



Mr. and Mrs. Bunny—Detectives Extraordinaire!

Polly Horvath , Sophie Blackall (Illustrator)

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In this hilarious chapter book mystery, meet a girl whose parents have been kidnapped by disreputable foxes, and a pair of detectives that also happen to be bunnies! When Madeline gets home from school one afternoon to discover that her parents have gone missing, she sets off to find them. So begins a once-in-a-lifetime adventure involving a cast of unforgettable characters. There's Mr. and Mrs. Bunny, who drive a smart car, wear fedoras, and hate marmots; the Marmot, who loves garlic bread and is a brilliant translator; and many others. Translated from the Rabbit by Newbery Honor-winning author Polly Horvath, and beautifully illustrated by Caldecott Medal winner Sophie Blackall, here is a book that kids will both laugh over and love.

Mr. and Mrs. Bunny—Detectives Extraordinaire! Details

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From Reader Review Mr. and Mrs. Bunny—Detectives Extraordinaire! for online ebook

Gail Shepherd says

The bulk of my reading is middle grade, YA, and adult, but getting the galleys for Polly Horvath's Mr. and Mrs Bunny--Detectives Extraordinaire! made my week, and I'm not even exaggerating. I haven't howled through a book this way since David Sedaris's Naked. And to think it was a chapter book that left me gasping! Mr. and Mrs. Bunny is targeting two completely different demographics, I suspect: seven- to ten-year-olds, and the adults reading to them. The book is due out February 2012, but you can pre-order it now from Amazon. Do it now so you don't forget.

The under-ten crowd might miss the satire (New Age parents and chain restaurants come in for a lot of goosing; and couples will recognize themselves in the happily married, if long-suffering, Bunnies). But the non-stop silliness is equal opportunity fun. Madeline's parents have been kidnapped by foxes running a rabbit by-products factory; she hires Mr. and Mrs. Bunny to track them down. Half the joke is that Mr. and Mrs. Bunny--who wear fedoras and drive a Smart car--are kindly but incompetent. When a very stupid marmot (named The Marmot) is added to the mix the tangles increase exponentially.

The Marmot Question

Just how stupid is that marmot? Well, for starters, he uses a card printed with a precious secret code to wipe his bottom, then flushes it down the toilet. Horvath knows how to take a good joke and keep drawing it out. The Marmot asks Madeline to call him "The," his first name, but Madeline finds this impossibly confusing. "Listen," she says, "can I call you something else? Don't you have a nickname?"

"My Mother sometimes called me her Special Precious," said The Marmot.

"I don't think I could do that," said Madeline, shuddering.

"Look, just let her call you Mr. Marmot," said Mr. Bunny.

"How about Poindexter?" said the Marmot.

"Why Poindexter?" asked Madeline.

"Please do not ask him questions. Please. We'll be here all night. When it comes to marmots, give orders," said Mr. Bunny.

The problem of what to call The Marmot goes on for pages, getting progressively crazier. All the while Madeline's annoying parents, who have brains the size of mung beans, are having an insane conversation of their own with a fox called Grand Poobah. They're tied up back to back in the by-products factory, and Madeline's dad believes--wrongly--that he's getting the hang of speaking fox. Zakszokeyid! Little do they know the foxes are planning to have finger food for dinner that night. Can you guess what the main ingredient is?

The illustrations by Sophie Blackall are charming. Among her twelve previous kids books, Horvath has picked up a National Book Award and a Newberry Honor; I can see why. I plan to go back and read them all.

Jim Erikson says

Thanks for the tip, Lu! We enjoyed listening to this in the car, and filling in at home with the book in

between.

The tongue-in-cheek tone reminded me of the Alexander McCall Smith mysteries, like the Prof. Dr. von Igelfeld books. So many laughing moments in this book--Pearl couldn't help herself and acted out several times during the week the moment when for dramatic effect in the courtroom, Mr. Bunny paused so long that "several councilbunnies went out for coffee. One had time to order a short decaf double shot no whip mocha iced frappuccino to go. Mr. Bunny paused so long that when the coffee came he had time to change his mind to a venti semi-skim soy no sugar caramel macchiato with no whip but double caramel and a reduced fat skinny poppy seed and lemon muffin, hot, no butter."

The book does not waste the fact that these are bunnies. There are foxes out to eat them, which makes for a great backbone of themes that depend on the differences between animals and humans. Mostly, it I loved the irony of the bunnies being more 'civilized' than Madeline's hippy parents, Flo and Mildred, who btw got the best lines in the book--and Polly Horvath's reading of their voices had me in stitches, while driving. I hope she comes to CCIRA next year.

Sharon Tyler says

Mr. and Mrs. Bunny-Detectives Extraordinaire! by Polly Horvath is a children's chapter book with much more to it than I expected from the cover. There are two story lines in the beginning, that intersect and continue in unexpected ways. Madeline is a responsible young girl being raised by two free spirited parents, in an equally free spirited town. One night Madeline comes home from work to discover her parents have been kidnapped. Mr. and Mrs. Bunny are moving to a new home, that has been vacated under mysterious circumstances. To alleviate boredom Mrs. Bunny has decided they should become detectives, which turns out to be a good choice when they meet Madeline, who has sought help from her uncle. As the story continues, it gets funnier and more interesting with quirky characters and beautiful illustrations from Sophie Blackall.

Mr. and Mrs. Bunny-Detectives Extraordinaire is a hilarious mystery full of expected characters like detective bunnies, disreputable foxes, and a garlic loving marmot. I liked the fact that Madeline was smart and self reliant, and thought it was even better that the bunny couple wanted to take care of her. She is a practical girl that seems to be raising her parents. The entire island she lives on seems to look at her as the strange one, because she is responsible. The bunny community is equally odd. The kidnapping and the search for Madeline's parents draws in a slew of eccentric characters, like the brilliant code breaking but odd uncle, scatterbrained marmot, hat loving bunnies, and a nuisance of a neighbor. The bunny couple is well-meaning and many parents might see some aspects of their own relationships in the bunny interactions. The entire effect is fun and highly entertaining.

I recommend Mr. and Mrs. Bunny-Detectives Extraordinaire! For seven to twelve year-old's, and the adults that might read to or with them. Teachers, parents, and anyone that enjoys children's literature will also enjoy this book. There is something fun and entertaining for both distinct levels of readers, and I am looking forward to further exploring the work of Polly Horvath and Sophie Blackall.

Rachel says

This is a weird, weird book. The audience definitely skews a bit older than the title and cover art would lead you to believe. A book about bunny detectives, and such sweet-but-hip/strange illustrations...just right for my 4- and almost-7-year-olds. Except that a character says "Crap" twice in the first chapter, and "Bollocks" in the last chapter, and the humor is very dry and strange and adult. And the plot is utterly bizarre. It irritated me, but at the same time, it was so absurdist I couldn't help but like it. The wonderful reviewer Elizabeth Bird commented that Polly Horvath just does not care one bit what anyone thinks and is really writing just to please herself. That is so obviously true with this book, and you can't help but enjoy it despite yourself. And my kids loved it, of course. They made me read it for an hour at a stretch, till my voice gave out.

Jessica says

I had really high expectations for Mr. and Mrs. Bunny—Detectives Extraordinaire!, because it sounded so cute and charming, and plus, it was about bunnies, which are my favorite animals ever! When I started reading it, I really liked it, especially the human character, Madeline. However, the silly and cutesy parts of the story really started to wear on me. I'd say it ventures on parody, with bunny versions of Jane Austen and The Old Spaghetti Factory. After a while you start to wonder how many names you can stick Bunny into.

The story is about a girl named Madeline who lives on a small island in British Columbia with her hippie parents. Although most of the children on the island are home-schooled, she takes a two hour trip to Vancouver to attend school, where she hasn't made any friends, due to her scavenged clothes and general other-ness. When she learns that Prince Charles will be visiting her elementary school graduation, she desperately wants to go, but learns that she needs white shoes for a special performance, something she knows her parents will never pay for. But one week before graduation, her parents get kidnapped by foxes looking for information on where to find her uncle, Canada's top decoder. Madeline inadvertently enlists Mr. and Mrs. Bunny, amateur detectives, to help her find her parents, with varying results.

The slightly madcap tone and humor, mixed with the charming illustrations and old-fashioned (albeit with Glade PlugIns references) sounding narrative reminds me a bit of The Penderwicks: A Summer Tale of Four Sisters, Two Rabbits, and a Very Interesting Boy. Maybe I wasn't in the right mindset when I read it. In any case, I feel that there are better animal stories or funny tales to recommend to kids.

Grades 3-5

Lindsay says

At the library where I work, we have a section for new books (print books and audiobooks), and I am always perusing it on my out. To be honest, I pulled this book because of the cover! lol I'm also fond of mysteries.

One thing I can't stand about modern TV sitcoms is that parents, usually the dad, are portrayed as idiots. In this story, the parents are idiots, but in a way that should make some kids appreciate their own parents a bit more. In this story, Madeline is a girl who lives on a tiny Canadian island with her "hippie" parents-- Madeline is the one who forces herself to get up at the crack of dawn to travel to a nice school to get a good education; she cooks; she cleans, etc. Her own parents don't even want to go to her grade school graduation! One day, Madeline's awful parents are kidnapped by some foxes to get some information, which, of course, they don't know... With the help of Mr. and Mrs. Bunny, Madeline eventually finds her parents.

This is a hilarious chapter book. The Bunnies have the best lines (for example, see the part when they first meet Madeline and what they say about most children's books and dead parents), and I love the way the husband-wife bunnies pick on each other. I'm hoping there's another Mr. and Mrs. Bunny book in the works!

Lu Benke says

Think farce. Think Marshall's *The Stupids*. Think a book that blows you out of the water for how silly and fun and full of the fun of language a book can be. I KNOW a lot of my colleagues will say this book is just too much, but I loved it! I listened to this as an audiobook but I think I would have enjoyed the book even more. The girl Madeline has parents who are the stereotype of Hippy/Dead Head parents. I laughed the entire time that they were introduced. I kept wondering what age kids would enjoy how many idioms and figures of speech peppered this book. And, I kept wondering if any third or fourth grade teacher would have the courage to use this as a classroom readaloud. I think the kids would love it and the teacher could get a lot of mileage out of talking about all the idioms. I mean, there is at least one every other sentence! Horvath always was good at using more advanced vocabulary in her books, but she has outdone herself here! And, if you, like I, were hesitant to read a chapter book with "Mr. and Mrs. Bunny" in the title, rest assured, this is not in the "bunny" genre!

Luann says

This was fun and silly, although I went back and forth with how much I liked it while I was reading it. I sometimes got tired of the silliness and wanted it to end sooner, but I always wanted to finish and find out what happened. I mostly liked Mr. and Mrs. Bunny and Madeline, but not too many of the other characters. There were several quotes that I really liked, some of which made me laugh out loud.

I find now that I've finished that I would be willing to read another Mr. and Mrs. Bunny book sometime, which surprises me. So this is one of those rare books that I look back on with more enjoyment than I had while I was reading. If you are looking for a fun and quite silly book where rabbits and foxes and marmots can talk and be detectives and write books and enjoy garlic bread, this might be the book for you.

(This is a nominee for Arizona's 2015 Grand Canyon Reader Award.)

Susan Dunn says

I picked this up b/c it's been on a lot of potential Newbery lists. It's cute, but I didn't love it. Typical quirky Horvath (which is good) with lots of unusual characters, but I wish I'd read this and not listened to it. The author narrates her own book, and I didn't like her narration. Plus the book has some cute illustrations that I'm sorry I missed. In a nutshell, Madeline comes home from school one day to find that her hippie parents have been kidnapped by foxes. She sets out to try to find them, and finds herself helped by a couple of talking rabbits. A fun, quick read, but I certainly don't think it has Newbery potential.

Shanshad Whelan says

Just . . . not my thing. There's something so condescending about the style of this that I didn't really like anyone in the entire story. I didn't find anyone particularly cute or funny. Just irritating. It is, I suppose, a well told little story for what it is, if you like anthropomorphic animals who act exactly like people, but live in a world with humans as well (who don't have a clue that animals can talk).

Jessica says

This was HILARIOUS. Mr. and Mrs. Bunny, empty nesters now that their twelve children have moved out and are having bunnies of their own, decide to turn detective. Their first case? The case of the missing parents! Madeline, a human girl who can understand bunny language, is beside herself when her parents are kidnapped. Can the bunnies help? SHOULD the bunnies help? After all, Madeline's parents are useless hippies and it might be better for the bunnies to keep Madeline as a pet.

As charming as it is hilarious, sweet without being twee, this book was just a delight from start to finish! My children and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Adriel says

The first chapter showed such humorous potential. I loved the hippie parents and the kooky island community. This book lost me at the big butt joke in which Mr. Bunny cannot get over referring to Madeline's humongous bottom. I get that it is supposed to be funny for the 11 year olds reading it, but it feels uncomfortable every time because I am so aware of how easily girls can be negatively affected by this kind of joking. My librarian recommended it and says she has kid's for whom this is their favorite book, but I am giving it only two stars and will skim through to the end guilt free.

Rachel says

I picked this one up for a couple of reasons. I enjoyed *Everything on a Waffle* and *My One Hundred Adventures* by the same author. Also, the cover drew me in with its ridiculous title, its equally ridiculous illustration of two oh-so-serious detective rabbits, and its claim that the book was translated from the rabbit by Polly Horvath.

And even though I laughed through the whole thing, I don't think kids are going to find it nearly as funny as I did. The kids who pick up a bunny chapter book are not the same age as the kids who are amused by sarcastic, quirky, read-with-a-dictionary-next-to-you wit. Oh, and most kids would absolutely have to read this with a dictionary (or an iPhone, presumably). And speaking of quirk, the eccentricity factor was just a little too high for me; it made some of the humor seem contrived rather than native to the plot. (Please refer to the character of Uncle Runyon for a case study in pointless quirk.) The selfish, brainless hippie parents made me laugh; kids won't get it. The husband-wife dynamics between Mr. and Mrs. Bunny made me laugh; kids won't get it. The foreign-language antics of the head of the foxes made me laugh; kids...won't get it.

I'm a proponent of refusing to underestimate kids' ability to "get" stuff. But if a kid has no experience of a particular social dynamic or bit of history (and if the book makes references without explaining), he has no context to understand the humor.

You know who kids will like in this book? Mrs. Treaclebunny, the mooching neighbor. If you've read it, you'll know.

Don't get me wrong – this is a very enjoyable read...for a grown-up. But grown-ups probably won't be reading it.

Elizabeth? says

A clever book aimed at middle grades. Mr. and Mrs. Bunny bumble their way through solving a crime for young Madeline. Madeline's parents were taken by foxes and she needs to locate them before it is too late.

The detectives are not always practical in their efforts, but they are sincere. This is silly and surreal and I enjoyed the journey. A fun and smart read.

Rachael says

Ursula K. Le Guin recently wrote an excellent post about literary awards. The whole thing is thoughtful and thought-provoking, but this passage in particular caught my eye:

"I wish we gave literary prizes freely, the way they used to give prizes at the Pet Show at Codornices Park in Berkeley when I was a kid. Every kid in the neighborhood brought their pet, and every pet got a prize, an ad hoc, unique prize: for Soulfulness — for Loud Meowing — for Unusual Spot Placement — for Being the Only Skink.... There was no Best of Breed (in those days there were many mongrels and few breeds), and certainly no Best of Show."

I very much doubt that Mr. and Mrs. Bunny is going to win the Newbery Medal (though I could be wrong - I used to think there was an upper limit for Newbery weirdness, but then a little book about funeral homes, Hell's Angels, and homicidal octogenarians made the cut). If there were a literary equivalent of Being the Only Skink, though, Polly Horvath would have it in the bag.

And that gets at the heart of my ambivalence about literary awards. I disagree with Le Guin when she says that in "declaring a book as 'the best,' a literary award serves that book. It does not serve literature." When Frederic Melcher and the Children's Librarians' Section created the Newbery award, their explicit intent was "to encourage original creative work in the field of books for children." To that end, I think it has met its goal. It has encouraged excellence in writing (and publishing) for children by rewarding excellence in writing for children (with prestige and increased sales).

In that sense, maybe literary awards are most effective within ghettoized genres. If no one believes there's such a thing as aesthetic greatness within children's literature (or science fiction, or romance), the establishment of an award can create a change in perception on the part of both publishers and readers.

On the other hand, this is the age of shrinking shelf space and vanishing bookstores. Awards encourage publishers to give riskier titles a chance in the first place, but if they don't garner the Big One, how long do the books stay in print? There will always be a place on the library's shelves for Polly Horvath, but she'll be in and out of Barnes & Noble in the space of a month, if they ever stock her at all. I guess we'd better hold on to our libraries and our children's librarians: loyal defenders of Only Skinks and other oddities.

But I digress. A lot.

Mr. and Mrs. Bunny is really freaking weird, even for Polly Horvath. The fact that she is listed, on the cover, as having translated the book "from the Rabbit" should tip you off. The plot, such as it is, concerns a sensible little girl whose hippie parents have been kidnapped by some evil foxes (who also own Fox Entertainment, naturally). She enlists the help of Mr. and Mrs. Bunny, who have very recently taken up detective work, mostly as an excuse to wear fedoras.

I described Polly Horvath to Sam as "Daniel Pinkwater meets Kate DiCamillo," but this one obviously has a pinch of Beatrix Potter, and possibly Kenneth Grahame, thrown in. It's hilarious, surreal, and good-natured (with a touch of bite). I will also note that it's so, so nice to see a woman writing unabashedly in the darkly humorous vein. We need more of that.

Sophie Blackall's illustrations complement the text perfectly. They make me want to buy an illustration from her etsy shop. I do worry, though, that the cute bunnies on the cover will put off the weird little boys who will otherwise love this book. Skink defenders, do your work!
