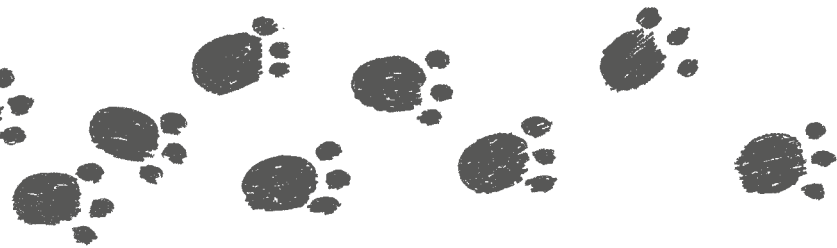


‘Or I could have a coughing fit?’

‘You haven’t got a cough!’

‘But I’m desperate to know Hector’s news . . . what can it be?’

‘You’ll find out in the morning, dear. Try and think about something else.’



Chapter

3

It was a difficult night for Mr Bold. He couldn’t get to sleep for hours, wondering about Hector’s news. Then he was awake before dawn, washed and dressed and listening outside the lounge door to see if their visitor had woken up. He hadn’t. So Fred collected some more caterpillars from the vegetable patch ready for Hector’s breakfast. In fact, he tried one himself and rather enjoyed it. So he tried another. Then another, until in the end he had to make a second trip to the garden to replenish the saucer.

Eventually everyone else got up and had



breakfast and they all gathered in the lounge, facing the still-sleeping cuckoo. The twins began to giggle. Mr Bold cleared his throat rather loudly. Then Uncle Tony had one of his wheezing fits and that did the trick. Hector slowly opened one eye, then the other. He yawned and looked around him as if he couldn't quite remember where he was.

'Er, good morning, Hector,' said Mr Bold brightly. 'I hope you slept well?'

'Yes, thank you, I did,' replied Hector sleepily.

'Breakfast?' offered Mrs Bold, holding

up the saucer with about a dozen wriggling caterpillars on it. Hector immediately flew down from the curtain rail to the coffee table and set about eating them. As soon as the last one was finished, Mr Bold could contain himself no longer.

'You said you had come to tell me something important?'

Hector wiped his beak on his chest and nodded. 'Yes. You are Fred Bold? And this is Number 41 Fairfield Road, Teddington, Middlesex, in England?'

'Yes, yes, yes,' said Mr Bold. 'I am and it is. What is the news?'

'Do you have any proof of identity? Passport? Utility bills? Photo ID?'



Mr Bold stood up and looked in the mirror that hung above the fireplace. ‘Yes, that’s definitely me,’ he said confidently.

‘Excellent. Then I will begin,’ said Hector. ‘Listen carefully.’

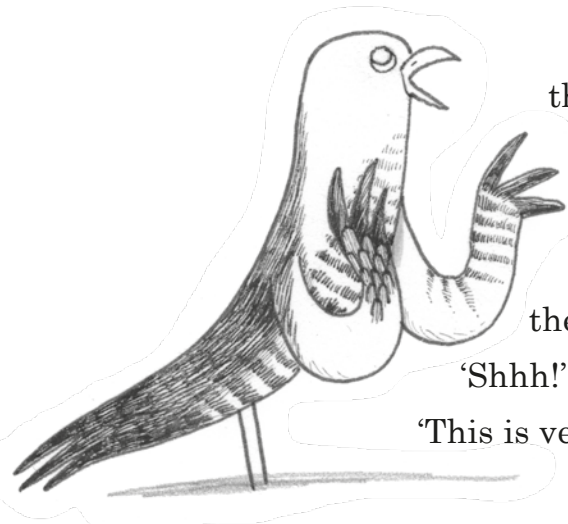
Everyone’s attention was focused on the grey bird sitting on the coffee table.

‘A little background information is important, I feel,’ began Hector, before clearing his throat.



‘My name is Hector and I am a cuckoo. Cuckoos are medium-sized, sleek birds, just like me, with soft feathers and long tails to help us steer. We enjoy a cosmopolitan distribution, mostly in tropical places, it’s fair to say, as we prefer to live in trees. We eat insects, insect larvae and various other bits and bobs, as well as fruit. Some cuckoos are known as “brood parasites”, which means they sneakily lay their eggs in other birds’ nests and let them have the bother of raising the hatchlings, but some also raise their own young. It just depends what mood we are in.’

Bobby and Betty let out a simultaneous sigh. This was not as interesting as they had



thought it was
going to be.

Mrs Bold gave
them a stern look.

‘Shhh!’ she whispered.

‘This is very educational.’

‘Cuckoos have always played an interesting role in human culture,’ continued Hector. ‘Notably in Greek mythology, where you may or may not know they are considered sacred to the goddess Hera. In Japan, cuckoos symbolise unrequited love, while here in Europe, our call heralds the beginning of spring to many. Isn’t that interesting?’

Mr Bold couldn’t contain his impatience. ‘Yes, Hector, yes. But what is the news you have for me?’

‘I’m getting to that,’ said Hector. ‘I am of the migratory variety of cuckoo. I spend April to October here in England and then I fly many miles south to avoid your winter months.’

‘Where do you go?’ asked Mr McNumpty.

‘Africa,’ replied Hector.

Suddenly everyone’s ears pricked up.

‘Africa?’ said Mr Bold, a slight tremble in his voice. ‘But that is where we come from.’

‘I know,’ said Hector simply. ‘And it is from Africa that I bring your news.’

Fred and Amelia looked at each other, eyes wide with amazement.

‘Please continue,’ said Fred. ‘What is the

important news you have for me?’

Hector cleared his throat again. ‘Do you think I might have some water? I’m a little dry, and after such a long time getting here I’m not used to all this **talking**.’

You could have fooled me, thought Mr Bold, but he said nothing. Bobby jumped up and went to the kitchen, returning with a saucer of water for the cuckoo.

‘Thank you so much,’ said Hector, before taking several long sips. Then he began talking again.

‘Africa is the ~~second~~ largest continent in the world, with the second largest population. It covers eleven point seven million square miles in fact, making up twenty per cent of all the land on planet Earth. Africa is surrounded by

bodies of water, including the *Mediterranean Sea* to the north, the *Suez Canal* and the *Red Sea* along the *Sinai Peninsula* to the north-east, the *Atlantic Ocean* to the west and the *Indian Ocean* to the south-east.’

Hector was then **interrupted** by the sound of snoring.

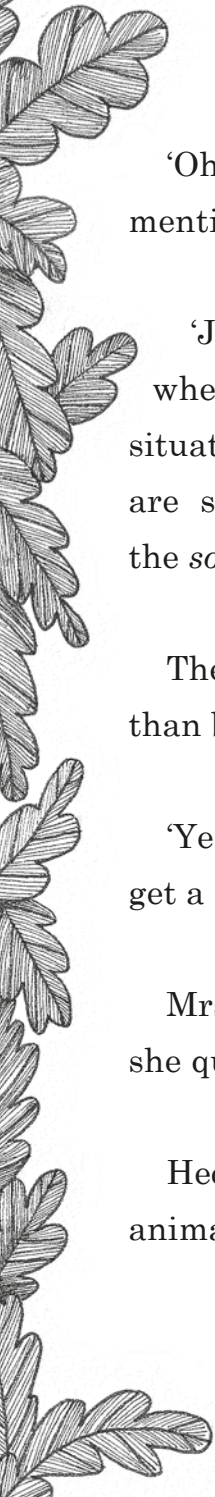
‘*Uncle Tony*,’ said Mr McNumpty, giving his friend a nudge. ‘Wake up!’

‘Oh, er, sorry,’ said Uncle Tony. ‘Have we got to the **important** news yet?’

‘Afraid not,’ said Mr Bold.

‘May I continue?’ asked Hector.





‘Oh, yes please,’ said Mrs Bold. ‘You mentioned some **n**ews?’

‘Just getting to that,’ said Hector. ‘Now, where was I? Ah, yes. The continent is mostly situated in the *northern hemisphere*, but there are still a number of African countries in the *southern hemisphere*.’

The twins began to giggle. ‘This is **w**orse than being at school!’ said Betty.

‘Yes, **d**efinitely,’ replied Bobby. ‘At least we get a packed lunch at school.’

Mrs Bold **g**lared at them, although secretly she quite agreed.

Hector droned on: ‘There are many native animals in Africa. Too many to list just now—’

‘**Q**uite,’ jumped in Mr Bold. ‘We don’t want to be here all day!’

‘Perhaps some of the best-known are the lion, elephant, giraffe, leopard, rhino, cheetah, buffalo, crocodile, hippopotamus and zebra,’ continued Hector. ‘I have seen all of these animals in my time, I’m pleased to say.’

‘What about **h**yenas?’ asked Fred, a little indignantly.

‘Yes, hyenas too,’ confirmed Hector.

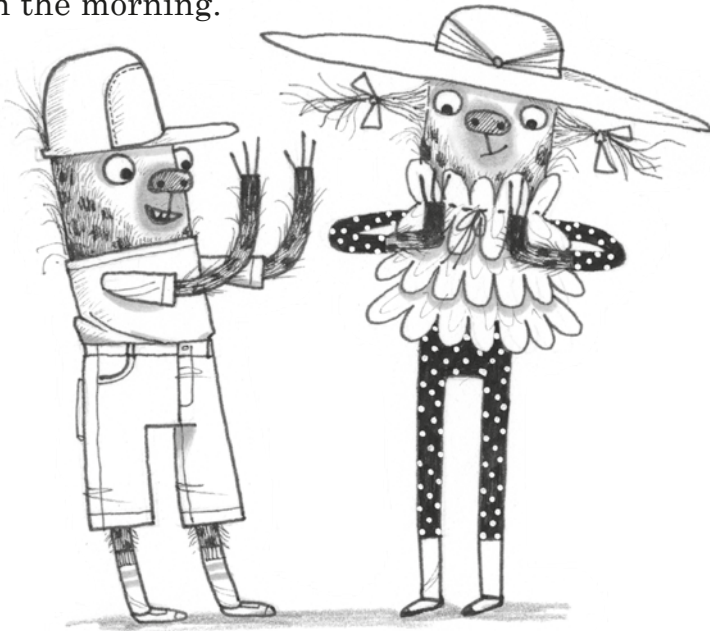
‘Now we’re getting somewhere,’ muttered Mr McNumpty.

Hector cleared his throat again. ‘Hyenas are very **i**nteresting animals. A bit like a mix-up of a cat and a dog. Hyenas catch their prey using their jaws, then eat very quickly, or sometimes

store their food somewhere secret. They have calloused feet with large, non-retractable, blunt claws, handy for running and turning.'

The twins both looked at their paws during this speech. 'See?' said Bobby to his sister. 'I knew there was a reason we had such big hands!'

'Hyenas are, generally speaking, nocturnal animals,' continued Hector. 'But sometimes they venture out from their lairs first thing in the morning.'



'Er, we don't do that any more,' pointed out Mrs Bold. 'The neighbours were beginning to talk.'

'Over time hyenas evolved into two distinct types: the almost extinct, lightly built, dog-like hyenas and the more familiar robust, bone-crushing hyenas.'

'That's us!' said Betty, punching the air. 'We are the bone-crushing Bolds!'

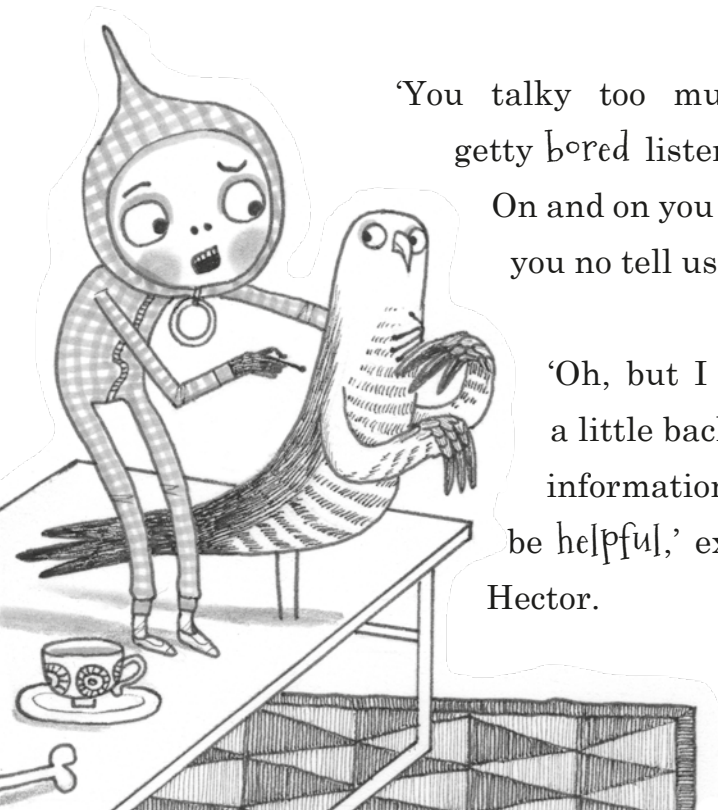


'Hyenas, like cuckoos, often appear in the folklore of human cultures. For example—'

But Mr Bold could take no more. 'Hector, I hate to interrupt you again. But we *are* hyenas. You don't need to tell us all this. We know it already.'

‘But I’m just getting into my stride,’ said Hector, sounding a little hurt.

Surprisingly it was Miranda – usually shy and retiring – who put a stop to Hector’s monologue once and for all. She suddenly leaped out from inside Uncle Tony’s T-shirt and landed next to the cuckoo on the coffee table. She placed a gentle hand on Hector’s back and spoke quietly to him.



‘You talky too much! We getty bored listen to you.

On and on you go. Why you no tell us newsy?’

‘Oh, but I thought a little background information might be helpful,’ explained Hector.

‘No. You boring,’ said Miranda bluntly.

‘I do apologise.’ Hector ruffled his feathers. ‘When I’m on these long flights I pass the time by reciting as many facts as I can remember from the encyclopaedia.’

‘Why you no watch filmy?’ asked Miranda.

‘I’m the one doing the flying,’ said Hector. ‘I’m not on an aeroplane. There’s no in-flight service!’

‘Ohhhhh!’ said Miranda. ‘Me understandy now. No wonder you so boring.’

‘I’ll do as you ask,’ said Hector, pursing his beak. ‘I’ll tell you the important news you are all waiting for.’

