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Opening extract from

The Bolds

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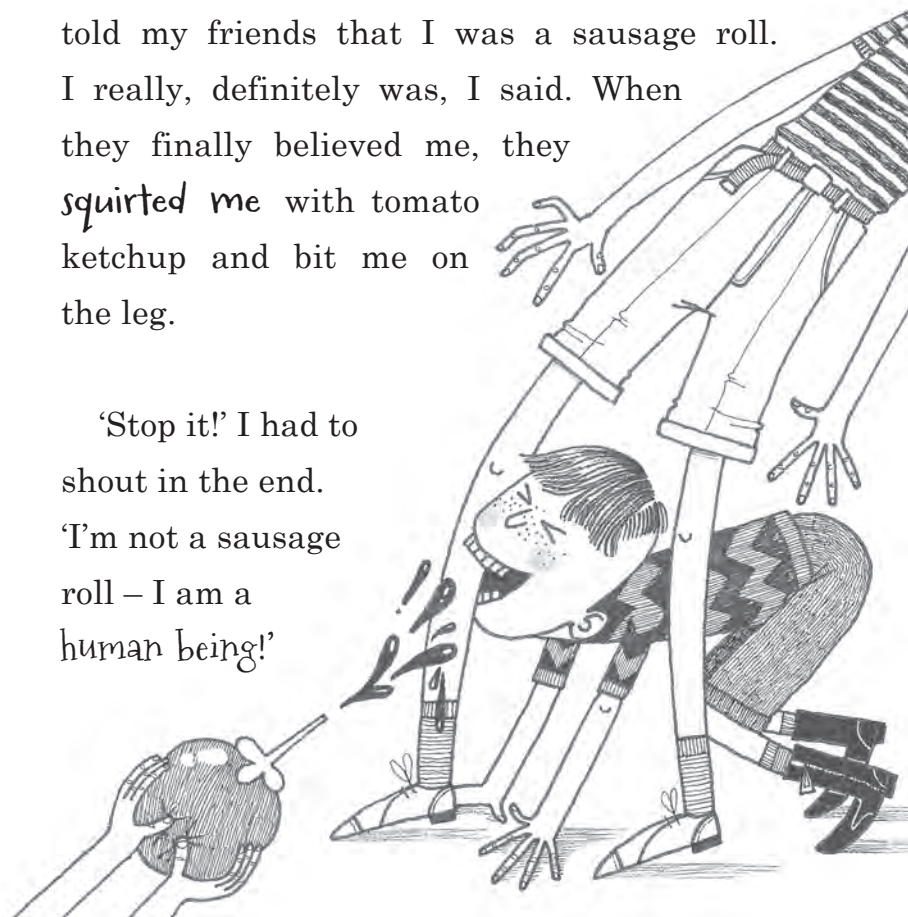
For my great nephews and nieces
Nico, Jake, Dani, Mia, Alex and Zac.

JC

Chapter 1

Telling lies is **NEVER** a good idea. I once told my friends that I was a sausage roll. I really, definitely was, I said. When they finally believed me, they **squirted me** with tomato ketchup and bit me on the leg.

'Stop it!' I had to shout in the end. 'I'm not a sausage roll – I am a human being!'



That taught me a lesson, I can tell you. I don't tell lies any more. Ever.

So believe me when I say that the story I am going to tell you is ABSOLUTELY TRUE. It's important that you know and understand this, because it is quite an extraordinary story. And funny. Funny peculiar. Very funny peculiar, in fact.

But true. Every word.

The first thing you need to understand before I begin this story is that for some reason human beings have grown rather full of themselves over the years. They now suppose that they are far cleverer than all other living creatures.

This is a mistake. Just because humans can read and write and use knives and forks and

computers, they think they are better than other animals. How stupid! Did you know that a squirrel can hide ten thousand nuts in the woods and remember where every single one of them is hidden? Well, I ask you: could you remember where you'd put ten thousand nuts?

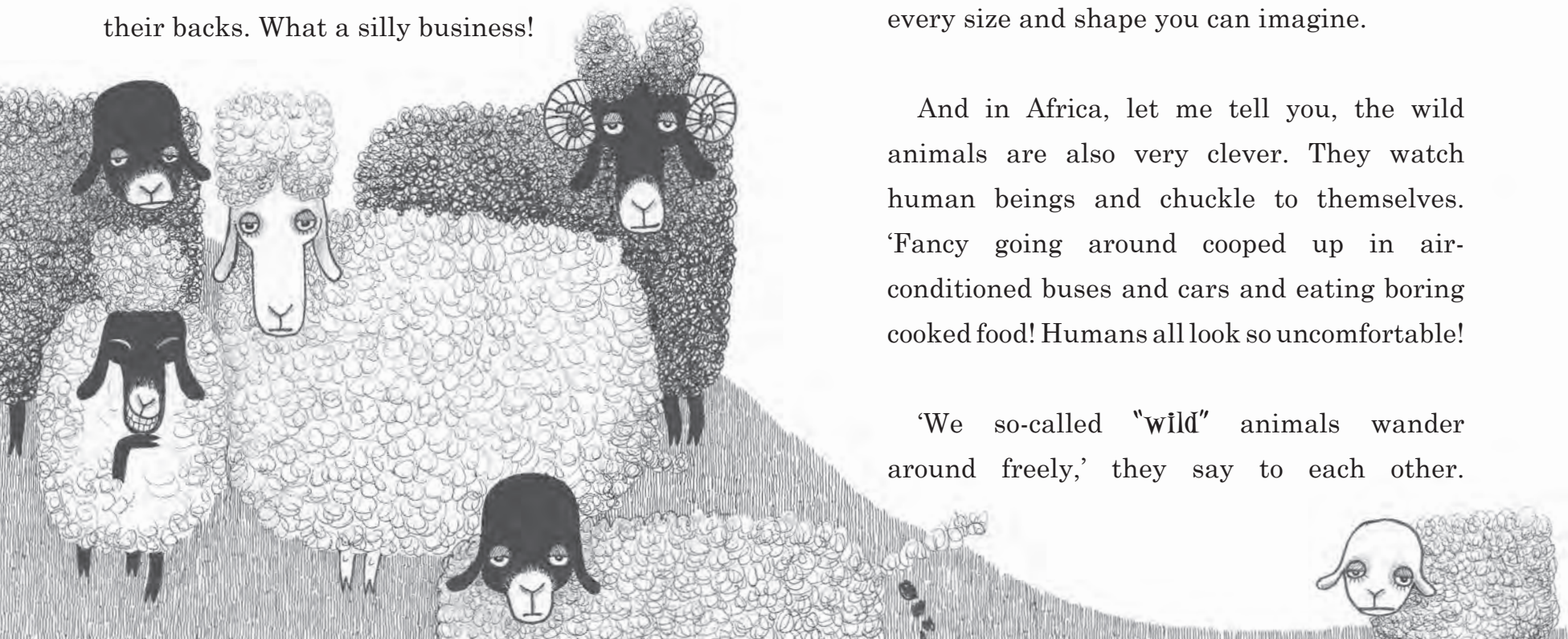
Frogs can sleep with their eyes open. Can you?

A cat can lick its own bottom! How clever is that?



The truth is that animals are *just* as clever as people, but clever in different ways. Animals think people are the *stupid* ones sometimes.

Next time you pass a field of sheep, stop and look: they will stare back at you with a steady, sympathetic gaze. You might even see them shake their heads if you look closely – amused that we need to wear jumpers and coats made out of wool that grows perfectly naturally on their backs. What a silly business!



But anyway, back to my story. It begins ten years ago, far away in Africa. Africa, as you may know from photographs and television programmes, is a very hot and beautiful place. There are forests and bush and vast open plains where lots of wild animals live – lions and elephants and giraffes. There are brightly coloured birds that live in the trees, monkeys and gorillas, lizards, hyenas, porcupines and buffaloes. The place is teeming with life of every size and shape you can imagine.

And in Africa, let me tell you, the wild animals are also very clever. They watch human beings and chuckle to themselves. 'Fancy going around cooped up in air-conditioned buses and cars and eating boring cooked food! Humans all look so uncomfortable!

'We so-called "*wild*" animals wander around freely,' they say to each other.

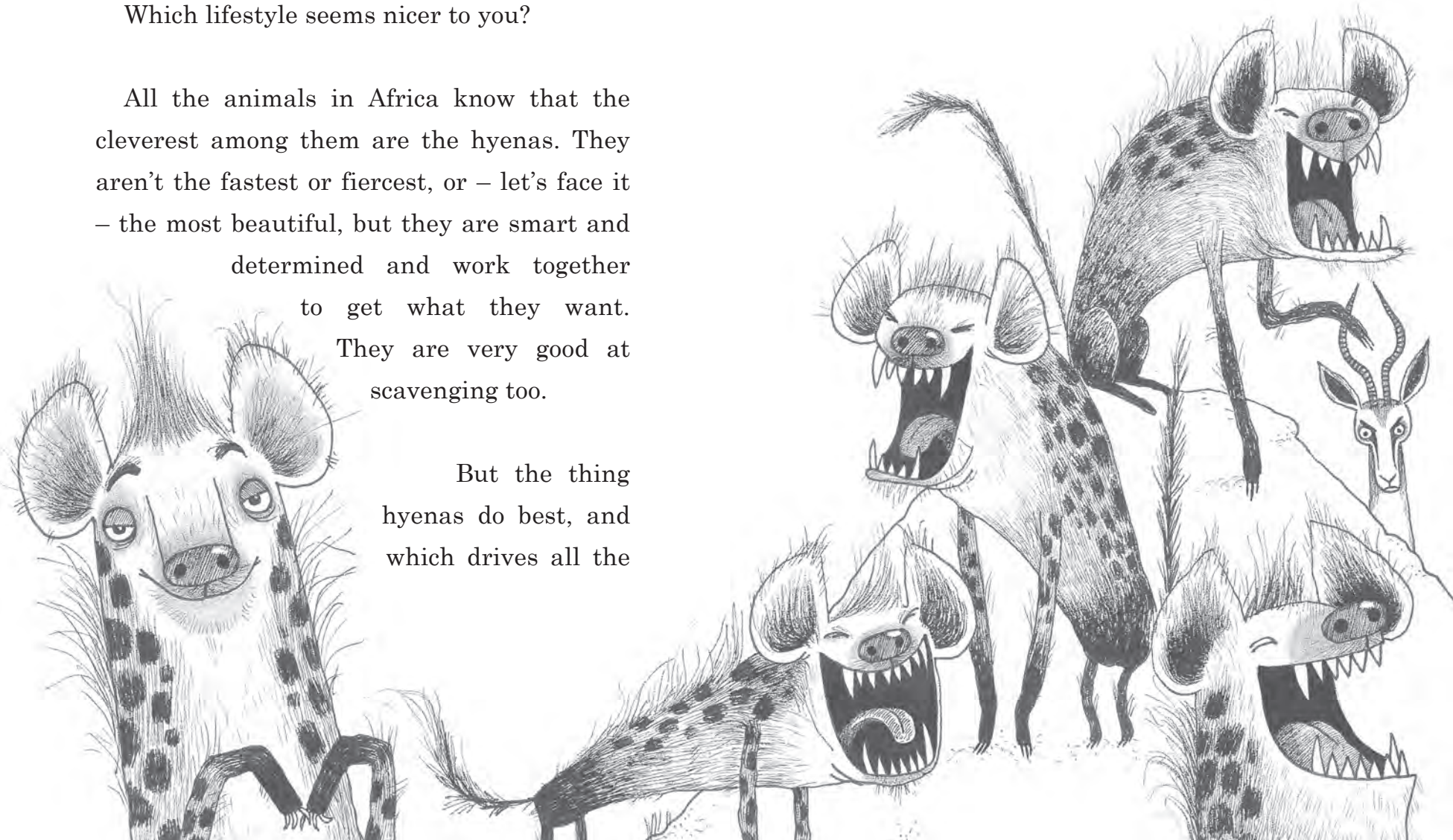
'Breathing the fresh air and eating fresh food that we catch or pick or graze for ourselves. Far better, in our humble opinion!'

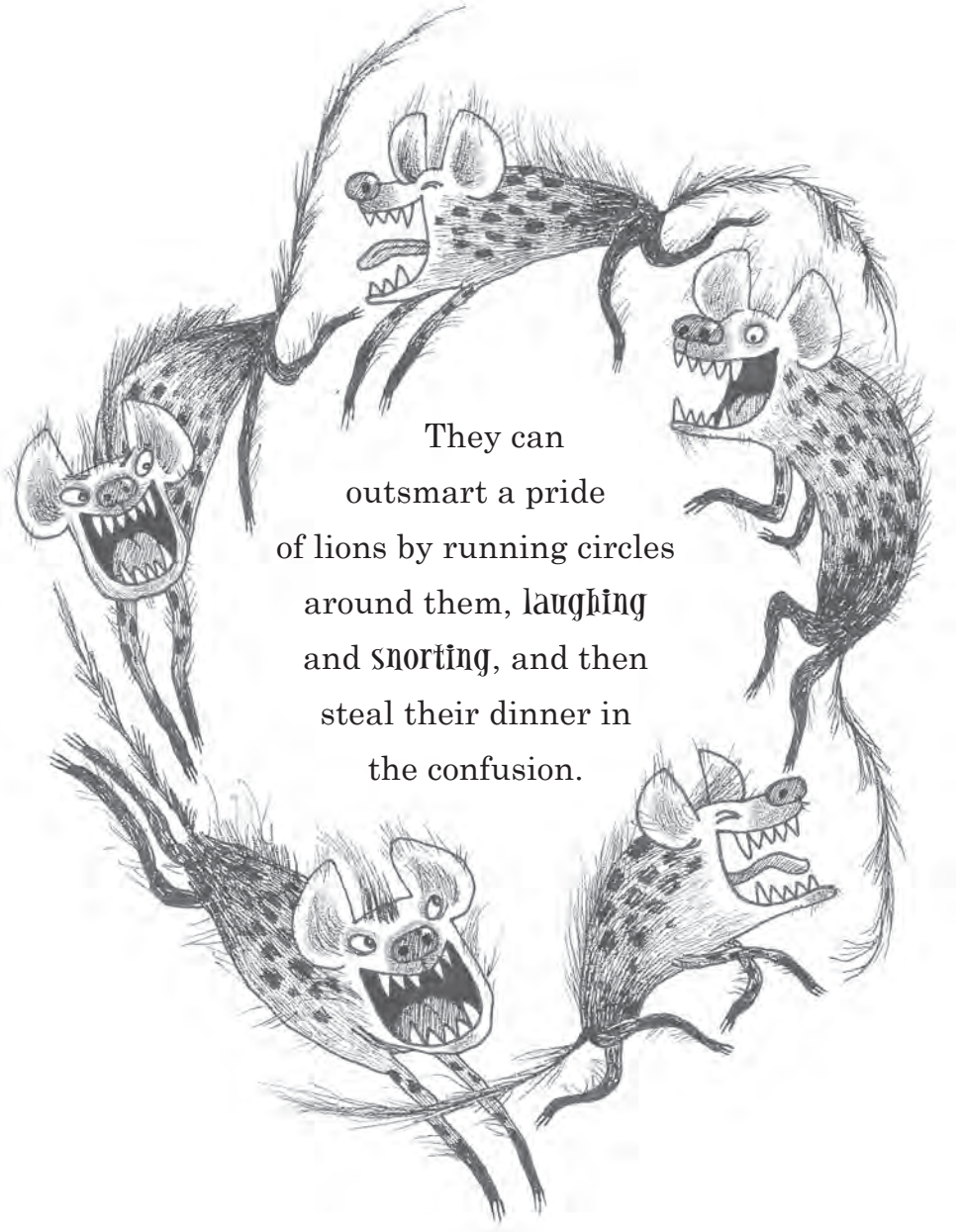
Which lifestyle seems nicer to you?

All the animals in Africa know that the cleverest among them are the hyenas. They aren't the fastest or fiercest, or – let's face it – the most beautiful, but they are smart and determined and work together to get what they want. They are very good at scavenging too.

But the thing hyenas do best, and which drives all the other animals round the twist, is: they laugh.

In fact, they're known as laughing hyenas. Long, loud shrieks and cackles.



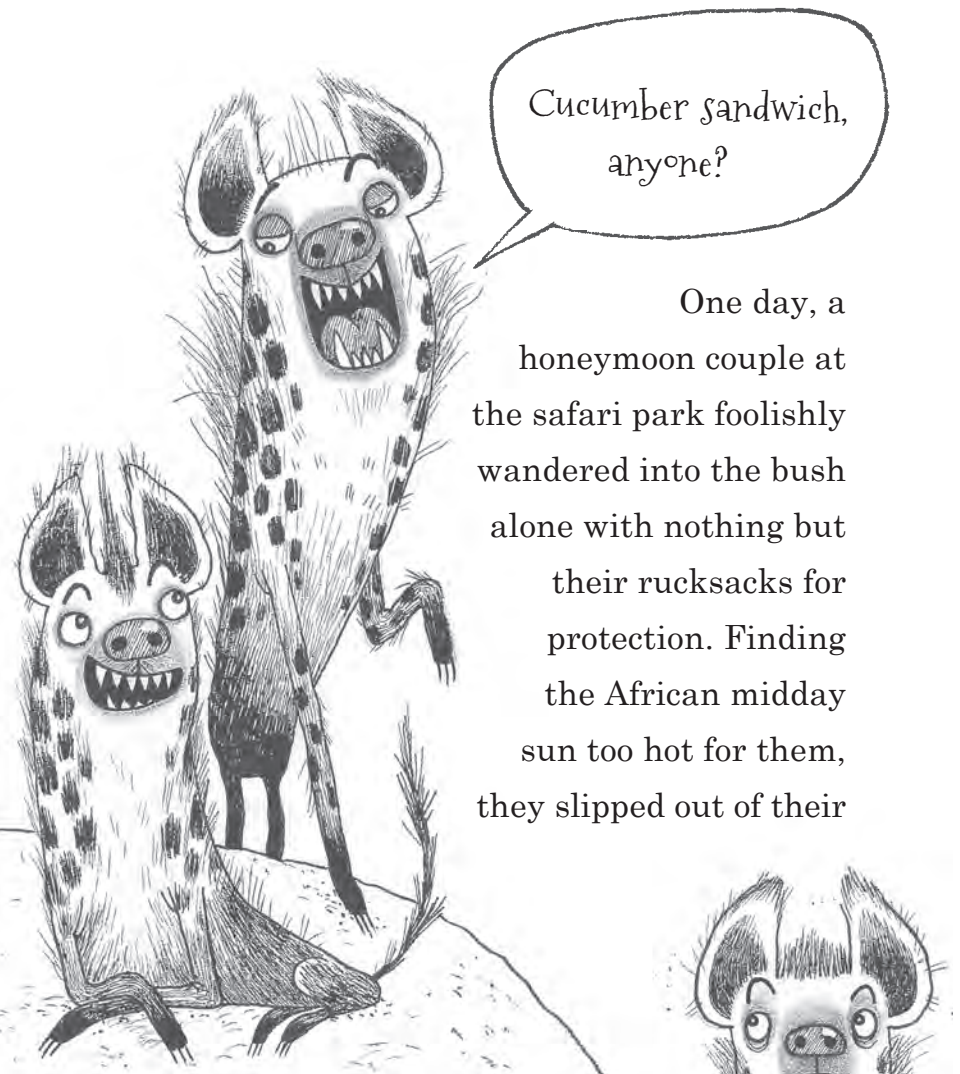


To be honest with you, hyenas are not very popular among the other animals. Birds sing prettily, lions roar impressively, but the incessant laughter of the clever hyenas gives other animals a headache.

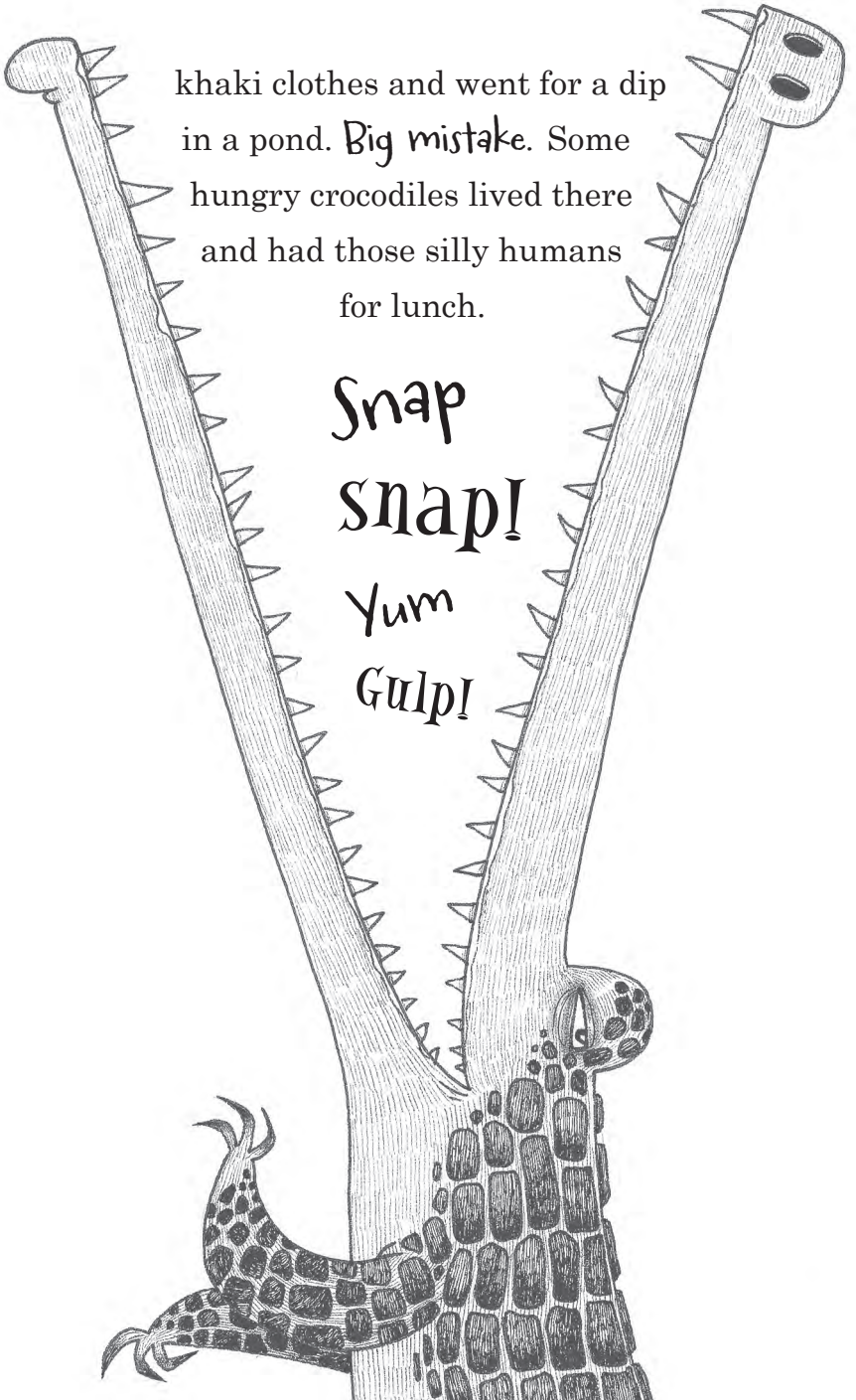
Now then. There was once a large clan of hyenas living in the Masai Mara (which is a huge national park in Africa). Laughing hyenas. These particular hyenas laughed even more than most.

They lived in burrows, near to a safari camp, where lots of tourists came to see the animals in their natural environment. Slowly the hyenas became accustomed to their strange visitors. They would creep ever closer to the camp, scavenging leftover food, getting bolder and bolder. Eventually, over time, they began to understand the human way of communicating – they learned to understand human languages.

There were a lot of English visitors at this particular safari camp, so after a while the hyenas began to copy their language and they started to talk. In fact, their first words to each other in English were:



One day, a honeymoon couple at the safari park foolishly wandered into the bush alone with nothing but their rucksacks for protection. Finding the African midday sun too hot for them, they slipped out of their khaki clothes and went for a dip in a pond. Big mistake. Some hungry crocodiles lived there and had those silly humans for lunch.



Two of the English-speaking hyenas, called Spot and Sue, who were actually very much in love, saw what had happened and came to sniff around the discarded items.

'Hey!' said Spot to Sue. 'Come and look at this!' And he handed her two passports, pulled from one of the bags.

'Well, well!' exclaimed Sue. 'The poor dears were called Fred and Amelia Bold. May they rest in peace.' The two hyenas stopped for a moment and bowed their heads as they thought about the poor dead humans.

But hyenas are known to be opportunistic creatures, and sure enough, Sue soon had a very daring idea.

'Can you walk on your hind legs, dear?' she asked Spot.



'Then listen,' Sue said excitedly. 'These clothes look like they might fit us. We could put them on and go back to the safari lodge as Fred and Amelia Bold!'

'Then what?' asked Spot, frowning.

'Don't you see?' said Sue. 'This is our way out of here. I've always fancied living in England. Apparently it isn't as hot as Africa and the humans there love queuing. That would make a nice change from always fighting and diving in for scraps of meat here with the rest of the hyena clan. This is our chance for a new life!'

'Oh my!' said Spot with an incredulous laugh. 'That is one BOLD idea! Do you really think we could get away with it?'

'Why not?' said Sue as she continued to look through the dead couple's belongings.

'Look, here are two plane tickets, a driving licence, house keys, car keys – and our new address: 41 Fairfield Road, Teddington, in Middlesex . . .'

'It does have a nice ring to it,' said Spot, as he slipped into the larger pair of shorts. 'And I must say, these are a perfect fit.'

'Tuck your tail out of the way, for goodness' sake! It's peeking out the bottom of your shorts. That would give the game away.'

Spot laughed. 'Oh, Sue, how I love you!' he said, trying on a large sun hat.

'I'm not Sue any more, remember?' she replied, putting on a posh voice as she buttoned up her khaki shirt. 'From now on, you must call me Amelia. And you, my husband, are Fred! We are Fred and Amelia Bold.'

And with that they both rolled around laughing, before they got up on their hind legs to walk back to the camp and into a new life.



Chapter 2

I did warn you it was a very unusual story, didn't I? Good. So, dressed in human clothes and walking on their hind legs, the two hyenas slipped into England and began their new life as Fred and Amelia Bold.

It wasn't easy. Their tails had to be kept hidden at all times. As a rule, people don't have tails, and there was likely to be talk if the Bolds' were spotted swishing about all over the place.

They also discovered they looked far more human-like if they wore hats (as well as