Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Atticus Claw Breaks the Law

Written by

Jennifer Gray

Published by

Faber and Faber

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Atticus Claw Breaks the Law

Jennifer Gray used to be a barrister, so she knows how to spot a cat burglar when she sees one, especially when he's a large tabby with a chewed ear and a handkerchief round his neck that says Atticus Claw. Jennifer's other books include *Guinea Pigs On Line*, a comedy series co-written with Amanda Swift and published by Quercus. Jennifer lives in London and Scotland with her husband and four children, and of course Henry, a friendly but enigmatic cat.

Atticus Claw Breaks the Law



ff

faber and faber

First published in 2012
by Faber and Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House, 74–77 Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DA

Printed in England by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

All rights reserved
© Jennifer Gray, 2012
Illustrations © Mark Ecob, 2012

The right of Jennifer Gray to be identified
as author of this work has been asserted in accordance
with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs
and Patents Act 1988

*This book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent,
resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's
prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than
that in which it is published and without a similar
condition including this condition being
imposed on the subsequent
purchaser*

A CIP record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978–0–571–28449–8



2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

To my parents
With special thanks to Henry and Kirstin





Atticus Grammaticus Cattypuss Claw – the world's greatest cat burglar – was lying on a comfy bed in Monte Carlo when a messenger pigeon landed on the window ledge. Atticus opened one eye, then the other. Finally, with a yawn, he stretched lazily, jumped off the bed and padded over towards the window.

'Are you Claw?' The messenger pigeon said cautiously.

'Who's asking?' Atticus replied, examining his sharp talons.

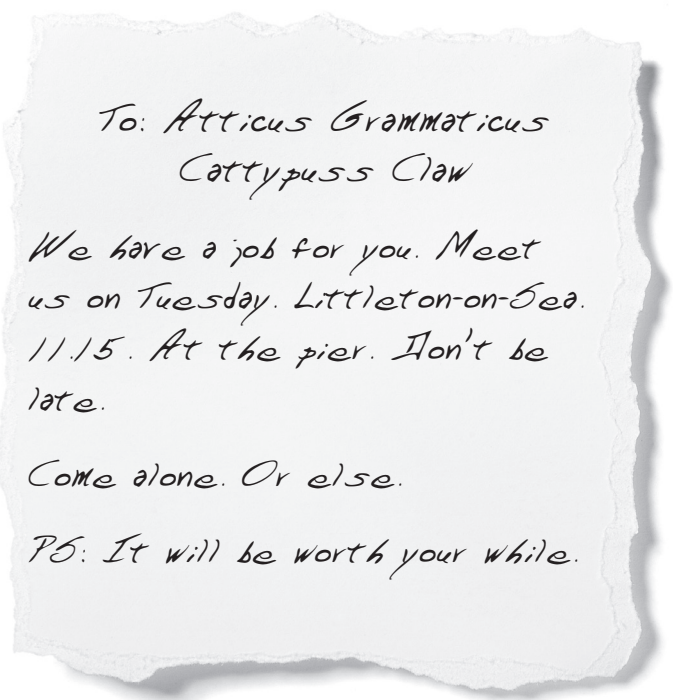
'Never you mind.' The pigeon shivered. He blinked at Atticus. He had been told to deliver the note to a brown-and-black-striped tabby with a chewed ear, four white socks and a red handkerchief with its name embroidered on it tied round its neck. He was sure he'd got the right cat. It looked a nasty

piece of work; but then most cats did as far as he was concerned. 'I've got a message for you.'

'Hand it over then,' Atticus purred, jumping on to a table and holding out a paw.

'No chance!' the pigeon sidled away from him along the ledge. Carefully, watching Atticus all the time with his beady eyes, he unclipped the tube containing the message from his leg and threw it on the table.

Atticus flipped off the lid, reached in with a claw and uncurled a tiny piece of paper. He stared at the message. It was in a strange scratchy writing he didn't recognise.



'Who gave you this?' Atticus demanded.

The pigeon looked frightened. 'I can't remember,' he cooed.

Suddenly Atticus pounced. His left paw pinned the pigeon's tail. 'Don't waste my time,' he hissed. 'I want to know who gave you this.'

The pigeon looked more frightened than ever. 'I can't say,' he squawked. 'They'll kill me if I do. And worse! You're not supposed to find out until you get there. Help! I'm in a tizzy!' The pigeon fainted.

Atticus let go. 'Hmmm,' he said, reading the message again. 'Interesting . . .' He glanced at the dazed bird. Pigeons always talked. Yet this one had kept its beak shut. Whoever had sent the message, Atticus decided, had certainly scared the poo out of the pigeon.

For a moment he hesitated, wondering what to do. Then he grinned. All cats like mysteries – that's why they're called 'curious'. And Atticus was no exception. In fact Atticus *loved* a mystery. Especially when he was at the centre of it.

The pigeon came to with a start. 'Well?' he trembled. 'What shall I tell them?'

'I'll be there,' Atticus said.

The pigeon looked relieved.

'Off you go, then.' With a sweep of his paw, Atticus pushed the startled bird off the ledge.

He watched it flap away. Then he padded down the stairs and went into the study. The computer was on. He tapped out the words *Littleton-on-Sea* expertly with his claws. A picture of a sleepy cobbled town next to a flat grey sea popped up on the screen. It didn't look much, Atticus thought. Not exactly the sort of place you'd expect a summer crime wave. But he could soon change that! Tapping away at the keyboard, it didn't take him long to work out exactly how he was going to get there. Then, without a backward glance, he slipped out of the cat flap, jumped on a train to the nearest port and boarded the next cruise ship to England.



At about the same time that Atticus Claw was talking to the messenger pigeon in Monte Carlo, three black-and-white birds with dark blue wings and jade-green tails flew down from the sky and landed by the side of the main road leading to Littleton-on-Sea. They were magpies.

They crowded round the limp body of a fourth bird, nudging it with their claws. The first magpie had a tuft of grass in its beak. The second one had a twig. The third hopped from one foot to the other, dipping his head and dangling a worm.

None of the birds spoke. The only sound was of the occasional car rushing by.

After a little while the first bird, the glossiest and sleekest of the three, with cruel glittering eyes to match, dropped his offering of grass beside the dead

bird's tail. He nodded to the others. 'You can begin the funeral now, Slasher,' he cawed quietly.

The second magpie, who was thin and scrawny with a hooked foot, hopped forwards and arranged the twig neatly beside the tuft of grass. 'Huh hum.' He cleared his throat and bowed his head. 'We are gathered here together,' he began, 'in the sight of the A1234, to say farewell to our dear friend, Beaky.'

The third magpie, who was fatter than the other two and had feathers missing from his tail, let out a sob.

'It's all right, Thug,' the first magpie put a consoling wing around his friend's heaving body. 'It's good to cry.'

'Beaky was truly one of us,' Slasher continued. 'He was mean and horrible and nasty. Everyone hated him. He helped give magpies the bad name we're so proud of. He stole eggs and scared baby birds. He woke people up at five o'clock in the morning with his awful voice—'

'—Chaka-chaka-chaka-chaka . . .' Thug managed a throaty chuckle between sobs.

'He loved bashing blackbirds and chasing chickens—' Slasher's voice was breaking. He wiped tears away with the black tip of his wing. 'He was an ex-





ample to us all. I'm sure I squawk for everyone when I say I'm going to miss him.' He hopped aside to make way for the first magpie. 'Now Jimmy will say a few words.'

'Thank you, Slasher; that was beautiful.' Jimmy Magpie preened his glossy feathers. His eyes glittered like diamonds. Looking down at the roadside, he addressed the dead bird in a solemn voice. 'You were our friend, Beaky – a valued member of the gang. We lived together, we fought together and we stole together.' He paused. 'Good times!' He let out a cry. 'Chaka-chaka-chaka-chaka-chaka.' It was harsher than Thug's – more of a battle cry. Then his voice hardened. 'Yours is the third funeral I've been to this year, Beaky. First Goon. Then Penguin. Now you. All squished by the side of the road. All mangled by murderers. All crushed by *cars*.' Suddenly he looked up sharply. 'Any more clues yet, Slasher? You were with him when he died.'

Slasher shifted uncomfortably. 'I'm sorry, Boss. All I know is that it was a Rolls-Royce. I didn't get the number plate. It all happened so fast.'

Jimmy Magpie glared at him menacingly before turning back to his task. 'As I was saying . . . Goon, Penguin and Beaky. All flattened like pancakes by our

sworn enemy . . . *humans*.' Jimmy Magpie spat the word out.

Slasher and Thug nodded. They had heard the speech before. At Goon's funeral. And Penguin's.

'But this time the death won't go unavenged,' Jimmy Magpie continued, his beak set. 'This time, we magpies are going to fight back.'

Thug and Slasher looked at one another, puzzled. This bit was new.

'What are we gonna do, Boss?' Slasher flexed his wings. 'I mean, I don't mind having a go at one but you've got to admit them humans are an awful lot bigger than us.'

'They may be bigger,' hissed Jimmy Magpie, 'but most of them are stupid.'

'Let's scare baby birds.' Thug's beak was twitching with excitement. 'Humans hate that!'

'That's hardly original, Thug, and it's the wrong time of year.' Jimmy Magpie sounded bored. 'Baby birds are born in spring. This is the summer, in case you haven't noticed.'

'What about waking them up at five o'clock in the morning with our beautiful singing?' Slasher suggested.

