In this uproarious update of a favorite story, an unexplained noise leads to pandemonium among the animals. The fox, the elephant, even the big brown bear prove no match for the Terrible Plop. Only the littlest bunny learns not to panic when the sky—or something else up there—is falling.

Bright, energetic illustrations and a lively rhyming text combine to make this a perfect read-aloud story for little ones needing assurance that plops in the day or bumps in the night aren’t as scary as they might seem.

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My Personal Review:
Before I begin, a word to the adults out there. Ahem. GET YOUR MIND OUT OF THE GUTTER!!! THAT IS NOT WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT! I wish I could say that the creators of this book were all wide-eyed innocents when they named it The Terrible Plop, but let's be realistic here. Honestly? More adults AND kids are going to pick this book up when they read the cover, if only to figure out whether or not it's as dirty as the title implies. What they will find instead is a funny bit of writing packed in a story that may well be the best readaloud picture book I've encountered all year.

Pack up your rabbits and hide your chocolate cake, ladies and gentlemen. This is one Aussie winner that's going to charm everyone it meets. Plop or no.

"Six little rabbits / Down by the lake / Munching on carrots / And chocolate cake." Unfortunately this peaceful cake-laden scene is interrupted by a horrid sound. From NOWHERE (which is to say, an apple falling into a lake) comes a "terrible PLOP". Like lightning the rabbits take off, terrified of the sound. Every other animal in the forest soon joins them, until they interrupt a sunbathing bear. When informed that this so-called PLOP is stronger and fiercer than he is, the bear is incensed. He picks up the straggler (a little rabbit that cannot run very fast) and insists on being taken
to the PLOP. The rabbit is reluctant, but when faced with the choice of going back versus getting eaten right then and there, it wisely opts for the former choice. Once they return, it notices an apple swinging on a branch that falls into the nearby lake creating a second PLOP. Mystery solved! Of course the bear didn't notice this, and so he high-tails it out of there, scared out of his ever-loving beary wits. So it is that the littlest rabbit returns to munching on chocolate cake, saying aloud to himself with glee, "All this running / Should really stop . . . / Who's afraid / Of a silly old PLOP?"

Some books read aloud to large groups of kids well, but only after a fair amount of practice on the reader's part. Other books feel as if they were made to be read out loud from the moment your lips form the first word. This book is one of those rare titles that does precisely that. The cadences bounce along absolutely perfectly. The length of the story itself is never too short or too long. There are plenty of chances to do silly voices, and a wonderful bouncy rhythm that will aid even the most rhythmically challenged amongst us. A boon to librarians, and the perfect companion for any parent or grandparent who needs a story that will amuse both children and adults alike. You cannot read this book aloud and not fall in love with it, at least a little.

Dubosarsky made a couple narrative choices along the way that help this book out enormously. First off, right from the start the kids reading this book know that an apple caused the original "plop". So the panic-inspired animals are all the sillier for their misguided flight. Then there is the fact that Dubosarsky has chosen to eschew the old Henny Penny route of gossip sharing. One minute the rabbits are hopping as fast as their legs can carry then, and the next moment (which is to say, two pages later) every single animal from the fox to the bat is running too. I think there is a time and a place for stories that systematically repeat the old why-I-am-running-away speech, and Dubosarsky has made the right choice in not repeating it here. Finally, there's the author's humorous timing. At one point the bear gives the littlest rabbit a choice; Take him to the plop or get eaten. Thinks the rabbit, "I'm afraid of the PLOP. / I'm afraid of the bear. / But the bear is here. / And the PLOP is there!" Put like that, the choice is pretty straightforward, and back they go.

By all accounts The Terrible Plop is Andrew Joyner's first illustrated picture book. I find this pretty hard to swallow. Really? He never made one before? Riiiiight. Uh-huh. Pull the other one. Look, dudes, I've seen first time illustrators, okay? And first time illustrators do not hit it quite as far out of the park as Mr. Joyner has here. I mean, consider the evidence. First off, there's his artistic medium. Joyner has created a kind of watercolor + ink + clip art + collage style that's difficult to pin down. The slices of cake in the first two-page spread are photographs, the knife a kind of printmaking collage, and the rest of the scene drawn. The bear, for this part, is a funny mix of paint and ink, but filled with real brown shag that is either a cleverly
cut photograph, or actual brown fur, filling the image. Who puts such elements together so seamlessly right from the start?

So there's that. Joyner also happens to be very comfortable in knowing how to lay out his pages. I've mentioned Dubosarsky's penchant for a good joke. Well some of those jokes only work because Joyner is in on them. For example, when the littlest rabbit cracks the mystery of the terrible plop, he turns around to tell the bear. The bear, however, has exited stage left. When the rabbit calls out to find out why, you turn the page and find yourself facing a magnificent two-page spread of the bear's face. Clutching his big meaty paws to his head in a picture of ridiculous fear he yells, "I cannot stop! / Quick! It's coming, / The terrible PLOP!" Kids'll get a kick out of that one if you read it right.

Finally, there is Joyner's attention to detail. I love the way in which our hero rabbit is distinguished from his fellows. The bigger rabbits are all gray without any distinctive characteristics between them. Only the littlest one is a pure white, with pink dashes to the insides of his ears, his nose, and the furry little ball that is his tail. Now let's talk endpapers. Those slips of paper at the beginning and end of every picture book that can go a variety of different ways. They can be illustrated or left entirely blank. Generally, they are blank. In this case, however, they are especially amusing. At the beginning of the book the endpapers are light green, drawn over with dark green graphite. The only shot of color is of the littlest rabbit, smiling wanly at the reader. The scene, by the way, is positively idyllic. All the animals are happily flouncing about. The bear in his beach chair. The rabbits in varying states of cake and carrot eating. Now flip to the back endpapers. Same image, only now almost all the animals are missing. There are two exceptions to this. The littlest rabbit is staring with a bemused expression on his face at the point in the water where ripples continue to emanate. You might think the rabbit was the only creature in this scene, but lift the bookflap. Running hell-for-leather, just the tips of his heels left visible, is the bear. Libraries that glue down their bookflaps will probably cover up this image entirely. FYI.

Creative art, a story that bobs and sways with its own internal rhythm, and that hard-to-define spark that makes a title a readaloud whiz. What more could you possibly want out of a picture book? Those adults that can get past the title will find a marvelous tale inside. Those that can’t will miss out big time. A surefire storytime hit.

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