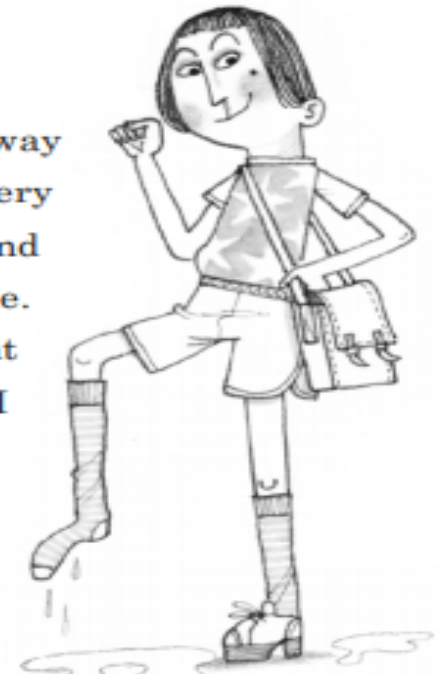


Chapter

1

Some people think that everything happens for a reason. This makes perfect sense to me. Although sometimes it can take a while for the reason to become clear. You just have to be patient, that's all.

Why did I lose a shoe on the way to school? It was certainly very annoying; my foot got wet and my mother was cross with me. BUT . . . losing the shoe meant I was late for class and so I missed a maths exam. Result! It happened for a reason.

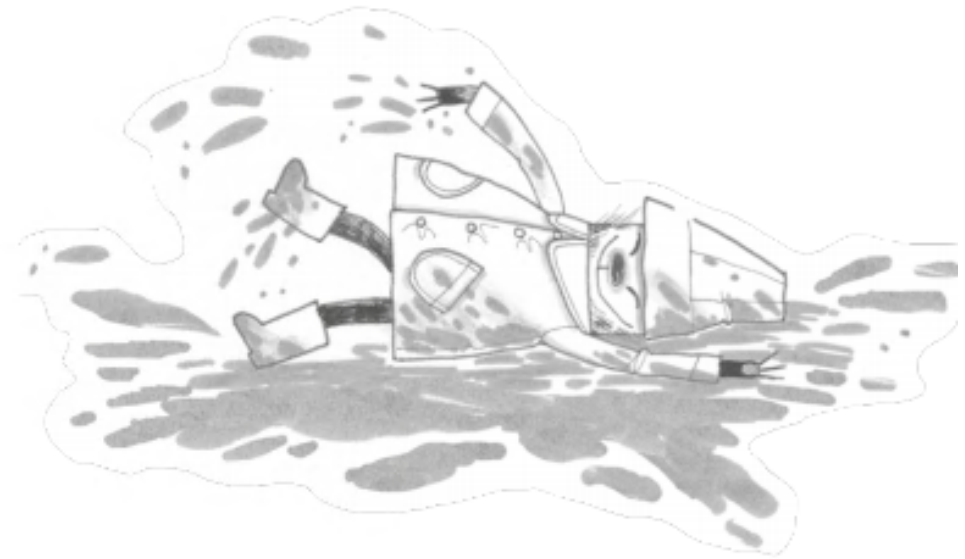



And I once told my best friend that I still slept with a teddy called Mr Pilchard. My friend told the whole class and they all laughed at me. But then I realised the reason for all this upset: it was time to dump my best friend and get myself one who *could* be trusted. So I did.

Now what about the things that happen to the Bolds?

Perhaps you are new to stories about them. I hope not, because that would mean you've been missing out on lots of fun. The Bolds, you see, are a family that strange things happen to – some things good, some not so good – but always for a reason. The good things are wonderful and the not-so-good always make the stories about them very interesting – though I say so myself.

Our story this time begins on a rainy day. Most people on days like that want to stay indoors and avoid getting wet. This isn't the case with the Bolds, though. Dear me, no. They love the rain. Rain means puddles and mud, both of which they are very keen on. Stamping in puddles and making a mess, getting mud in their fur, down their trousers or anywhere else you can think of, is their idea of fun. This is probably because the Bolds family, as you may already know, aren't actually people.





No. They're hyenas. Hyenas living *disguised* as human beings in a lovely little house in Teddington. In order to keep this unusual fact a secret, they are careful not to do anything too *hyena-ish* in public: no running around on all fours, no chasing things and eating them, no rubbing their *bottoms* on bushes.

But laughing *wildly* and messing about in the rain and mud are hyena traits they can get away with. And they do. People might think them a little *odd*, but those same people never jump to the conclusion that the family running around and laughing in the rain are *hyenas*. And for the Bolds it is a little taste of their old life. It satisfies their *hyena instincts*, so carefully covered up most of the time.

So on this particular day in early April, during a heavy shower, the Bold family (Mr and Mrs Bold, and their twins, Bobby and



Betty) spent a *glorious* couple of hours in a rather wet Bushy Park. They took with them their fellow hyena Uncle Tony, and Miranda the marmoset monkey, as

well as their next-door neighbour Mr McNumpty (who is a grizzly bear, *not a hyena*, but rather partial to a frolic in the mud nevertheless).



To begin with they just hopped over puddles, *laughing* and shrieking. But then Bobby landed in a large one (perhaps by mistake, perhaps not) and splashed water all over Betty's skirt.

'Right! Game on!' said a laughing Betty, before jumping in the air and landing with a *splat!* right in the middle of an even larger,



ominously dark puddle. It turned out this puddle was much deeper than expected. Betty suddenly found herself knee-deep in filthy muddy water. And not only was Bobby drenched from head to foot in thick gravy-like mud, but Mrs Bold was too, as she happened to have been walking just behind Bobby.

Now I don't know about *your* family, but in mine Betty and Bobby would be in big trouble by now. However things are a little different with the Bolds.



'Eek!' said Betty, covering her mouth with her paws in surprise.

'You've had it now, Sis!' laughed Bobby,

jumping in beside his sister, creating a new wave that curled right up and engulfed a squealing Betty's neck.

Mrs Bold, meanwhile, simply inhaled the earthy scent and her nostrils twitched with delight. She gave Mr Bold a sly glance. 'Mmmm!' she said. 'This so reminds me of life in Africa during the rainy season. Have a sniff, Fred!' She scooped up a handful of mud and rubbed it over Mr Bold's face.

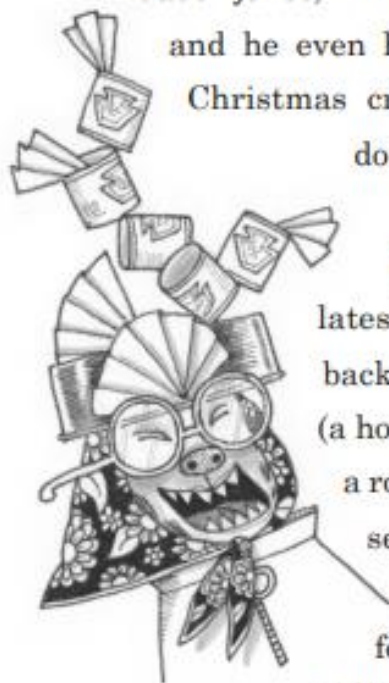
'Ahhh!' said her husband. 'I know what you mean, Amelia.'

What did one
raindrop say to
the other?

My plop is bigger
than your plop!



Now, in case you are unaware, Mr Bold loves jokes. Many dads do. But unlike lots of dads' jokes, Mr Bold's are actually funny and he even has a job writing them for Christmas crackers. A pretty cool job, don't you think?



When his wife heard his latest joke she threw her head back with laughter, and her hat (a home-made bonnet made from a round cake tin decorated with several empty tomato soup tins and some cleverly folded napkins) fell into the mud. But before she could pick it up, Uncle Tony (who was bent over on account of his arthritis) grabbed hold of the tin, scooped up some dirty water and, with a hyena howl of mischievous laughter, flung it over his best friend Mr McNumpty.



Nigel McNumpty wasted no time before retaliating: he reached into the depths of the deep puddle, smothering his designer-suit sleeves with muck in the process, and flung a heavy lump of smelly mud at his friend. The mud ball hit Uncle Tony a glancing blow on the shoulder but somehow landed on Mr Bold's face where it slid slowly down to his chest, leaving a gleaming brown trail behind.

Momentarily shocked, Mr Bold then let out a distinctly animal-like cackle.



Mrs Bold was so busy laughing at her husband's joke that she didn't notice Uncle Tony now creeping up behind her with Miranda perched on his shoulder, and the cake tin, full of water, in her little monkey paws. When they were directly behind her, Miranda tipped the tin all over Mrs Bold, and Uncle Tony stood there shaking with laughter.

'Bullseye! Me wetty Missy Boldy!' laughed Miranda.

Well, it was sheer mayhem after that, I can tell you. Luckily no one was out in the park that day, so no humans were there to see the extraordinary sight of a family rolling about in cold muddy puddles, hooting with delight.

After an hour or more of this pandemonium – like a snowball fight with mud that got way out of control – the Bolds pulled themselves together again.





'We'd better stop,' said Mrs Bold breathlessly. 'Before we are seen. Please, Bobby, don't do that in the ferns – it's not at all human-like.'

Exhausted, but exhilarated and very, very happy (hyena happy), they made their way home to 41 Fairfield Road.

'Right,' said Mr Bold with a sigh when they were safely inside the house. 'We'd better all get changed into some clean, dry clothes.'

There was a bit of a queue for the bathroom, but a couple of hours later everyone was clean and dry and sitting in the lounge enjoying hot buttered crumpets,



slices of fruit cake and milky tea. The twins' best friend Minnie, the only human who knew the Bolds' secret, had come round. But being a human she wasn't so keen on wet weather and couldn't understand why her friends had got themselves so muddy like that.



‘What goes up when rain comes down?’ Mr Bold asked her.

‘I know the answer to that,’ said Minnie. ‘An umbrella!’

‘Yes!’ Mr Bold said. ‘Although we don’t own one in this house. Can’t think of anything more silly than avoiding the rain. In the Serengeti it only ever rains in the rainy season. So when it does, we animals get very excited. We all get as wet as possible. I remember my mother teaching me and my brothers and sisters how to roll around in the mud. It’s good for our skin and keeps mosquitos away.’ Mr Bold stared into the distance. ‘Ah, yes,’ he sighed. ‘Happy days.’

But his thoughts of home were suddenly interrupted by an urgent tapping sound.

‘What’s that?’ asked Bobby.

‘It’s coming from the window!’ declared Mrs Bold, pulling back the net curtains to get a closer look. There, on the other side of the window, sat a fairly large, sleek grey bird, his beady eyes staring in through the glass. He gave three quick, impatient taps with his small beak and then sat there expectantly.

‘He wants to come in out of the rain,’ said Mrs Bold. ‘All right, Mr Bird! One moment.’

And she opened the window to let him in.



