

CHAPTER SAMPLER

FERN & NEWT

AND
THE

LOST LOOT





FERN & NEWT

AND THE **LOST LOOT**

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ILLUSTRATED BY CATARINA OLIVEIRA



Orca Echoes

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS



*To Heidi P.,
the original milkweed maiden.*

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Published in Canada and the United States in 2026 by Orca Book Publishers.

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Fern & Newt and the lost loot / Mireille Messier ; illustrated by Catarina Oliveira.

Other titles: Fern & Newt and the lost loot

Names: Messier, Mireille, author | Oliveira, Catarina (Illustrator), illustrator.

Series: Orca echoes.

Description: Series statement: Orca echoes

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 2024050769X | Canadiana (ebook) 20240511239 | ISBN 9781459841567 (softcover) | ISBN 9781459841574 (PDF) | ISBN 9781459841581 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS8576.E7737 F47 2026 | DDC jC813/.54—dc23

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024946514

Summary: In this illustrated early chapter book, Fern and her friend Newt help a neighbor with weeding and butterfly-egg collecting so they can earn money for a metal detector to help them find a jewelry box they lost at the beach.

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Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Cover and interior artwork by Catarina Oliveira.

Photo, page 93: Paschall, Mary Frances Carpenter. Milkweed.

Ca. 1900. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004675080/>.

Design by Troy Cunningham.

Edited by Sarah Howden.

Printed and bound in Canada.

29 28 27 26 • 1 2 3 4



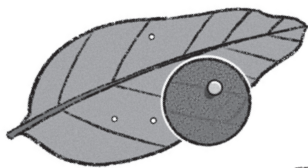
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THE MYSTERIOUS BOX



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EGG

The kitchen table was littered with empty gift boxes and crumpled wrapping paper. Next to Fern was a big pile of brand-new shirts, skirts and socks. She stared at the mismatched heap and sighed loudly. These were *not* what she had asked for on her “Happy 10th Birthday to Me” wish list.

“I don’t even like polka dots,” grumbled Fern.

“What’s that, honey?” asked her dad.

“Nothing.” She sighed, flicking a glittery tag.

Maybe she’d missed it. Maybe the Trove Chaser metal detector she’d wanted was buried at the bottom of one of these boxes. Fern was double-checking when she heard her dad say, “Oh! I forgot something! Wait here!”

This is it! thought Fern. They forgot my real gift.

The rummaging in the living room sounded promising. Soon her dad returned with a large parcel wrapped in brown paper and mummified in clear tape. A yellow sticky note teetered on top.

“It’s from Madame Musette, down the street.”

“Madame Musette? My music teacher?”

Fern took the strange box from her dad and put it on the table. It was the

right size. And it was the right weight. Maybe it was a metal detector...

“You should read the note first,” suggested her dad.

Fern peeled off the yellow sticky note. She read it out loud.

***Dear Fernanda, I hope you
know how to use one of these.
If not, practice, practice, practice!
Please bring it with you at 10 a.m.
tomorrow. Your help is required.***

Madame Musette

Could it be?

In a flash, Fern was tugging at the tape. But it wouldn't budge. She tried to rip it with her thumbnail. But that didn't work either.



“I wonder what it is,” said her dad, handing her a pair of scissors.

Fern slid the scissors under the tape. Once she got started, the ripping happened fast. Pieces of brown paper covered the kitchen floor. When she saw the box, Fern froze.

“It’s a root remover,” said her dad, scratching his head.

For a second, Fern hoped that maybe, just maybe, the gift was in the wrong box. Like that time her aunt had given her homemade soaps in an old box of chocolates. But that had been a bad present in a good box. Did good presents (like metal detectors) come wrapped in bad boxes?



She opened the box. She stared at the shiny green gadget that lay inside.

Fern was dumbfounded.

“What’s a root remover?”

This was worse than getting socks.

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DID YOU GET IT?



— — — — *

NEW CATERPILLAR

“So? Did you get it?”

The voice came from the other side of the hedge. It was Newt.

“No,” grumbled Fern as she walked down her driveway, dragging the root remover behind her.

Newt poked his freckled face over the bushes, his eyes wide in disbelief.

“Really? But you left hints about wanting a metal detector *everywhere*.”

“I know.”



“You put it on your wish list!”

“Yep.”

“And you gave your dad a copy. And your mom a copy. And—”

Fern interrupted him. “YES!” she huffed. “And I put a copy, with pictures, on the family corkboard. And on the fridge! I did everything I could to get that metal detector.”

There was a pause.

“Well...that’s a bummer,” Newt said.

“*Hecka* bummer,” agreed Fern.

She bent down to scratch her shin. Her new socks were itchy and a little too tight.

“So...umm...how are we going to find the jewelry box now?” Newt whispered.

“I don’t know,” Fern whispered back. “But we have to find it before Nicole gets back home from camp. Or else we’ll be in *big* trouble!”

A few days earlier Fern and Newt had done something pretty bad. They’d gone into Fern’s sister Nicole’s room without permission and taken her jewelry box. And then, something even worse, they’d lost it! It was pretty much the worst-case scenario.

Fern and Newt walked to the end of their driveways in awkward silence. The silence didn’t last very long because their

driveways weren't very long. And also because Newt had another question.

"What's that thing?" he said, pointing at the shiny green gadget Fern was dragging behind her.

"It's a root remover," answered Fern, giving it a little kick.

"What does it do?"

"It removes roots," she said, frowning.

Newt followed her as she started up the block.

"Obviously. But why do you have it?" he continued. Newt could be very insistent.

"Who knows! Madame Musette gave it to me."

"Madame Musette? Really? What for?"

The root remover felt heavier in Fern's hand. It kept catching on the edge of the sidewalk and making an annoying *grrrrr-ping, grrrrr-ping* sound.



“She asked me to come over and bring it with me. She said she needed my help. What time is it?”

Newt looked at his *Quasar Quest* watch.

“Ten hundred hours,” he said.

Fern’s eyes narrowed into tiny slivers. It bothered her when Newt talked like a starship captain, and he knew that. She’d played space explorer with him in the past, and she was always the alien who had a strange disease or spoke gibberish. She did not want to play starship now.

“What’s that in normal-people time?” she asked.

Newt rolled his eyes. “It’s ten o’clock. And you’re no fun.”

Fern gasped. She picked up the root remover and ran as fast as she could.

She was already late!