

LAURA JAMES

Illustrated by
EMILY FOX

FABIO

THE WORLD'S GREATEST
FLAMINGO DETECTIVE



BLOOMSBURY



FABIO

— THE WORLD'S GREATEST —
FLAMINGO DETECTIVE

MYSTERY ON THE OSTRICH EXPRESS

LAURA JAMES

Illustrated by **EMILY FOX**

BLOOMSBURY
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY



In a small town on the banks of Lake Laloozee lives the world's greatest flamingo detective. His name is **Fabio**. He's not tall or strong, but slight and pink. And he's very, very clever.

At his side for every case is his friend and associate, **Gilbert**, a giraffe terrible at the art of disguise but good at asking questions – sometimes even the right ones.





Chapter 1

The bell rang as Fabio and Gilbert stepped into Alfonso's, the small and exclusive jeweller's shop. Alfonso's was as much part of the history of Laloozee as the Hotel Royale or Plume Street, where Fabio's detective agency was based.

'I'll be with you in one moment, gentlemen,'
said Alfonso, who was an ageing tortoise

with an unhurried way of speaking.

Fabio tipped his hat and he and Gilbert browsed the expensive jewellery as Alfonso dealt with his customer, a stylish desert fox.

‘Good luck, my dear,’
he said, carefully handing her a package. **‘If your mother could see you now ...’**

The fox smiled. ‘Thank you, Mr Alfonso. It’s a pleasure doing business with you.’

Fabio tipped his hat again as the fox sashayed out of the shop.

Alfonso turned his attention to Fabio and Gilbert. **'How may I be of service, gentlemen?'** he asked.



'It's my pocket watch, Alfonso,' said Gilbert, lolloping towards him. 'It seems to be on the blink.' He gave the watch a shake and then rested it on the counter.

Alfonso delicately picked it up and examined it through his eyeglass.

'I don't see these much any more,' he said. **'It's nothing too serious. I'll fix it now, if you don't mind waiting a minute.'**

'Not at all,' said Gilbert, trying his best not to be impatient. He felt sure,



at Alfonso's pace, it was going to take more than a minute.



As Alfonso steadily made his way to his workshop, Fabio and Gilbert continued to look around. Gilbert tried a few things on.

‘What do you think he meant when he said he doesn’t see these much any more?’ asked Gilbert. ‘That’s top of the range, that watch. Or at least it was.’

‘And now its time is up,’ murmured Fabio, who wasn’t properly listening. Something through the shop window had caught his eye. Maybe it was a trick of the light, or maybe ...

‘What have you spotted now?’ asked Gilbert. ‘Don’t you ever relax?’

‘I may have spotted something, as you say,’ replied Fabio. ‘Or it may be nothing. A good brain, my dear friend, is always working, even when it knows it is going on holiday.’

Gilbert couldn’t think of anything clever to say to that, but was saved



by Alfonso returning from his workshop.

'Your watch is ready, sir,' he said.

'I say,' said Gilbert, removing a pair of pearl earrings, 'you were very trusting leaving us in the shop alone. What if we'd tried to make off with all this valuable jewellery?'

'Well,' said Alfonso, **'you have an honest face.'**

Gilbert beamed and picked up his pocket watch.

'Cripes, is that the time? Fabio,

we'd better hurry or we'll miss our train.
How much do I owe you?

'No charge,' replied Alfonso.
**'I just need some advice
from the world's greatest
flamingo detective.'**

'He's going to the Coral Coast with
me and he's going to be late!' exclaimed
Gilbert.

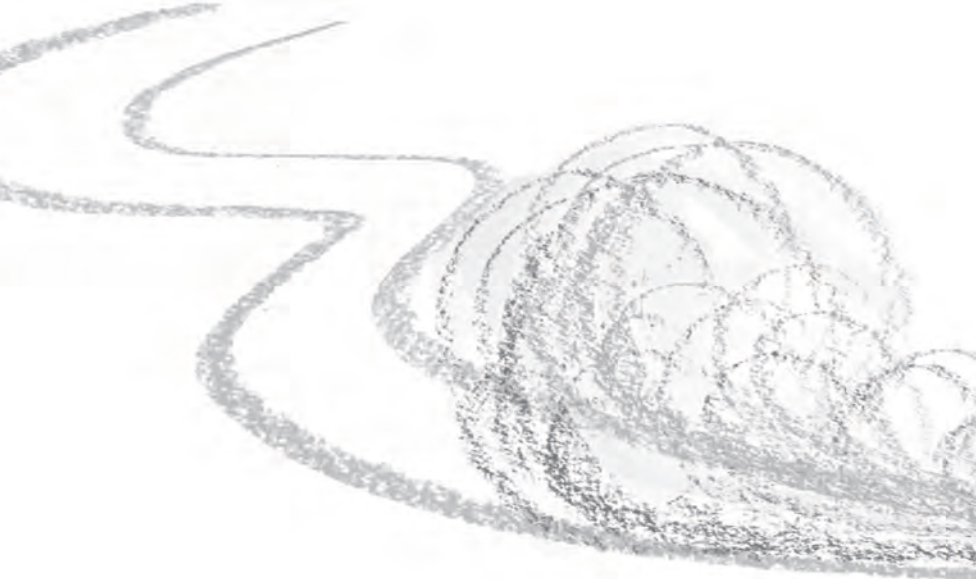
'But I would be delighted to assist
when I return ...'

Alfonso looked crestfallen. **'That
might be too late.'**

'We're staying at the Coconut Palm Resort if you need me,' said Fabio.

Alfonso nodded slowly.





‘Why did you tell him where we’re staying?’ asked Gilbert as he sped them through the back streets of Laloozee in his sports car.

‘There was something bothering him,’ Fabio replied.

‘You’re always overthinking things, Fabio. This is why you need a holiday!’



By the way, what did you see on the other side of the street when we were at Alfonso's?' asked Gilbert, taking a corner at full speed.

Fabio clung to the car door for dear life. 'I thought I saw someone from the past,' he replied.

'How nice,' said Gilbert.

‘Please can you drive more slowly, my friend?’

‘Sorry!’ Gilbert apologised, hitting the brakes.

‘If it was who I thought it was, Gilbert,’ Fabio continued, ‘it was definitely not nice.’

There was no time for Gilbert to ask more, because they’d arrived at the Laloozee Central Train Station and they had a train to catch.

And not just any train – the Ostrich Express.





Chapter 2

The gleaming and magnificent Ostrich Express was by far the fastest locomotive in the world. A journey on the train promised the passenger an experience of true luxury and comfort.

The guard's whistle blew and steam filled the platform as Gilbert, directed by Fabio, loaded their baggage. Fabio helped him leap on board as the train began to chug its way majestically out of the station.





Fabio and Gilbert squeezed along the corridor past their fellow passengers until they found their compartment, number 13. Gilbert flopped down on the bottom bunk.

'You know what your trouble is, Gilbert?' mused Fabio as he carefully unpacked.

'No,' said Gilbert. 'What's my trouble?'

'You pack too much,' Fabio teased him.

'But I've only packed what I need,' Gilbert replied.



‘A bucket and spade?’ asked Fabio.
‘Will your niece and nephew be joining us?’

‘They’re for me!’ replied Gilbert,
feeling slightly injured.

Fortunately for both of them there
was a knock on the door.



‘The dining car is now open,’ the steward informed them, pretending he hadn’t noticed Gilbert’s bucket and spade. Gilbert kicked them under his bunk. He was regretting packing them.

‘I could do with something to eat,’



said Fabio. 'How about you, Gilbert?'

'I'm starving!' Gilbert replied, the prospect of food making him suddenly feel much happier.

Fabio and Gilbert were not the first of the passengers to arrive in the opulent dining car. It was almost full.

The waiter showed them to their table and Fabio ordered two glasses of the finest pink lemonade.

Gilbert gazed out of the window. The sun was setting. Laloozee was already well behind them.

'Home is just a few twinkling lights in the distance now,' he said.

'Yes, and ahead of us,' said Fabio, 'the savannah turns to desert, and then finally we will reach the Coral Coast.'

'What if we get stuck in a sand dune?' asked Gilbert, sipping his lemonade.

'It is most unlikely,' said Fabio, 'but if

we do, I'm sure your bucket and spade will come in handy.'

Gilbert was about to respond when they were interrupted.

'May I sit here? The train is very full tonight and there's nowhere else for me to sit.'

Fabio recognised the speaker immediately. It was the desert fox from Alfonso's.

'Certainly,' said Fabio as both he and Gilbert stood up.

'My name is Zazie,' said the fox, taking a seat.



'This is Fabio, the world's greatest flamingo detective,' said Gilbert, pointing at his friend. Fabio nodded modestly. 'And I'm Gilbert.'

'The world's greatest ... ?' asked Zazie.

‘I’m not the world’s greatest anything, I’m afraid,’ said Gilbert.

‘But you are very good at asking questions,’ said Fabio encouragingly.

Gilbert beamed.

Fabio ordered an extra glass of pink lemonade for their guest.

‘May I say, what a beautiful pendant you’re wearing,’ Fabio complimented Zazie after they’d ordered their food.

Zazie nervously touched the pendant hanging from her neck.

‘Yes, it’s as big as an egg!’ Gilbert marvelled.



‘This is the Laloozee Ruby,’ she said.
‘I shouldn’t really be wearing it. It’s very
valuable, you see, but I thought, as we’re
on a train, what could possibly happen
to it?’

‘I heard there was a legend about the
Laloozee Ruby,’ said Fabio.

‘Yes, there is,’ said Zazie. ‘If you believe in that sort of thing. It says that the wearer must have a true heart. If they don’t, the ruby will find itself a new home. It’s all nonsense, of course, but people like stories so it should help me. I’m selling it, you see.’

‘Oh, what a shame!’ said Gilbert.

‘The money from the sale will pay for a new wing at the Laloozee Infirmary. The auction is the day the train arrives at the Coral Coast,’ Zazie smiled.

‘Gosh,’ said Gilbert. ‘It must be worth a lot of money!’ He was about to ask

Zazie if he'd seen her somewhere before, when the waiter arrived.

'Would you be interested in dessert?'

'Of course!' cheered Gilbert. 'Dessert in the desert, why not? Always room for pudding!'

Fabio jovially rolled his eyes at his friend as the waiter handed them the menus.

All of a sudden, the train braked sharply, throwing the waiter off balance and causing much upset with the rest of the diners in the carriage.

'Raspberry ripple!' were Gilbert's

last words as his head banged against the window and he was knocked unconscious.

In seconds, the train had shuddered to a complete stop.

Gilbert was out for the count. Fabio fanned him with the dessert menu and when that didn't work he threw a glass of pink lemonade over his friend.



‘Black Forest gateau,’ Gilbert mumbled as he came to.

‘I’ll look after Gilbert,’ Zazie assured Fabio. ‘You go and find out what’s happened.’

Fabio tipped his hat and headed to the front of the train to see what had caused it to stop so suddenly. As he stepped on to the desert sand he was surprised by the coolness of the night. The sky was full of stars and the moon was a thin crescent.

He hurried towards a group of stewards. There was a great deal of



commotion. Only a few paces away from the buffers, gagged and tied to the tracks, was an elephant.

