

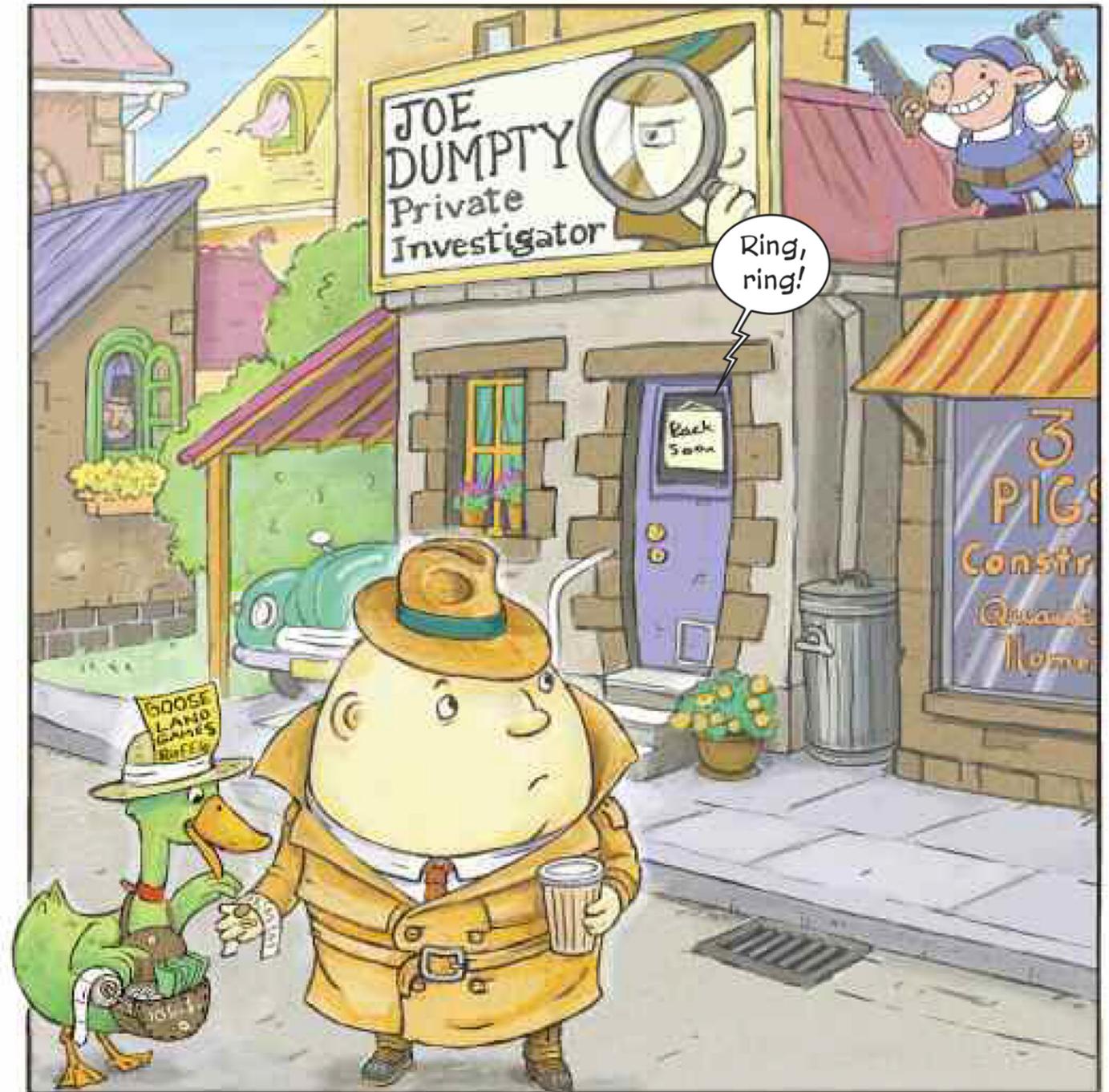
The CROWN AFFAIR

(from the files of a
hard-boiled detective)

by **Joe Dumpty**
as told to
Jeanie Franz Ransom
illustrated by
Stephen Axelsen

 Charlesbridge

Jack and Jill went up the hill
to fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and lost his crown . . .

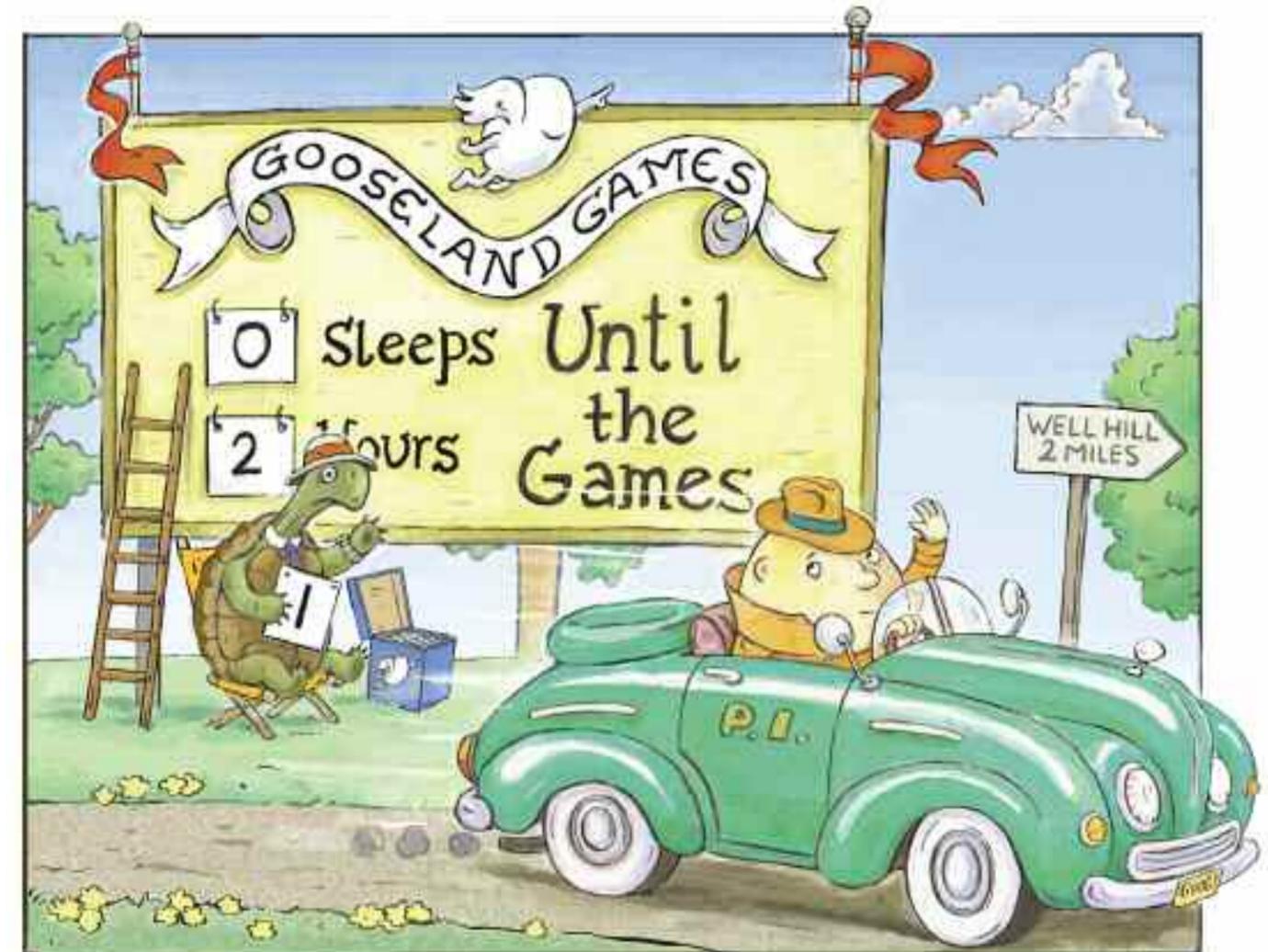


And that's where I come in.
Who am I? I'm Joe Dumpty, Private Investigator.

I'm the go-to guy for detective work in Mother Gooseland. I cracked the Humpty-Dumpty case when I figured out that my brother Humpty didn't just *accidentally* fall from that wall. Chief Goose still can't wrap her beak around the fact that I've solved more crimes than her gaggle of police geese. So it must have ruffled her feathers when Jill gave me a jingle.



"Jack's crown is missing," Jill said. "Chief Goose thinks he just *lost* it. But I'm sure someone took it! If that crown isn't found by two o'clock today, the Gooseland Games will be canceled!" Jill sighed. "I told Jack not to wear that crown except on special occasions. Will you take the case, Joe?"



I'm one tough egg, but I've got a soft shell for damsels in distress. Not to mention, I'm the biggest Gooseland-Games fan this side of Old Mother Hubbard's house.

"Consider it taken," I said.

When I rolled up to The Hill, All the King's Horses and All the King's Men were loading Jack onto a stretcher.

"Joe, I'm so glad you're here," Jill said.

"How's Jack?" I asked. "Can I talk to him?"

"Suit yourself," Chief Goose replied. "I'll check on my team. They're bound to turn up that crown soon."



I went over to talk to Jack. "Hey," I said. "It's Joe Dumpty."

Jack's eyes flew open. He looked right at me. "It's Jack," he said.

"No," I said. "It's Joe. Joe Dumpty, Private Investigator."

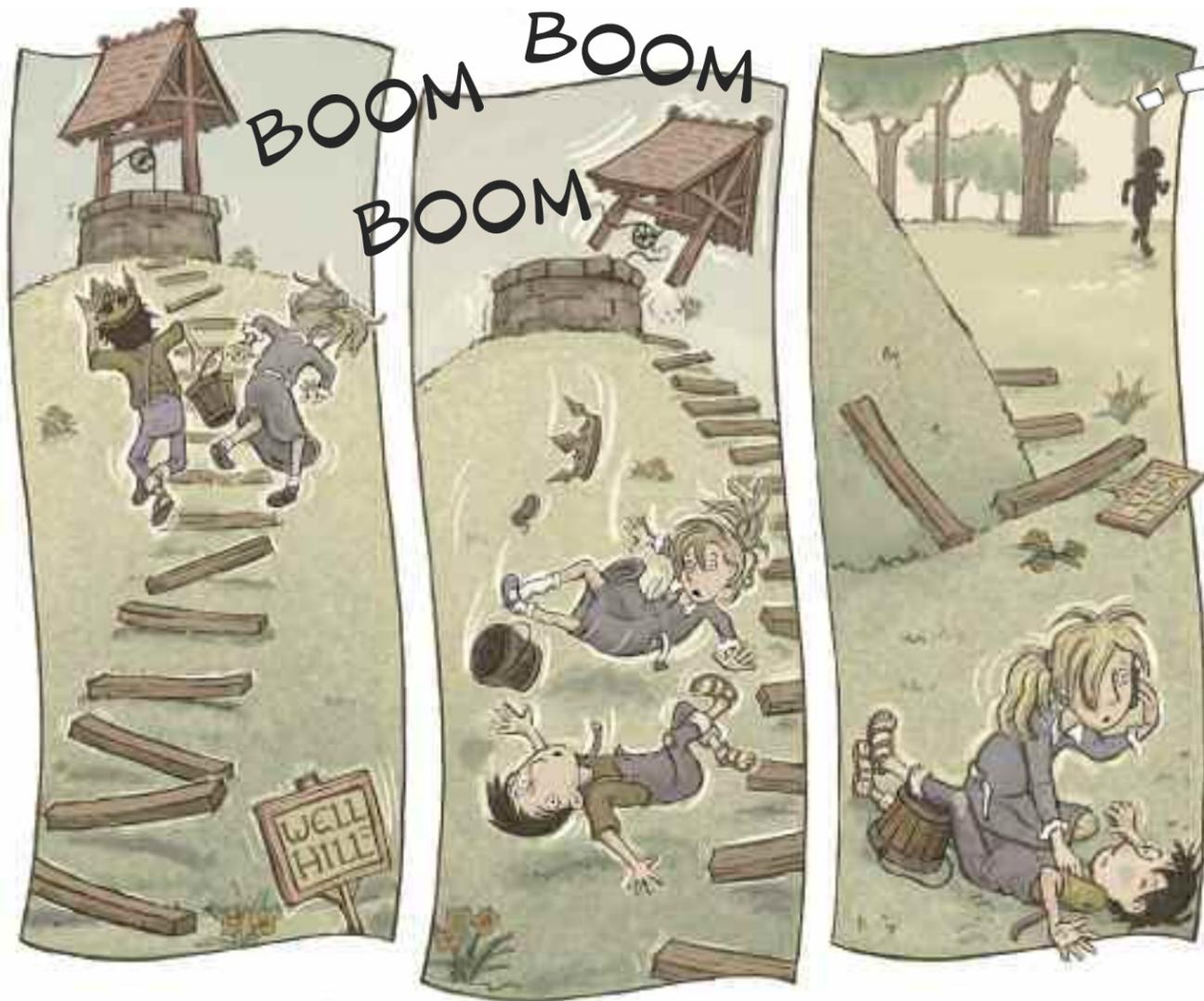
"It's Jack! Jack! Jack, I tell you!" Jack shouted. Was this a clue?

Jill shook her head. "That fall must've scrambled his brains!"



How I hate that word *scrambled*. But I'm hard-boiled enough not to show any reaction. I pulled out my notebook. "Let's take it from the top, Jill."

"Jack and I went up The Hill," Jill said. "But all of a sudden, there was this big *BOOM, BOOM, BOOM* overhead. The ground shook and Jack and I both fell down."



"When did you notice the crown was missing?" I asked.

"Not right away," Jill replied. "First, I checked on Jack. Then I called 9-1-1. After that, it's a blur. I was a little dizzy myself. I came tumbling down after, you know?"

Fall or no fall, Jill's always been a little dizzy. "Jill," I said, "I need you to focus. Did you see anyone either before or after your fall?"

"I thought I saw someone run by after we fell," Jill answered. "But it's hard to say who. Maybe it was someone getting ready for the race today."



Maybe. But why would they steal the crown when they had a chance to win it fair and square this afternoon?

Looks like this case won't be over easy.