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Opening extract from

Casper Candlewacks in Death by Pigeon!

Written by

Ivan Brett

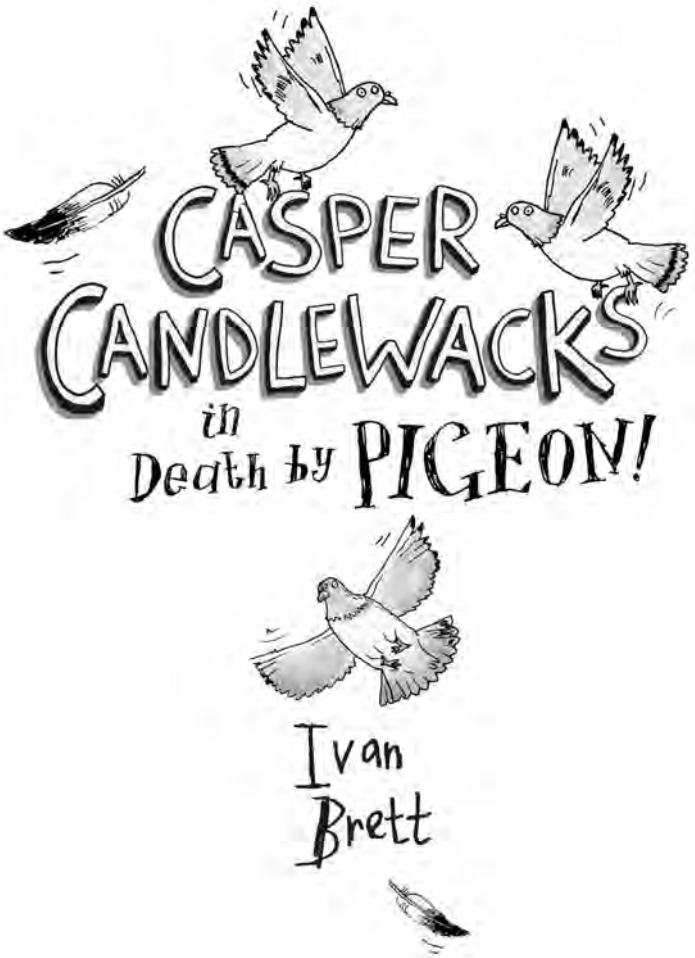
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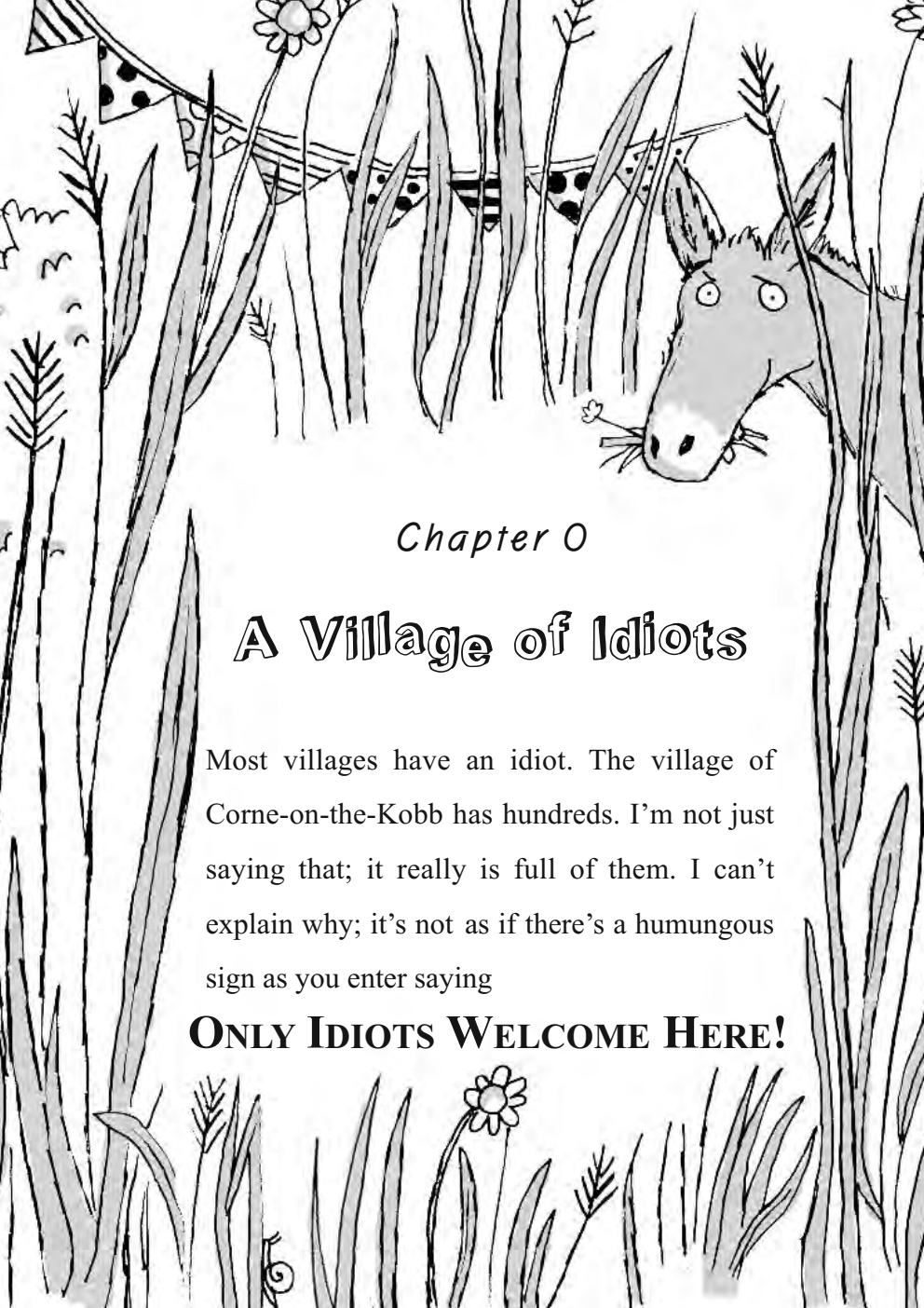
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TO HIGH KOBB
N
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SKOOL
SLOW CHILDREN
THE HORSE & HORSE
THE BOILED SPROUT
DONKEYS
VILLAGE SQUARE
MENU
PIGEONS
DONKEY STOP
RIVER KOBB
THIS WATER IS WET
CORNE-SHOP
OAK TREE
CRACKLIN CRESCENT
CORNE
-ON-THE-
KOBB
DRIVE DONKEYS SLOWLY


HERE BE WOLVES
THE HILLS
VILLAGE HALL
LONG LOST DRIVE
BLIGHT MANOR
THE PARK
ONE WAY
ONE WAY
FEETE ST
THE candlewacks' HOUSE
LAMP'S HOUSE
RUBBISH TIP
To UPPER crustenbury





Chapter 0

A Village of Idiots

Most villages have an idiot. The village of Corne-on-the-Kobb has hundreds. I'm not just saying that; it really is full of them. I can't explain why; it's not as if there's a humungous sign as you enter saying

ONLY IDIOTS WELCOME HERE!

It's not as if there's anything particularly idiotic in the village that attracts them there, apart from other idiots, of course. It's just a fact: there is a higher concentration of idiots in Corne-on-the-Kobb than in other, less idiotically populated areas.

"But," you might ask, "what exactly *is* an idiot?" Well, the answer is as simple as the idiots themselves. An idiot is someone who talks at the people on the telly and wonders why they don't respond; someone who thinks the world's gone all dark every time they close their eyes; someone who thinks Shepherd's Pie is made of real shepherds. You get the idea. But shepherds and their pies aside, Corne-on-the-Kobb isn't exactly famous for its geniuses. Keep this fact safely stuffed inside your brain at all times when reading this tale – it might make the whole thing just that little bit easier to understand.



Of course, there is an exception to every rule, and in this case the exception's name is Casper Candlewacks. He isn't an idiot, which is really lucky because, by some strange stroke of fate, he turns out to be the hero of the story, and no one wants an idiot as their main character, do they? Well, they might, but their story would end rather soon, with the hero glued to the ceiling or dangling off a cliff, and that wouldn't make for a very good book.





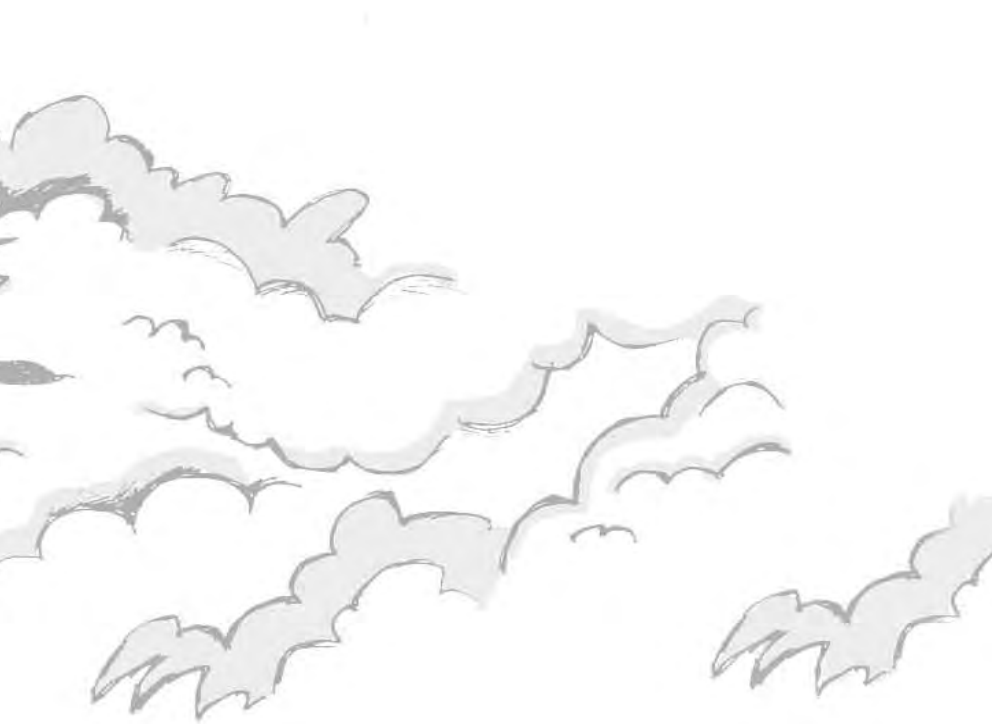
Chapter 1

The Odd One Out

This was it. His moment.

"Casper."





He stood, rapier blade in hand, face to face with the vile beast. Their eyes locked; the air around them fell still.

"Casper?" *It bared its savage teeth, tail flickering menacingly, but Casper was ready. And then, it pounced.*

"Casper Candlewacks, WAKE UP!"

Casper awoke with a snort and shot upright, losing his balance and sending books and pens flying across the classroom as he tipped too far backward and clattered, along with his chair, to the floor. The rest of Class 6 exploded with riotous laughter, but Mrs Snagg was less than amused.



"How *dare* you sleep in my classroom!" yelled Casper's teacher, her spiky hair bristling threateningly.



"I'm awake, miss!"



"Well, *stay awake,* boy," shouted Mrs Snagg, "or I'll glue your eyelids open myself."

"Sorry, miss." Casper was too embarrassed to want to get up ever again. The class giggled and someone threw a rubber at him.





Mrs Snagg snarled. “Now pick yourself up and get back to your desk!”

Casper did as he was told, blushing like an embarrassed plum and wishing he were still asleep. He plonked himself at his desk as his classmates sniggered and pointed, and slumped his head in his hands. He was awake again: back in the boring old world full of idiots, homework and falling off chairs.

Casper Candlewacks was an eleven-year-old boy with a wild imagination and a scruffy crop of wild



blond hair in which many pencils and woodland creatures had been lost. He liked log flumes, goblins and helicopter gunships. He didn’t like girls, geography, or killer robots. His favourite food was spaghetti bolognese with chips, and his favourite animal was an ocelot. In other words, he was a pretty ordinary boy by our standards. But that was

the problem. In a village where *ordinary* was thinking that eggs came from eggplants, Casper Candlewacks was far from ordinary. The people of Corne-on-the-Kobb didn't like Casper because he was different. He could do joined-up handwriting, he knew his times tables, he even understood French. Those things scared the villagers, and so they either ignored Casper or blamed him for things.

Casper twizzled a finger in his hair and looked out of the window. It was the dawn of summer: the sun was out, the flowers were in bloom and the little lambs were frolicking in faraway grassy meadows like tiny frolicking flumps of wool in a massive salad. But Thursday afternoons meant double geography, and so summer would have to wait.

"Now, class," squawked Mrs Snagg, rapping the board rubber loudly on her desk, making a bang

so shocking that little Teresa Louncher let out a terrified squeak. Casper watched his teacher, Mrs Snagg, as she surveyed the classroom. She reminded Casper of a hedgehog in a flowery dress. She had little black beady eyes that were always watching you when you thought they weren't, and a voice like a fire alarm. Not even one of those new soothing fire alarms that play nice relaxing ditties about how great it'll be once you escape the burning building, oh no. Mrs Snagg's voice was like an old-fashioned screechy fire alarm that made your eardrums give up on hearing and apply for a job in your pancreas, where it's quieter and there's a better pension plan. She liked to fill in other people's crosswords with the wrong words in permanent pen, and she hated all boys, especially ones called Casper Candlewacks.

Now that Mrs Snagg had the attention of the class,



she continued. “Today, instead of geography, we’ve got a very special art class. Now I’m sure you’re all awfully excited about The Great Tiramisu’s visit to our village tomorrow night, so to celebrate, we’ll be drawing pictures of him to put on the wall!”

Casper groaned. But for the rest of the children of Class 6, this announcement was about as exciting as disco-dancing squirrels. Celebratory cheers rang out, fireworks were let off and some small children were thrown into the air.

“Drawing instead of joglaphy? This is better than Christmiss!” declared a buoyant Ted Treadington.

Teresa Louncher was equally excited. “I’m gunna draw him with felt-tips!” she said.

For Casper, life had reached its lowest possible point. Normally, drawing would be a brilliant replacement for any real schoolwork, but even the



most sleepifyingly dull geography lesson seemed better than having to draw that wand-wielding, pizza-guzzling fop. The Great Tiramisu was all that anyone had talked about for weeks, and it was getting right on Casper's nerves. Yes, he could pull a badger out of a hat, but who couldn't? And of course he had once made the entire population of Norway disappear, and reappear in Belgium, but who wants to see that anyway? Certainly not the Belgians – they didn't have enough space or waffles to go



round, and the whole thing ended in quite a considerable war. Casper had seen The Great Tiramisu on TV – he was snooty, arrogant and his hair was too shiny. He said things like "*Mamma Mia!*" and applauded himself after each magic trick. Everything from his long, swizzly moustache to his cheesy Italian accent annoyed Casper almost enough to put him off a bowl of cheesy Italian spaghetti bolognese with chips. How could no one else see that? The villagers of Corne-on-the-Kobb loved The Great Tiramisu like he was giving out free chocolate cake, and it just didn't make sense. Casper solemnly refused to spend the next two hours drawing someone he'd much rather spend the next two hours firing angry gerbils at, with an angry gerbil gun.

"What's wrong, Casper?" said the class bully and teacher's pet, Anemonie Blight, who was already

halfway through her pink drawing, entitled 'The Grate Terimisew'. "Forgotten how to use your hands?" The other girls laughed, but not because it was funny. If you didn't laugh at one of Anemonie's jokes, she'd probably bite you later.

Casper's face went red. "No, I just don't want to draw him, that's all."

"Miss! Miss!" cried Anemonie.

Mrs Snagg, angered after being distracted from her copy of *Hunks in Trunks* by some whingeing, snotty-faced child, saw that it was Anemonie Blight and smiled as sweetly as her sour old face would let her.

"What's bothering you, my huggypumpkin?"

"Casper isn't doing the work, miss." Anemonie shot a dirty look over at Casper, which stung as it hit him. "He's not drawing The Great Tiramisu."

Mrs Snagg peered poisonously at Casper with her little beady eyes. “Is this true, boy?”

“No, miss.” Casper looked down at his blank piece of paper. “I’m just… drawing him in white.”

“That’s a lie, miss,” said Anemonie. “He said the work was stupid and he hated drawing and then he hit me and stole my pink pencil.”

“What? I didn’t!”

Mrs Snagg drew in a deep breath and puffed up her chest. “Too good for drawing, are we, Candlewacks? In that case, you’ll write five pages on why The Great Tiramisu is such a wonderful man and an inspiration to us all.”

Anemonie and the others guffawed, as Casper recoiled from the blow. “But, miss—” he started.

“Shut up!” said Mrs Snagg, her shrill tones reverberating nauseatingly around the classroom like

the screech of a badly played clarinet. “You start writing.”

Casper turned to look at Anemonie. He despised that little brat, with her long brown hair and squinty eyes, and that little pointy nose just like her mother’s. She had corrected her title to ‘The Grait Tiremesoo’, and was now defacing Teresa Louncher’s drawing with her scissors and eyeliner pencil. Casper didn’t think he was too good for drawing. He loved drawing good stuff, like log flumes, goblins and helicopter gunships. But The Great Tiramisu wasn’t good stuff, and he didn’t deserve to be drawn.

The clock had ticked itself along happily, like a time bomb, but in the other direction and with no explosions. In the last two hours Casper had climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, slain a fire-breathing dragon and landed a fighter plane behind enemy lines, but he had



most definitely not finished his work. Most of Class 6 were adding the finishing touches to their pictures. Anemonie Blight looked most proud of her creation (she had used eyeliner and lip gloss, with dried pasta for the legs), but Lamp Flannigan, who had forgotten the legs completely, was now frantically taping on an extra piece of paper to make space for them. So when Mrs Snagg rose from her desk and shouted "Time's up!" Casper looked at the clock, and then down at his paper, and then up at the clock again, and then down at his paper again, with horror. He'd written two and a half words! They were good words, but that didn't matter. 'I like Th' was not five pages. It wasn't even close, unless he had written in really big writing, or used tiny paper, but he hadn't done either. If Mrs Snagg saw that he hadn't completed his punishment, he'd be in all flavours of trouble.



Casper scoured his desk for anything that might pass for his completed punishment. Finding a piece of last week's homework, he scrubbed out the title ('Where is Brazil, and Why?') and replaced it with 'Why The Great Tiramisu is such a wonderful man and an inspiration to us all'. Casper shuffled to the front of the class and handed the paper to Mrs Snagg. The whole class went silent – silent as a mouse that had lost its voice and didn't even have anything to say anyway. Anemonie stopped pulling Teresa Louncher's hair for a moment and watched intently.

Mrs Snagg pored over the first page, blinking slowly. (She couldn't actually read, so she just pretended to.) She turned the paper over, nodded and put a little tick next to a map of Brazil. She skipped to the third page, and then the fourth, and then stopped, and looked up quizzically at Casper.

“Didn’t I say five pages, Candlewacks?”

Casper looked down at his work and swallowed. His homework was only four pages long. “Miss, I…”

“And how many did you write?” Mrs Snagg’s spiky face grew redder, her whole upper body began to prickle.

“Four, miss.”

“And what do we say about laziness, Candlewacks?” An onlooker might have been worried that this woman was about to explode all over the room, or at least puncture and deflate like a soggy balloon.

“Miss…”

“What do we say?” spat Mrs Snagg, face now an impressive shade of purple.

Casper’s stomach knotted with embarrassment as he mumbled out the much-repeated rhyme: “‘Lazy

boys will get no toys; idle girls won't marry Earls', miss."

"And you," she pointed her grubby old finger at Casper, "are lazy. You'll write me ten pages on 'Why I will neither get any toys nor marry any Earls', for tomorrow morning."

This was incredibly unfair. "Miss!" said Casper. "This is incredibly unfair."

"Don't answer back," Mrs Snagg shook as she shouted. "Fifteen pages."

"What?"

"Fine, Twenty."

"I didn't even—"

"Twenty-five! Now go!"

