‘What’s going on?’ she asked.

‘IT’S A CALAMITY!’ cried Ms Fragranti.

But within seconds T. Bear had been uncovered, only now he was hatless and his eyebrows were loaded with ice. He spat out a mouthful of snow as he was pulled up to his paws.

‘T. Bear?’ said Anna.

‘Our guests have arrived,’ he said grumpily, placing the hardened ball of snow down to the ground. Almost immediately a line of cracks formed on its surface and it crumbled, like a chocolate egg revealing its contents.

A young white flaminglet was left standing in the snow before them, his long thin legs quivering.

‘Philippe!’ said Ms Fragranti angrily, brushing him down with her wing feathers. ‘You were skiing far too fast! Apologise to the gentlebear now!’

‘Sorry,’ said Philippe, not looking sorry at all.



‘Are you both all right?’ asked Anna.

‘I’m fine, miss,’ said T. Bear, searching for his hat.

‘Yeah, fine,’ said Philippe.

‘This is my nephew,’ said Ms Fragranti with a slightly exasperated air. ‘He *will* charge off sometimes and get into scrapes . . .’

‘Oh, leave me alone!’ said Philippe.

Anna brushed some snow from T. Bear’s jacket and checked him over. He seemed unharmed.

‘Thankfully everyone appears alive and well,’ said Anna.

‘More by luck than judgement, darling,’ said Ms Fragranti.

Anna tried to smile. ‘Come on, let’s go inside and get you all signed in and

warm,' she said. 'Hot chocolates are the order of the day, I think!'

Philippe liked the sound of that. 'Do you have marshmallows and cream?' he asked.

'You bet,' Anna replied.





A Warm Welcome

The hotel lobby was blissfully warm.

‘I hadn’t taken you for a winter sport sort of person,’ said Anna to Ms Fragranti.

The two had a long history. Ms Fragranti was always useful in times of trouble at the hotel, and Anna enjoyed her company and help, although it seemed as if she might have her own set of problems to deal with this time around.

‘It’s not really my scene, darling,’ said the flamingo, clutching her room key and suitcase. ‘These long legs aren’t cut out for skis. In truth, I’m here for Philippe. Snowboarders are his world, *his everything!* He knows them all by name, can recite all the tricks by heart – it’s his life . . .’

The young flaminglet was flicking tiny bits of snow off his feathers at T. Bear, who was unaware and tidying discarded snowboards into a pile.

‘I shouldn’t do that,’ said Anna, putting out her hand to stop him. ‘He’s a very big bear.’

Ms Fragranti rolled her eyes. ‘Now, now, Philippe!’ she said, gently berating her nephew.



Philippe strolled off towards Eva, who was standing with a tray of hot drinks. He tossed his skis to one side and accidentally knocked over a large ceramic flamingo. Its neck snapped in two.

‘Oh my! I’m so sorry, darling,’ Ms Fragranti said.

‘It’s just a sculpture,’ said Anna.

Ms Fragranti stooped down to pick it up, attempting to fit the pieces together again. ‘Philippe is just a big ball of furious

energy and he hates being told what to do,' she said. 'But he's very new to life, isn't he?'

They watched him from afar, as he took a hot chocolate and sipped it.

'We all have to find our way,' said Anna.

'Yes. We don't have to be so *difficult* about it, though,' said her friend. 'I promised to take him on holiday to give my sister a break, but we don't have a lot in common. He tends to make a scene wherever he goes . . . If only he would do it on a stage! I might understand that more!'

Anna knew full well what it was like to manage tricky people. 'As you know, everyone's welcome at Hotel Flamingo,'

she said, full of understanding, 'so we'll do our best to make him happy. Perhaps he might like it here?'

'I hope so,' said Ms Fragranti.

Anna watched the crowd of guests filling the lobby – the atmosphere was so different from that morning. 'You should have told us you were coming,' she said.

'But we had to make the bookings so suddenly!' said the flamingo. 'The Winter White-out Games were cancelled at the last minute and moved here.'

'Winter games?' said Anna.

'Wait!' said Ms Fragranti. 'Have you not met Mortimer Blake?'

She called out to the polar bear and he walked over confidently, raising a clipboard in greeting.

‘Mortimer runs the Winter White-out Games, which is why we’re all here,’ Ms Fragranti explained.

‘They’re the greatest extreme sports event this side of Animal Boulevard!’ said Mortimer. He was pumped with excitement. ‘When the snow failed to arrive in the mountains we hastily made a few phone calls and switched venues to the Boulevard Sports Arena.’

‘I see!’ said Anna. ‘I mean, it certainly seems like we have *all* the snow in the world right now.’

‘Enough to spare!’ said Ms Fragranti.

‘Yeah, dude, it’s sick!’ said Mortimer. ‘My team is already building the new course at the stadium. It’s going to be perfect – we’ve put so much work into it.’

‘Well, anything you need, Mr Blake,’ said Anna, ‘don’t hesitate to ask.’

‘I’m sure there’ll be a few things,’ he replied.

Windy walked over clutching her tummy. ‘You’re absolutely right there will,’ she said.

‘You’re pregnant?’ asked Anna, suddenly worried. She’d never had a pregnant guest before.

‘Oh yeah,’ said Windy. ‘And if it’s anything like Mortimer, little Squirt will be restless to get out and see these games.’



‘We’ve got plenty of time before he comes,’ said Mortimer, batting away her worries.

Windy shook her head. ‘He acts like he knows everything!’ she said to Anna.

‘Is there anything *you* need?’ checked Anna.

‘Pineapple juice,’ Windy replied. ‘And lumps of wood. I have a real taste for bark, particularly the thick crusty type!’

‘I’ll see what I can do,’ said Anna.

She walked over to the reception desk to see Lemmy, who was looking a bit overwhelmed. He handed a key to the walrus, and then called the group of short stout penguins over.

They parked their skis against the desk and peered up at him.



‘Everything in order?’ asked Anna.

‘I think so,’ said Lemmy.

The penguins chirped happily.

‘You bet your skippity-doo it is!’ said one, smiling.

Lemmy ran his finger along the line of bookings then looked up at the penguins.

‘Twelve of you?’

One of the penguins turned and

counted his friends. 'We sometimes lose a few,' he said, laughing. 'Yep, we're all here!'

A bead of sweat formed on Lemmy's brow and his eye started to twitch. 'Umm . . .' he said, turning round to face the large wooden board that held all the hotel's bedroom keys. It looked very empty. 'Miss Anna . . .'

'Yes?' she replied.

Lemmy pulled her to one side in order to whisper in her ear. 'I think I've made a little mistake,' he said.

'What do you mean?'

'In the rush of orders this morning, I think I may have overbooked the hotel . . .' he said, gritting his teeth.

Anna stared at him blankly. 'You think you did what?'

'Yeah, so . . . I think I accidentally booked in the penguins as one guest, instead of many.'

'Exactly how many?' asked Anna.

'Twelve penguins,' he said, doing the sums. 'So we need eleven more beds.'

Anna put her head in her hands. It was not the news she wanted. 'Well, we can't turn them away now,' she said.

'No, miss,' said Lemmy.

Lemmy smiled meekly as Anna went into crisis mode.

'Send them into the piano lounge for complimentary drinks and food while I sort this out,' she said.

'Will do!' said Lemmy.

Anna retreated to her office and slipped into her chair. Where on earth

would she find new rooms?

There was a rap on her door.

‘Yes?’ she said.

Mortimer Blake peered inside. ‘I’ve just thought of something we need actually.’

Anna invited him in.

‘I checked your restaurant menu,’ he said, ‘and there’s not much for your new guests.’

‘I assure you we have one of the best chefs on Animal Boulevard,’ Anna replied.

‘Don’t get me wrong,’ said Mortimer, ‘it’s just that all these kids only eat pizza – pizza for breakfast, pizza for lunch, pizza for dinner – and they only drink energy drinks.’

Anna gulped. ‘I’ll do what I can do,’ she said.

‘Awesome,’ said Mortimer. ‘Appreciate it.’

He left the office, leaving Anna in a state of despair. Not only were there more rooms to find, but she’d now have to go and speak to Madame Le Pig . . . and no one wanted that!





An Ice Idea!

Anna was usually very good at solving problems, but she was struggling to find a solution to the lack of rooms. If only there was a hidden floor that they hadn't discovered yet!

'May I come in, miss?' asked T. Bear, knocking on the office door.

'Of course, Mr Bear,' said Anna.

T. Bear opened the door and smiled.

‘Lemmy filled me in on our problem, miss,’ he said, ‘and I think I may have the answer. Come with me – and bring your coat.’

T. Bear walked Anna through the hotel and out on to the terrace. Stella and Jojo were busy building something out of clumps of snow and blocks of ice from the frozen swimming pool.



‘I watched some youngsters building an igloo this morning,’ said T. Bear. ‘I wondered if we could maybe take their idea –’

‘And scale it up!’ interrupted Jojo. ‘Ice hotels are all the rage these days.’

Anna looked uncertain. ‘What good’s a hotel made from ice?’ she asked. ‘Who’d want to sleep on an ice bed or even sit on an ice loo?’ She shivered at the thought.

‘It will mean extra bedrooms, miss,’ said T. Bear.

‘But won’t it be freezing?’ asked Anna. ‘We want our guests to stay in luxury, not in a fridge.’

‘Igloos and snow houses actually stay very warm,’ said Jojo. ‘It’s not how you’d imagine.’

‘That’s right, miss,’ said T. Bear. ‘And this is for penguins – they’re usually a hardy bunch.’

Anna couldn’t picture it. She simply wasn’t sure how an ice hotel could be at all pleasant. ‘I don’t know,’ she said finally.

‘Seems like a cool idea to me,’ said Jojo.

‘A little *too* cool!’ said Anna, trying to laugh.

She clutched her forehead, thinking it over. *Maybe it could work?* It felt like she had little choice. ‘Can you have it ready for tonight?’ she asked.

‘What do you think?’ said T. Bear to Stella, who was carving something that looked like a doorway.

The giraffe sucked a mouthful of air through her teeth and scratched her chin.

‘With a few extra paws, maybe,’ she said.

‘Then get all the help you can,’ said Anna. ‘If this works, it’ll be a master stroke.’

Back inside, the foyer was buzzing with guests, all excitedly discussing the Winter White-out Games. Anna noticed Mortimer Blake having a tense discussion with the two rabbit snowboarders, Steely and Fly.

‘But we need a practice course,’ said Fly. ‘We’re never going to make the Triple Low Backside

McTwist without practice!’

‘It’s the biggest move of all time,’ added Steely. ‘We’ve got to perfect it to get us into the World Finals!’

‘Give me time, dudes,’ pleaded Mortimer. ‘I’ll work it out!’

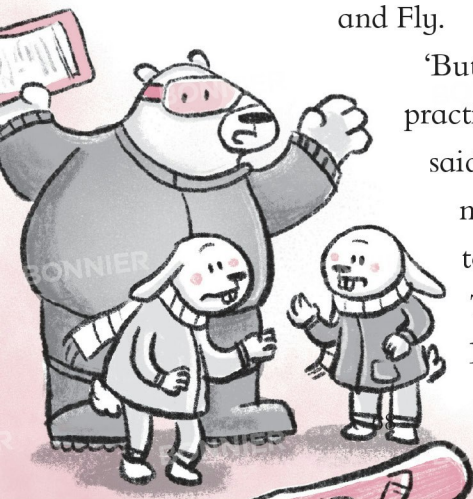
‘Can I help?’ asked Anna.

Mortimer took a deep breath before responding. ‘These girls are the Board Bunnies, the best of the best!’

Steely and Fly took a bow.

‘It’ll be a few days until the arena is all set up for us,’ continued Mortimer. ‘They’re worried that without practice they won’t make the cut for the World Finals next year.’

‘We’re working on the hardest trick ever,’ said Fly. ‘The Triple Low Backside



McTwist! If we can complete it and get the most points, we can be world champions.'

'I'll have to see it to understand,' said Anna, laughing. 'But it sounds wonderful.'

'It won't be unless I find them somewhere to practise,' said Mortimer.

'There must be somewhere around here that's suitable?' said Anna.

'Drawing a blank so far,' said Mortimer. 'But I'm working on it . . .'

'How about working on that pizza?' said Fly. 'My tummy is rumbling for that sweet cheese!'

'Ah, yeah,' said Mortimer, 'that too. How are we going on that front?'

Anna had completely forgotten to speak to Madame Le Pig. 'I will arrange

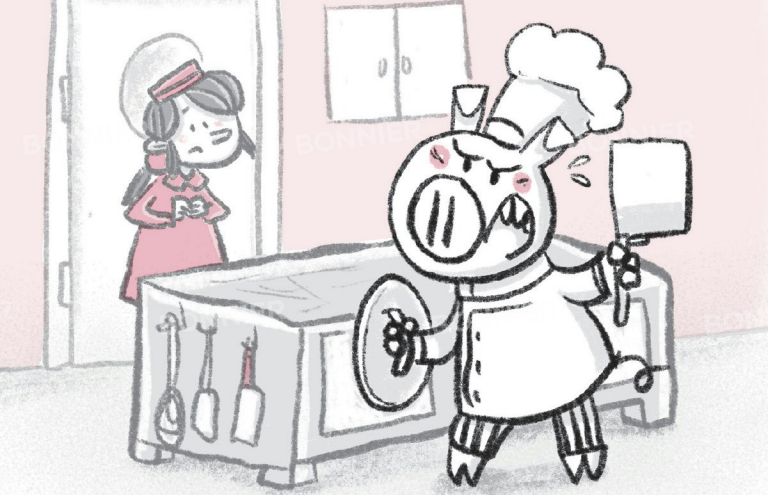
that now,' she said, her heart sinking.

'And some energy drinks!' added Fly. 'My reserves are super low . . .'

'Give me a moment,' said Anna.

Any visit to the kitchen was fraught with danger. Anna never knew what sort of mood Hotel Flamingo's chef would be in, and it was often best to go in wearing body armour. If Madame Le Pig was having a stinker of a day, spoons had been known to fly like spears.

'Hello?' said Anna, knocking on the kitchen door. She poked her head inside and instinctively ducked, as Madame Le Pig jumped up from behind a cupboard with a pan in one hand and a lid in the other.



‘What is it?’ she barked. ‘I am preparing the menu for your party! I need silence!’

In all the rush of the past day, Anna had almost forgotten about Mrs Turpington’s party, which was only a week away. She squeezed through the door, apologising with every step.

‘Something new has come up,’ she said tentatively. ‘I was wondering . . . how

easy it is to make pizza?’

‘Very,’ said Madame Le Pig with a sniff.

‘Oh, that’s a relief,’ Anna replied. ‘And what about energy drinks? Our new guests are asking for them and I was worried –’

The pig scoffed. ‘But I do not make pizza. And I do not like sugary energy drinks. I am a five-star chef of the highest quality! You wish me to dirty myself with greasy floppy circles of bread and that infernal stretchy cheese?’

‘I quite like pizza,’ said Anna.

‘Then you make it!’ snapped Madame Le Pig.

Anna was certain cooking was not her job. ‘I have a hotel to manage,’ she said, getting into the argument.

‘And I have a reputation to uphold!’ squealed the chef.

Anna tried a different approach. ‘All right,’ she said, hoping to call the pig’s bluff. ‘You teach me how to do it and I’ll make the pizza.’

Madame Le Pig looked suitably shocked. ‘You want *me* to teach *you*?’ she said, jabbing the pan in Anna’s direction.

‘Why not?’ said Anna.

‘In my kitchen?’ said Le Pig.

‘Where else?’

Madame Le Pig’s face turned bright red as she grew more furious.

‘We can do it right now?’ suggested Anna. ‘Our guests are really keen for them.’

‘NO! NO! NO!’ cried Le Pig. ‘I will not have anyone in here cluttering my

workspace . . .’ She paused and righted her chef’s hat. ‘I shall make the pizza with the most outrageously divine toppings ever,’ she declared. ‘But I will not enjoy doing it!’

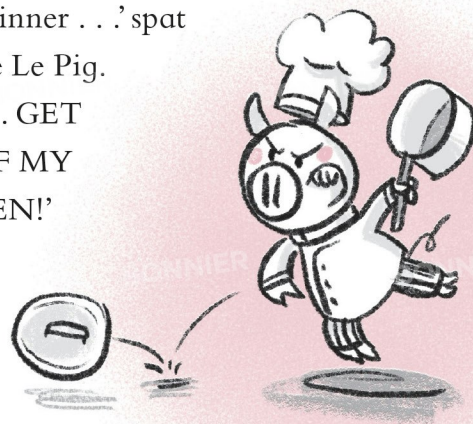
‘Thank you,’ said Anna. ‘And what about the drinks?’

Madame Le Pig sneered. ‘I will look into it.’

Anna turned to leave. ‘When might they be ready?’

‘For dinner . . .’ spat Madame Le Pig.

‘Now . . . GET OUT OF MY KITCHEN!’





The New Hotel

By late afternoon the temperature was falling faster than a flying squirrel in search of buried nuts. More snow was in the air and Anna was helping her staff build an ice hotel.

Wrapped up warm and with thick gloves to protect their hands and paws, they'd moved so much snow and ice that a huge gaping hole had been dug out of the wintry white terrace. The new building

was standing tall, with rooms, a roof and even arched windows!

‘Almost done!’ said Stella from high on a ladder, smoothing out the hardening icy ceiling.

T. Bear, who was carrying three crates of snow, slunk inside one of the bedrooms to join Anna.

Together they fashioned seats and tables, patting down surfaces and making the space look as much like a hotel room as possible.

Hilary Hippo looked on with suspicion. ‘How do I vacuum the floor?’ she said, shivering.



‘And do the ice beds need sheets?’

Anna had looked after penguin royalty before, so she knew very well that penguin nests were simply made of rocks.

‘I assure you they won’t need them,’ she said calmly. ‘Just a pile of stones.’

‘But how do I wash the sides down or clean the bathroom?’ asked Hilary. ‘Won’t the soapy water freeze? And where will all the dust go?’

‘I imagine it’ll just wipe off,’ said Anna.

‘You imagine, do you!? It must be tidy,’ Hilary said firmly. ‘My reputation is on the line!’

‘I know,’ said Anna. ‘And it will be tidy; I’m sure of it. Besides, either way, you’ll be rushed off your feet dealing with our full hotel.’

On this point Hilary agreed. 'I can vouch for that,' she said. 'There's a wolverine who keeps skiing down the staircase. He's already knocked over guests – three penguins went down like skittles, and ended up rolling about in the foyer.'

'We're working on finding the competitors a place to practise, but I'll get Lemmy to have a word,' Anna said.

'Make sure you do,' said Hilary, who then marched off, happy to have said her piece.

Anna placed candles on some ice shelves, then took a step back to see the results. She was taken by the unusual beauty of the rooms and realised she had been wrong to judge the idea of an ice hotel so quickly. 'It's certainly different,' she said.

'It really is, miss,' said T. Bear, rubbing his eyes. He was looking tired after a long day's work.

'And it must be almost time for you to turn in,' said Anna kindly.

'I think so, miss,' T. Bear replied.

Anna patted the big bear's back. 'I'll go and tell the penguins we're ready for them.'

Anna returned to the hotel and found Windy pacing the foyer, closely followed by Lemmy. She looked red-faced and out of sorts, while he looked totally out of his depth.

'Is everything all right?' asked Anna.

'Not sure, miss!' said Lemmy a little frantically.



‘I wish I was at home,’ said Windy, huffing and puffing. ‘Squirt seems to be making a move.’

‘The baby?!’ cried Anna.

‘Yes, the baby!’ snapped Windy.

Lemmy pulled a very anguished expression as though he’d been on the receiving end of Windy’s rage already.

‘But where’s Mortimer?’ asked Anna.

‘At the arena planning his games,’ growled Windy. ‘I told him not to go, but he never listens. *Oh no*, Mortimer knows everything!’

‘Then tell us what you need,’ said Anna.

Windy took a moment to lean over the front desk and catch her breath. Lemmy looked on helplessly.

‘I need somewhere to be alone,’ she snarled.

‘Is your room no use?’ asked Anna.

‘No, no. Somewhere away from Mortimer and everyone,’ she said. ‘I need peace and quiet.’

‘We’re a bit short of space,’ said Anna, trying to be helpful while acknowledging all the problems they already had.

‘We do have a large store cupboard,’ Lemmy said. ‘It’s quite full, but it’s definitely big enough.’

‘I’ll take it!’ said Windy, scraping her claws across the desk and cutting deep grooves into the wooden top.

Anna and Lemmy nodded to each other. Time was of the essence, if only to stop Windy destroying the hotel.

‘Follow me!’ said Lemmy.

Windy let Anna take a paw, and they hobbled slowly out of the foyer, down the stairs and into a corridor. Lemmy opened the cupboard door: it was the size of a small room, but full of towels, bedding, dusters and everything a hotel needs to care for its guests.

‘Right!’ said Anna, clearing an area of

mops and buckets. ‘Big enough?’

‘YES!’ Windy growled.

Windy pulled a pile of clean sheets and towels down to the ground, kicked them about to form a nest, then grabbed a DO NOT DISTURB sign from a shelf. She pushed Anna and Lemmy out of the cupboard, hung the sign on the handle then slammed the door shut.

Lemmy and Anna stood staring at the cupboard door, not knowing exactly what to do next.

‘We should probably tell Mortimer,’ said Anna finally.

‘And Hilary,’ added Lemmy.

‘She’s not going to like the mess in there,’ said Anna.

‘Windy can make as much mess as



she likes,' said Lemmy, laughing. 'You certainly won't find me stopping her!'

On this point Anna agreed. Anything, even arguing with Madame Le Pig, was preferable to dealing with a pregnant polar bear!



Pizzas and Power-ups!

Anna eventually found the penguins in the restaurant along with all the other guests, including Ms Franganti and Philippe. It was standing room only and Anna had to squeeze in.

Mrs Turpington waved at her, before taking a tiny bite of a pizza. Anna was pleased to see Madame Le Pig had succeeded in making new meals for the guests.

‘Is that all right for you to eat?’ asked Anna, remembering Mrs Turpington’s strict diet before hibernation.

‘Well, you have to try these things, dear,’ said the tortoise, who seemed to be enjoying the lively atmosphere. ‘It’s quite delicious. It’s got a most unusual spinach, lettuce and pea topping!’

Anna managed to catch Eva’s attention. She was squeezing through the crowd from table to table, doing her best not to tread on anyone’s paws or feet.

‘Why is it so busy?’ asked Anna.

‘They’re all mad for Chef’s pizzas,’ she said, handing two vast



platefuls to the walrus. ‘Enjoy!’

‘The pizzas are outstanding!’ he said with a gigantic slurp, his tongue swirling round his tusks. ‘Kelp and sardine, with fruits of the sea!’

He picked up one plate and slid the whole pizza into his giant mouth. With a couple of chews the mouthful was swallowed, allowing him to slide in the second pizza, leaving a smear of greasy tomato on his moustache.

‘Could you help me, miss?’ asked Eva. ‘I just can’t keep up. I don’t know where they’re putting it all.’

Anna rolled up her sleeves and joined in, and her first delivery was to the Board Bunnies.

‘No lie, these are the best pizzas this

side of the mountains,' said Steely.

Fly snatched another piece. 'And you should try the drinks. Whoa! What a buzz!'

Anna noticed a bright green concoction filling a tall glass on the table. She was overjoyed to see her guests so happy. 'I'll pass on your thoughts to the chef,' she said, smiling.

The lively group of penguins had filled two tables, and were surrounded by empty plates. Two lifted their flippers, calling for more pizza, and Anna headed over.

'Two more anchovy cheese supremes!' said the penguins.

'Coming up,' said Anna. She collected as many spent plates as she could manage. 'And, while I'm here, your rooms are almost ready,' she said.

The penguins squawked for joy.

'I'll show you them once you're finished,' said Anna.

'A round of Power-ups coming up!' cried Eva from the Board Bunnies' table.

'For us too, skippity-doo!' said a penguin.

'Yes, of course,' said Anna.

She walked over to the kitchen and stopped Eva on her rounds. 'What are Power-ups?' she asked.

'Madame Le Pig's new creation!' said Eva. 'I reckon it's the best energy smoothie you'll ever try. We're selling so many it's impossible to keep up.'

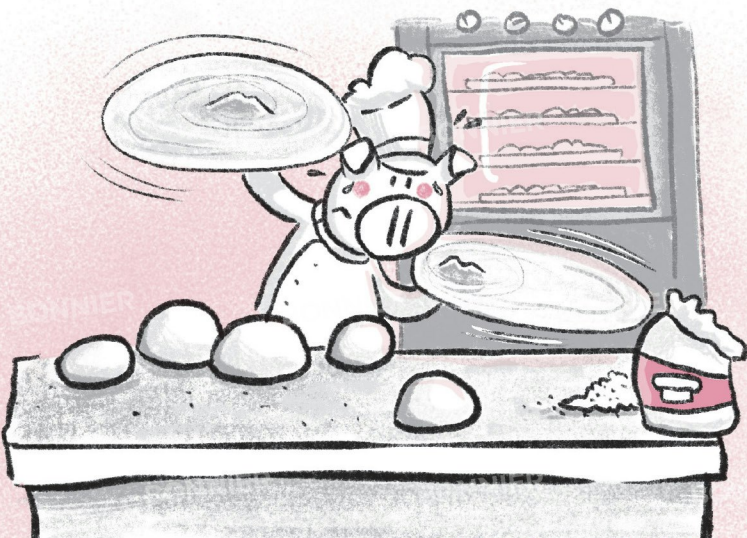
'Sounds like something we should all be drinking,' said Anna.

Eva passed Anna a small bottle. It

was filled with a bright green liquid that looked like a magic potion. Anna unscrewed the lid. Its sweet and feisty smell was overpowering, and just a whiff of it made Anna's eyes water.

'Is it safe?' she asked. 'Should we even be selling this stuff?'

'I CAN HEAR YOU, YOU KNOW!' blasted Madame Le Pig from the kitchen.



Anna skipped inside, where Madame Le Pig was hard at working spinning pizza dough in her trotters. Her cheeks were flushed and beads of sweat trickled from underneath her chef's hat. A counter was completely covered with her new drinks. Anna was impressed that Madame Le Pig had created so many in such a short space of time.

'Are they really safe?' asked Anna.

Le Pig sniffed. 'Of course they are! It is an ancient recipe of my father's – he said the recipe was a surefire way to put hairs on the chin of a hog!'

'I'm not sure I need hairs on my chin,' replied Anna. 'What's in it?'

'A few secret ingredients,' said Madame Le Pig, while whirling dough above her

head. 'But mainly ginger, green tea and seaweed. Try some before you question my creation!'

Anna took a sip and the intense taste almost blew her head off. When her brain stopped fizzing, she found the whole experience strangely enjoyable. After a long, tiring day, she certainly felt rejuvenated. She took another sip.

'You see!' said Madame Le Pig. 'It is delicious!'

Anna conceded that it was, even if every sip seemed to hold a new surprise for her tongue.

Madame Le Pig tossed a pizza base on to the counter and picked up another piece of dough. The chef was like a machine. 'Now let me work in peace!' she said.

Anna took a tray of the Power-up drinks and returned to the restaurant with a spring in her step.





Cool Customer Service

Once everyone had finished their food, Anna corralled the penguins and showed them outside. They were all wide-eyed and up for fun, despite the late hour, which Anna took as a sign that they'd had too many of Madame Le Pig's energy drinks.

With the snow gently falling, it was like a winter wonderland, and the penguins made a very pleasing 'Coooo!' at

the sight of their new residence.

The ice hotel was lit beautifully – Stella had redirected the pool lights to shine upwards – and it shimmered like a diamond tiara against the wintry backdrop.

‘You’ll probably need coats inside,’ said Anna.

‘Eh? We’ve survived much worse than this!’ squawked a penguin.

‘Oh yeah,’ said another, ‘I mean, this house is, like, ten times nicer than my mum’s.’

‘True,’ said a third, laughing. ‘My Great-auntie Gladys once lived on an iceberg!’

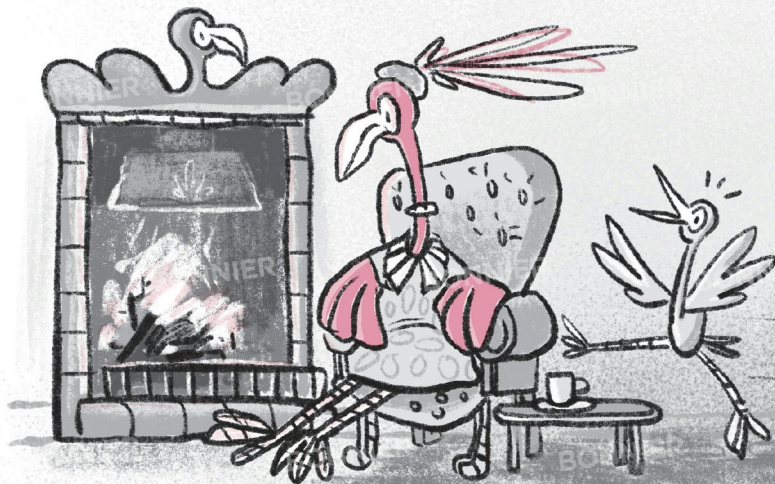
‘I’d like to think it’s a little better than that!’ said Anna.

From the looks on the penguins’ faces, it was. They mooched about the hallway, enjoying the sparkling interiors and decorations, while chatting among themselves.

‘The rooms are this way . . .’ said Anna.

‘Skippity-doo!’ said one of the penguins.

Anna left them to unpack and returned to the hotel ready to retire for the evening.



Ms Fragranti was sitting in the foyer, staring into a roaring fire and looking like she needed her bed. 'Ah, darling,' she said, unusually downbeat. 'I have a problem.'

'Oh dear!' said Anna. 'What is it?'

'It is Philippe,' said the flamingo. 'A penguin gave him one of Madame Le Pig's Power-up drinks . . .'

Just then, the young flaminglet came swooping and soaring through the hotel lobby, using a mixture of flying and running. He veered round a bend, screaming at the top of his voice, and disappeared.

'I see . . .' said Anna.

'It is *way* past his bedtime,' said Ms Fragranti, 'and I fear I am not cut out for

this sort of performance. Looking after a child is very different to putting on a show.'

'I'm sure he'll run out of energy soon,' said Anna.

'I very much hope so,' said Ms Fragranti.

Anna grimaced as Philippe returned for a second lap. 'It could be a long night,' she said.

'My fear exactly,' replied Ms Fragranti.

Suddenly Mortimer Blake came thundering through the lobby.

'WINDY?' he roared.

'Mr Blake!' said Anna calmly. She felt very small next to the polar bear and a little scared.

'Have you seen her?' he growled.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Anna. ‘She’s fine!’

Mortimer immediately calmed down.

‘Your wife just needed her own space to rest,’ said Anna. ‘I think the baby is on its way.’

‘Already?’ he said. ‘He can’t be!’

‘I think your wife probably knows best,’ Anna replied. ‘We found her some space downstairs. I could tell her you’re back if you like?’

‘No! NO! Don’t disturb her!’ cried Mortimer, sounding more worried than angry. ‘It’s what polar bears do. They like to be by themselves at times like these. The last thing you want to see is an angry polar bear!’

Anna felt as though she’d already seen at least one. Mortimer stomped around in

a grumpy circle and tumbled into a chair. His paw clenched the arms and his claws pierced the upholstery.

‘I brought her to a strange place and now I feel terrible . . .’ he growled. ‘Here’s big old Mortimer doing what he always does, making sure he gets what he wants. I should have just cancelled the games!’



‘And let all the competitors down?’ said Anna. ‘That doesn’t seem like something you’d do.’

Mortimer sighed. ‘No, it’s not,’ he agreed. ‘They’re my responsibility.’

‘Well then,’ said Anna reassuringly, ‘I can quietly check in on her regularly and when the baby arrives you can share that responsibility. But right now you’ve got other things to focus on.’

‘Dude, you’re right about all that,’ he said, geeing himself up. He rose with a renewed vigour and slapped Anna on the back with his giant paw. She almost lost her breath! ‘You know, this is a great hotel; you guys are the best.’

‘And gals,’ said Anna.

‘Guys and gals,’ said Mortimer

apologetically. ‘And at the first sign of Windy and the baby, you come and find me, OK?’

‘I promise,’ said Anna.



A Sprinkle of Magic

The following morning, Anna walked into the lobby expecting to find it alive with guests. Instead she found the lone hunched figure of Ms Fragranti, asleep in the very same chair she had left her in the previous night. The fire had long since gone out, so Anna placed a blanket gently round her.

T. Bear was manning the reception desk. 'Where is everyone?' asked Anna.

He pointed to the back of the hotel. 'Out on the terrace enjoying the fresh snow,' he replied.

'Already?' said Anna, puzzled – it was still so early!

She threw on her coat and walked outside to discover Lemmy wrapped up warm and with a smile on his face the size of one of Madame Le Pig's pizzas.

'Lemmy?' she said, confused to find him willingly outside.

'Just watch them go!' he said, bubbling with excitement. 'It's amazing! I almost wish I could have a go!'

The guests were dressed in their snow gear and practising tricks and moves.

'Hibbity-boo, you didn't tell us there was a half-pipe out here!' said one of the

penguins, who then went and joined his friends in a celebratory group belly bump.

'There is?' questioned Anna.

'Yeah, dude. You sure knocked that up quick!' said Mortimer. 'This hotel has the best customer service!'

'Half-pipe?' said Anna, still as perplexed as before. 'Where?'

'Over there! Watch!' repeated Lemmy.

The huge hole in the snow that had been dug out by Stella and T. Bear in order to build the ice hotel looked like a long deep gutter. It travelled downhill, following the terrace towards the sea, and with the new snowfall overnight softening its edges, it now resembled a real half-pipe – perfect for the guests to practise their snowboard and ski tricks.



‘But how?’ said Anna at a loss for words.
‘Sometimes in winter magic can happen,’ said Lemmy.

‘Yeah, dude,’ said Mortimer. He looked thrilled as the two snowboarding rabbits raced past. ‘And you just watch these girls. They are *real* magic.’

The Board Bunnies hopped up a bank of compacted snow and leapt into the half-pipe. They were truly something, dipping down then up the course, flying high into the air, twisting round, landing safely, then whipping back up the other side to do it all again.

Anna’s jaw dropped in awe. It was as though they were defying gravity.

Suddenly a knowing voice piped up.
‘Wow, that was a Backside Rodeo

One-eighty!’ said Philippe, who had appeared at their side.

Anna turned in wonder. ‘Philippe?’

‘Fly just pulled a Nollie, followed by a Cab Double Cork,’ he added with amazement. ‘That’s super hard.’

Anna could really see how much the sport meant to him.

‘Dude knows his stuff!’ said Mortimer.

‘And what are this lot up to?’ cried Lemmy, as the penguins took their turn.
‘They fear nothing!’

The penguins zipped round the half-pipe on their short skis like



bouncy balls thrown down a hill.

‘They make it look easy,’ said Anna.

‘It’s anything but,’ said Mortimer.

‘That was a Chicken Salad Air,’ said Philippe. ‘And that was a Burger Flip.’

‘How do you know all this?’ asked Anna, impressed.

Philippe shrugged, too busy watching the bunnies to answer.

‘We’re going for the big one!’ said Steely, pulling up alongside them as she prepared for another turn.

‘The Triple Low Backside McTwist?’ said Philippe.

‘You know about it?’ said Steely.



‘Nearly impossible,’ said Philippe.

‘We’re gonna beat it,’ said Fly.

‘We’ve *got* to beat it,’ said Steely.

The bunnies took to the half-pipe again, and after some discussion made the drop. They powered up the opposite side, launched into the air and spun over and round multiple times, before landing heavily in a skid. As impressive as it was, they seemed annoyed with themselves.

‘You only managed two and a half twists,’ said Philippe, as the bunnies returned. ‘You’re pulling up too early. You need to control your board more into the jump to get the spin.’

‘You reckon?’ said Fly.

‘It’s pretty clear, yeah,’ said Philippe.

Mortimer laughed. ‘Sounds like you’ve

got yourself a coach. Try it again – let's see what happens.'

The bunnies once more attempted their move, this time taking on board Philippe's suggestions. It still wasn't perfect, but it was an improvement.

'You rushed the jump,' said Philippe, as the bunnies returned.

Steely and Fly nodded to each other.

'Will you help us get it right?' asked Fly. 'We need your eyes if we're gonna make it to the World Finals.'

'Really?' said Philippe.

'You'd make a brilliant coach,' said Anna, realising how much it would help Ms Fragranti if Philippe had a job to do.

'Yeah,' said Mortimer. 'You could really help them take it to the next level.'

'You want me to help you?' asked Philippe in shock.

'Totally,' said Fly and Steely together.

They high-fived and turned to high-five Philippe. With a surprisingly happy expression he raised his wings and joined them in their celebration.



Winter Sets In

There was nothing but snowstorms and freezing temperatures for the next few days, and T. Bear got himself going each morning by clearing the fresh snow from outside the hotel. It was tiring work and the old bear went about his duties with a weary dedication.

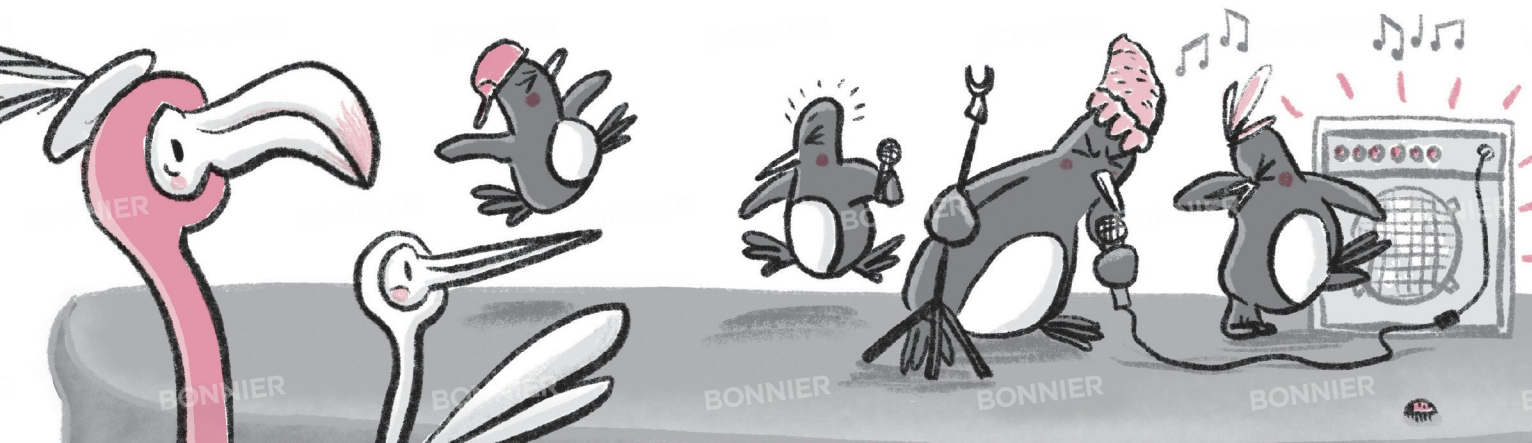
Much of Animal Boulevard was closed because of the weather. Icicles

formed on rooftops and window ledges, and every pavement became dangerous and unusable. Because of this the guests made good use of all the hotel's facilities. Philippe spent all the hours with the Board Bunnies practising on the half-pipe through the day and partying through the evening.

Every day Anna knocked on the store cupboard for news of Windy, but every day she was met with an angry growl so

ventured no further. Mortimer had told her to expect as much, so she didn't worry unduly. He was focusing his attentions on his White-out Games, which helped him stop worrying.

Ms Franganti was starting to feel much more at ease. Anna found her in the piano lounge after dinner, watching a number of guests doing karaoke. The penguins were trying their hand at rapping, laughing among themselves as much as speaking



the lyrics. It was quite awful but excellent entertainment.

‘Have things settled down now?’ asked Anna.

‘Philippe and I are still like chalk and cheese,’ admitted Ms Fragranti, ‘but he’s so engrossed in the action I barely see him. At least he seems happy.’

When the penguins finished their stint at the microphone, Philippe got up to have a go.

‘I don’t believe it,’ said Ms Fragranti to Anna, tapping her leg with a wingtip. ‘He’s taking to the stage! Are you sure, Philippe?’

The flaminglet rushed straight to the microphone and selected a song.

‘Why don’t you join him?’ asked Anna.

‘I’m still tired, darling,’ said Ms Fragranti. ‘I could never hit a note in my condition.’

‘It would give you both something to talk about,’ said Anna.

Ms Fragranti took a moment to consider this. ‘Yes, Miss Anna, you are correct!’ she said. ‘Wait there, Philippe! Prepare for a duet!’

As Ms Fragranti neared the microphone, a set of super-loud power chords blasted out the introduction to a heavy rock song.

‘It’s the Nocturnal Animals!’ shouted Philippe. ‘My favourite!’

He jumped and bounced and headbanged about the stage.

Ms Fragranti looked suddenly

uncertain. She turned fearfully to Anna.
'I've made a very big mistake!' she
shouted over the noise.

Anna smiled, 'The show must go on!'

Ms Fragranti nodded, and with the
composure of a true professional she styled
it out and joined in.

Suddenly the room burst into life, with
all the penguins bouncing about the floor.

Ms Fragranti had never been a
part of anything quite so
loud and furious before,
and Anna could see that
despite her tiredness
and doubts, she was
loving every second.

The next day was

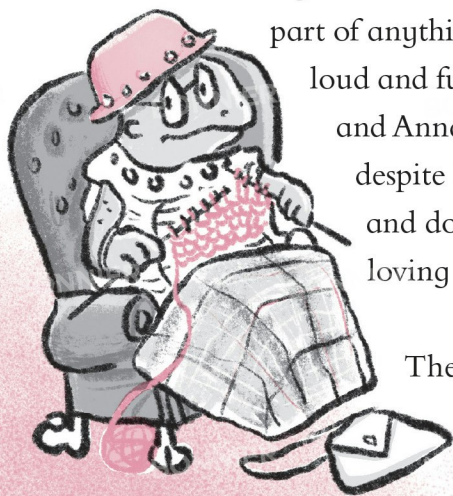
much the same, with the cold conditions
remaining. Confined to the hotel, Mrs
Turpington was growing increasingly
weary and increasingly anxious, and spent
a lot of time knitting while looking out at
the world from the warmth and safety of
the hotel lobby.

'Another frosty one,' said Anna, who
came across the tortoise peering through
the front entrance.

'This snow doesn't seem to be going
anywhere, does it, my dear?' she said,
clutching her handbag tight.

'They think it will last another week,'
said Anna.

The tortoise seemed to retreat a little
into her shell. 'I'm worried that my guests
won't make it tomorrow,' she said sadly.



‘Because of the weather?’ asked Anna.

‘Well, we’re not as young as we were,’ said the tortoise. ‘When you reach my age, you never know if it’s the last hibernation party you’ll ever see.’

‘Now then, let’s not talk like that,’ said Anna.

‘Oh no, love, it’s very nice of you to say that, but it’s fine,’ said Mrs Turpington. ‘I’ve seen far more summers than most creatures ever do.’

‘I promise to do everything I can to help,’ replied Anna, and she meant it. ‘We could even unbox our decorations from storage and dress the hotel! There are all sorts of paper chains and snowflakes up there.’

Mrs Turpington smiled. ‘That will

certainly help pass the time,’ she said.

‘It’s a plan then,’ said Anna.

Mrs Turpington was looking a little teary-eyed. ‘Who needs friends when you live here?’ she said, clutching Anna’s hand.

Anna helped the tortoise over to a comfortable chair and fetched her a smoky lettuce tea – one of the items on Eva’s new drinks menu. She loved caring for her guests, as well as her staff, so it worried her when



T. Bear stumbled through from the front entrance looking as though he'd just run a marathon.

He rested the snow shovel against a wall, yawned and rubbed his tired eyes. He then dipped his paw into a pocket and removed one of Madame Le Pig's bright green bottles of Power-up. He downed it in one.

'You look exhausted!' said Anna.

'Oh no, Miss Anna,' he said, struggling to keep his eyes open. 'I'll be fine.'

'If you're sure,' she said.

T. Bear mumbled something unintelligible and wandered off, sleepily bumping into a few tables on the way.

Anna left Mrs Turpington, promising

to return as soon as possible, and set about finding the decorations. She was determined to make the hotel look as magical as possible.



12

All Hands to the Pump

With renewed energy, Anna, Ms Fragranti and Eva decorated the lobby, making sure no corner was left without sparkles or fairy lights.

‘Too much?’ asked Anna, sticking paper snowflakes to the windows.

‘You can never have too much,’ said Ms Fragranti.

‘It will be a real frosty fiesta!’ said Eva.

‘That’s exactly what it is!’ said Anna.

‘Just perfect, dear,’ said Mrs Turpington happily.

The tortoise had been watching on with an unbreaking smile, occasionally stopping her knitting to point out an area in need of embellishment. Things were going well until Mortimer Blake appeared out of the lift, roaring. He ended a phone call and threw his phone to the ground.

Anna picked up the pieces. ‘Whatever’s the matter?’ she asked.

The polar bear’s fur was bristling.

‘As if nothing else could go wrong . . .’ he growled. ‘Dude, the games are off!’



‘Why?’ asked Anna.

‘No way!’ said Lemmy, leaving the front desk to join them.

‘The arena roof has collapsed because of the weight of the snow on top,’ said Mortimer. ‘It’s too dangerous to carry on.’

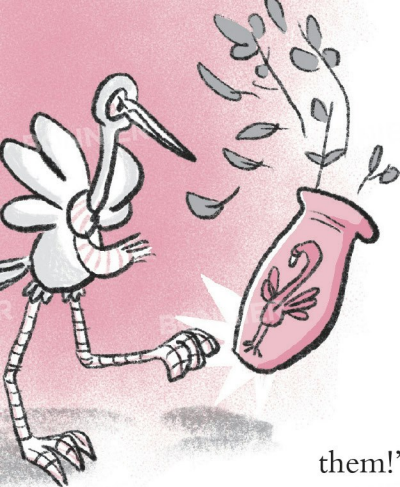
‘Everyone will be devastated,’ said Lemmy.

‘Me included,’ said Mortimer. ‘All this hard work for nothing.’

At this point Philippe and the Board Bunnies wandered into the foyer discussing their latest practice session. They immediately realised something was wrong.

‘What’s up?’ asked Fly.

‘Games are off, dude,’ said Mortimer.



‘What?’ said Steely. ‘They can’t be! We need the results to get through to the World Finals!’

‘You can’t cancel them!’ cried Philippe. He

kicked over a tall vase in anger. It smashed and Ms Fragranti raced over in horror to pick up the pieces.

‘Philippe!’ she snapped.

He started to cry, hanging his head.

Anna hated to see everyone so upset. She was the sort of person who believed anything was possible.

‘Don’t lose hope,’ she said. ‘There must be somewhere else you could go?’

‘For tomorrow?’ said Mortimer. ‘All the TV cameras, the judges, the audience . . . There’s nowhere else that could fit it all in at such short notice.’

There was a very simple answer to all their problems, thought Anna. It would be more work, as always, but when you need something doing, ask a busy person.

‘Why don’t you use our hotel terrace?’ said Anna. ‘We have a party to cater for but I’m sure we can manage.’

‘Dude, it’s a gracious offer,’ said Mortimer, ‘but I can’t see us succeeding.’

‘We already have a working half-pipe,’ said Anna. ‘You’d be surprised what this little hotel can do when stretched. We’ve put on rock concerts, royal visits, even a carnival before.’

Mortimer clapped Anna on the back with happy gusto. The force of the polar bear's friendly slap was enough to make her lose her breath.

'It's got to be worth a try,' he roared. 'I'll make some calls!'

'So the games are going ahead?' asked Philippe.

'We're gonna try, little dude,' said Mortimer.

Philippe leapt into the air with joy and hugged Ms Fragranti, who blushed brightly.

'Sorry about the vase,' he said.

'We can put it right, darling,' said Ms Fragranti, overcome by his show of emotion.

'We've had much worse, Philippe,' said

Anna. She helped Ms Fragranti clear the broken shards. 'But now it's all hands to the pump. If this is going to happen, we've got an all-nighter ahead of us – and plenty of Madame Le Pig's energy drinks will be required!'

Everyone, even the competitors, worked their socks off throughout the day and into the night in preparation for the games. With builders hammering and screwing structures together, the terrace soon became unrecognisable, with a towering viewing stand and judges' platform built alongside the hotel's half-pipe.

'I think we've done it,' Mortimer said, looking on proudly.



‘We have, Mr Blake,’ said Anna.

T. Bear was asleep on his paws, but he, too, was pleased at the result. ‘The terrace has never looked like this before, miss,’ he said. ‘I feel a bit like I’m living in a dream.’

‘Sounds like you need a sleep,’ said Anna.

‘Yes, miss,’ he said. ‘I probably do.’





Tricks and Twists

The day of the games was the first morning of clear blue sky in over a week. Anna and her staff were up especially early to prepare breakfasts for the competitors and also to start getting ready for Mrs Turpington's party.

Anna had never been so rushed off her feet, but she wouldn't have it any other way. As the crowds braving the conditions

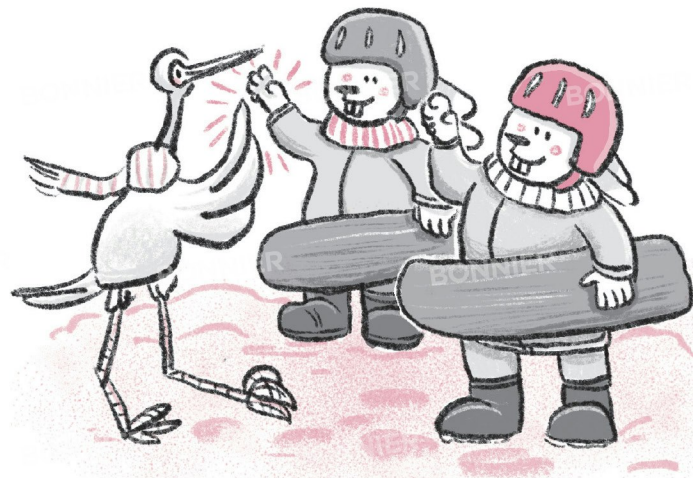
started to arrive, T. Bear took their tickets and Lemmy ushered them through the hotel to their seats out on the viewing stand in the terrace.

The first event was held just before lunchtime, and with Mortimer and other officials watching from the judges' box the competitors made their runs.

The cameras rolled, with 'Ooohs' and 'Aaahs' from the crowd providing the soundtrack to the day. Courageous creatures slid, flipped, hopped and wowed with their snowy manoeuvres.

When the Board Bunnies were ready to take their turn, Philippe joined them. He'd grown into the role of coach with ease. 'You can do it,' he said seriously. 'Focus.'

Steely and Fly high-fived and held their



boards over the edge of the half-pipe. They always made their runs together, and with a final nod they dropped down. Philippe provided commentary as they performed each trick – each one more impressive than the last. 'Nose Roll Three-sixty . . . Stalefish . . . Melon Grab . . . Wildcat One-eighty . . . and now . . .'

The bunnies' last move was the never-before-seen Triple Low Backside McTwist and Philippe clenched his wingtips nervously. The bunnies, however, were showing no nerves. They zoomed into the sky and started to spin in the most unusual manner: upside down, over and over, and then there was one final twist as they lowered their boards ready for landing.

The crowd fell silent as though the world had stopped. And then, suddenly, Steely and Fly hit the ground with a crunch and powered on. A plume of ice trailed behind them as they lifted their paws in celebration. The crowd roared, knowing that they'd seen something new. Philippe let out an enormous whoop of joy.

The Board Bunnies raced round to the top of the half-pipe and waited with Philippe as the judges made their scores.

'We need at least eight point nine!' said Steely.

'It's gotta be a nine at least!' said Fly confidently.

'I know it'll be enough,' said Philippe.

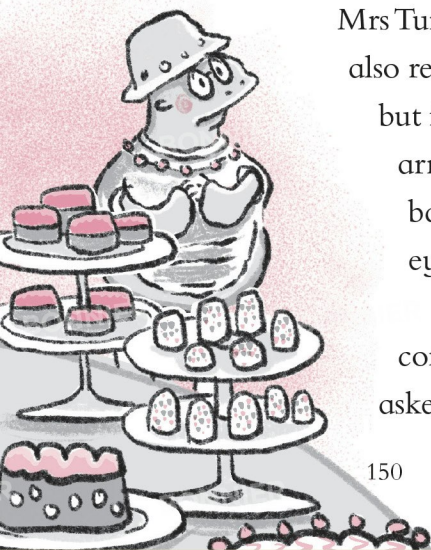
The judges' scores came through on the big screen:

9.0 9.2 9.3 9.0 9.2

'We've done it!' they cried.

All three hugged and jumped and tumbled into a happy heap on the snowy ground.

By teatime the White-out Games were over and Anna was able to focus on Mrs Turpington's party. The hotel was sparkling! The decorations were up, Madame Le Pig's fancy cakes had been prepared and arranged on beautiful stands, and a selection of beautifully wrapped presents were ready and waiting to be opened.



Mrs Turpington was also ready and waiting but fearful of no one arriving. She could barely take her eyes off the clock. 'Will they be coming, dear?' she asked, clutching her

handbag. 'I know I'm very early, but it's not looking very likely, is it?'

Anna was certain that the temperature was falling again. For all the older guests arriving the ground would be treacherous. 'I honestly don't know,' she said.

Mrs Turpington looked a little bit lost. 'No, nor me,' she said with a chuckle.

Anna walked over to the front desk and talked to Lemmy. 'We've got to do something,' she said, desperate to help the tortoise. 'I can't see her guests getting here and it won't be much of a party if it's just Mrs Turpington on her own.'

Lemmy scratched the fur under his little hotel hat. An idea was forming.

'We have all the guests' addresses,' he said, 'as we sent out the invites. All we need

are a few people who are good in snowy conditions and who owe you a favour,' he said.

Anna liked his thinking. 'Do you think they would?' she said, catching on.

'I think it's worth a try, miss,' he said.

With a beaming smile Anna raced out on to the terrace to ask a very big favour.

An hour passed and Mrs Turpington hadn't moved from her seat. She'd almost given up hope when a sudden blur of movement caught her eye through the window. She rose slowly and peered out through the frosted pane.

'Is that Briony?' she said quizzically. 'On a sledge?'

Mrs Turpington was so excited that she



walked through to the lobby and mustered enough energy to step outside into the cold.

‘You made it!’ she said, tears welling in her eyes.

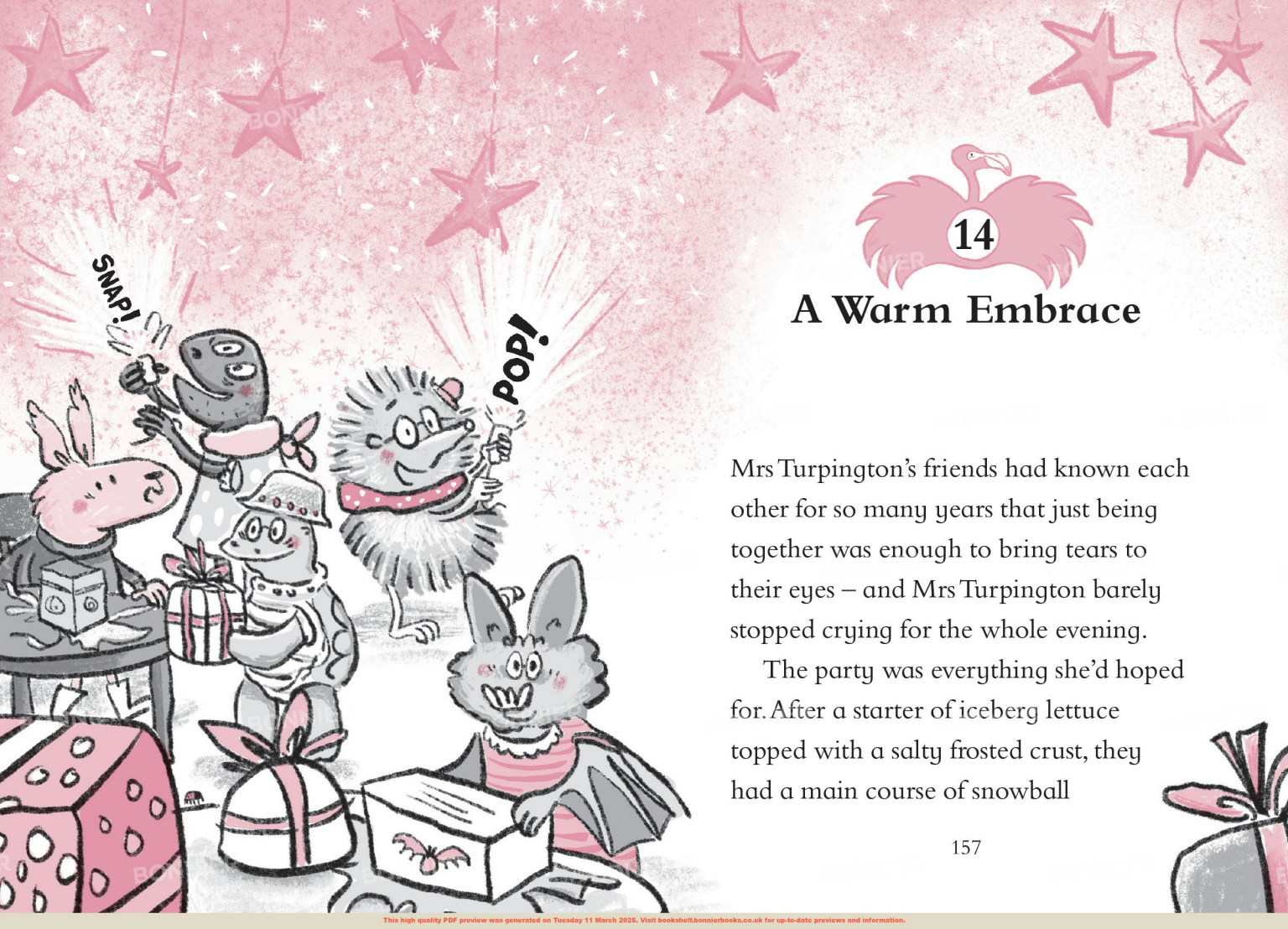
With Anna leading the way, Mortimer and all the competitors from the games had ventured out on to Animal Boulevard on their sledges, snowboards and snowmobiles and safely taxied the party guests to the hotel.

Mrs Turpington could barely speak. Henri the hedgehog skipped forward, followed by Svetlana the squirrel, Winnie the frog and Tinks the bat. All her guests were present and *all* were bearing gifts.

Anna greeted Mrs Turpington with a

huge smile and hurried her back inside to get warm.

‘I think it’s time for our frosty fiesta now, don’t you?’ she said.



A Warm Embrace

Mrs Turpington's friends had known each other for so many years that just being together was enough to bring tears to their eyes – and Mrs Turpington barely stopped crying for the whole evening.

The party was everything she'd hoped for. After a starter of iceberg lettuce topped with a salty frosted crust, they had a main course of snowball

surprise – a bespoke creation of steamed sweet vegetables surrounded by a fragrant rice ball. The creatures ate with ravenous hunger, only pausing to exchange presents and sing songs of warmer days and tell tales of the past.

Many of the games competitors joined in, revelling in their own achievements. The penguins cracked jokes, Mortimer helped Eva hand out tea and cakes, and the Board Bunnies even tried one of Madame Le Pig's winter-themed cakes – although they were keen to stress it wasn't as good as pizza, they were impressed with its mounds of snowy icing.

As the evening wore on, Mrs Turpington took a moment to clink a teaspoon against a teacup. 'I wonder,

could I say a few words?' she asked, standing up.

The room fell quiet and all eyes descended on her.

'Another year gone,' she said, 'another hibernation upon us, and another chance for us all to celebrate how lovely it is to have friends.'

Everyone cheered in agreement.

'We are nothing without each other –'

Mrs Turpington stopped abruptly. Her eyes glistened as she pulled out a mysterious little parcel from her handbag.

'And this is for you, Anna. Thank you for always looking after us as though we were your family.'

Anna was lost for words. She unwrapped the present – it was a glorious



pink hand-knitted
flamingo.

‘I noticed that one
of your sculptures in the
lobby had got damaged,
so I thought I could make
a replacement,’ said the
tortoise.

‘It’s beautiful!’ Anna said,
hugging it like a teddy bear.

There was a sudden hush, as a new
guest arrived at the restaurant doorway.

‘Oh my,’ said Anna.

‘Windy!!’ roared Mortimer.

The polar bear was carrying a tiny
sleeping bear cub and her joy was clear
for all to see. ‘Here is your daughter,’
she said.

Mortimer bounded over to his family
and squeezed them tight.

‘Goodness,’ said Mrs Turpington,
chuckling to herself. ‘What
a perfect end to a
perfect party.’

Once all Mrs
Turpington’s guests
had been taken back
to their homes, Anna
returned to the hotel
and found T. Bear standing
like a furry island in a knee-deep
snowdrift.

He was asleep – or so it looked – in
a most uncomfortable position, upright
and leaning on his shovel. He was snoring



heavily and snow was settling on his head and shoulders.

‘Mr Bear?’ asked Anna. ‘How long have you been out here?’

T. Bear’s eyebrows gently lifted. ‘Oh, Miss Anna,’ he said, rubbing his eyes. ‘I must have dozed off.’

‘Good grief! You’re freezing!’ said Anna. ‘Come inside now!’

Anna sat T. Bear down in the lobby beside the gently crackling fire, and asked Eva to fetch him a warm drink.

‘What were you thinking?!’ she asked, rubbing one of his big paws to warm him up.

T. Bear couldn’t keep his eyes open. ‘Umm, it was berries . . .’ he said dozily. ‘And dollops of ice cream.’ His head

dropped suddenly and a giant snore burst from his mouth.

‘T. Bear!’ said Anna.

‘Here you go,’ said Eva, placing a hot chocolate down on the table beside them. ‘Enjoy!’

‘He’s gone off again,’ said Anna.

‘That’s bears for you,’ Eva said.

‘What?’

Eva laughed. ‘Big bears like him sleep through winter, miss,’ she said.

‘T. Bear hibernates?’ said Anna. She hadn’t even considered her friend might need a winter rest.

‘Yeah,’ said Eva. ‘I mean, even I go slower, you know. But those big guys, they need their forty winks all right.’

Anna suddenly felt terrible. She’d been

asking such a lot of T. Bear over the past week, and he'd been working so hard to keep the hotel running. 'Then we must get him up to bed,' said Anna. 'Straight away!'

She managed to rally T. Bear enough to get him on his feet, but he wasn't really making much sense.

'Cheese sandwiches, with doughnuts and strawberries . . .' he muttered.

Anna propped him up on her shoulder and just about managed to hold his weight.

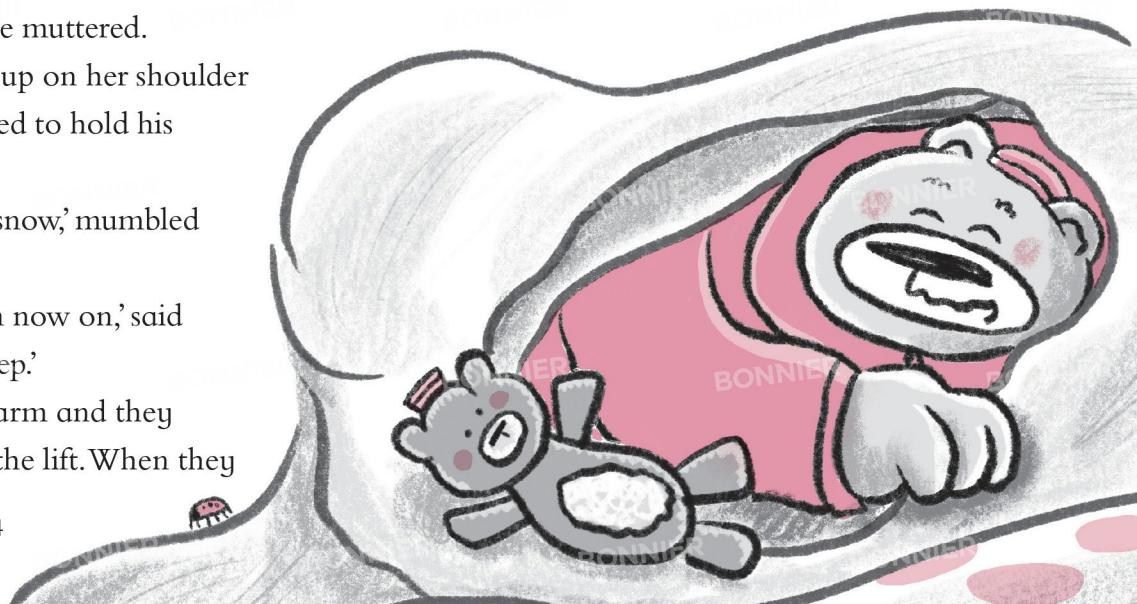
'Must . . . clear . . . snow,' mumbled T. Bear.

'I shall do that from now on,' said Anna. 'You need to sleep.'

Eva took his other arm and they walked him slowly to the lift. When they

reached his room, they found a swirl of quilts, sheets, pillows and duvets lodged in the corner just like Windy's nest. With a little direction T. Bear shuffled towards it and hunkered down.

'Sponge cake and biscuits . . .' he garbled, dragging the bedding over him until only his nose and mouth were visible.



Within seconds he was fully asleep.

‘What’ll we do without him?’ said Anna. The thought of T. Bear not being around was too much for her.

‘Oh, mate, it’s just like when your best friend can’t make your birthday party,’ said Eva, walking away cheerily. ‘It won’t be quite the same, but you’ll still have fun.’

‘I suppose you’re right,’ said Anna.

She drew the curtains and left the room quietly, although she couldn’t see anything waking T. Bear up – his snores could be heard all down the corridor.

Over the next few days all the competitors started to leave and the hotel fell quiet again.

Mortimer, Windy and their cub

promised to come back next year, the Board Bunnies vowed to give Lemmy a snowboarding lesson, and Ms Fragranti and Philippe had grown much closer.

‘Another wonderful time here, darling!’ said Ms Fragranti. ‘Wouldn’t you say so, Philippe?’

‘Can I come again next year?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know if there’ll be any snow next year,’ said Anna happily, ‘but you’re *always* welcome.’

She saw them out through the front entrance, immediately noticing the empty space where T. Bear would normally stand.

‘He’ll be back soon enough,’ said Ms Fragranti. ‘As sure as all this snow will

melt and spring will return.'

Anna wished them well and realised the snow needed clearing again. Tired but happy, she set about building a snowbear to stand in T. Bear's spot. It wouldn't be the same without him, but in just a few months spring would arrive, he would be back, and with it a whole load of new guests.

Anna couldn't wait!





A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Writing a story about an animal hotel is a dream come true for me. I love learning about animals (my favourites are lemurs!) and I love drawing them, but I particularly love customer service. So, as much as I'd like to stay at Hotel Flamingo and eat Madame Le Pig's amazing food, I would actually really like to work there. Yes, you heard right. Tidying the place up, planning and cooking meals, booking shows, making people happy . . . oh, that would be better than anything!

DID YOU FIND
ALL TEN OF ME
IN THE STORY?





Captain Sunshine Chapter 1

