



Clementine Rose gripped her pencil and stared at the page. Mrs Bottomley said that they should try to spell a word before asking for help. Clementine thought for a moment. Then, as neatly as she could, she wrote the letters *h-a-t-c-h*.

Mrs Bottomley was walking around the room inspecting everyone's work. She stopped beside Clementine's desk and squinted through her glasses.

‘Let me see what you’ve got there, Clementine. *The egg is going to hatch.* Where did you copy that from?’

Clementine shook her head. ‘I didn’t. I wrote it myself.’

Mrs Bottomley’s forehead puckered. ‘Come now, Clementine. Perhaps Astrid might have helped you?’ She smiled at the girl sitting behind Clemmie.

Clementine looked up at her teacher. ‘No, Mrs Bottomley. I sounded it out by myself.’

‘If you say so,’ the teacher replied, pursing her lips.

Clementine frowned. She wondered why Mrs Bottomley didn’t believe her. ‘May I go and see if anything’s happening?’ she asked.

‘Happening?’ Mrs Bottomley repeated. ‘Where?’

Clementine pointed. ‘Over there.’ Mrs Bottomley wasn’t very good at remembering things sometimes.

‘I think you should draw a picture first, and then you can have a look – although I don’t

imagine anything will have changed in the last few minutes.'

Clementine began to draw her illustration at the bottom of the page. She was trying to imagine what the chick would look like. She thought it would be fluffy and yellow, like the picture of a chick that was stuck up on the back wall.

Mrs Bottomley disappeared into the store-room. Clementine stood up and walked towards the incubator. It had been set up on a table at the back of the room by Poppy's father, Mr Bauer. It had glass sides and glaring lamps, and eight creamy eggs sitting inside.

'Come on, little chickens,' she whispered. 'Please come out soon.'

The eggs sat perfectly still.

Clementine hadn't noticed Angus standing behind her.

'I'm going to eat those eggs for breakfast tomorrow,' he said.

Clementine spun around. 'No, you can't! They're not breakfast eggs, they're chick eggs.'

‘They’re boring eggs,’ Angus sneered. ‘They don’t do anything.’

While Angus babbled on about his mother making an omelette, something caught Clementine’s attention.

She put her finger to her lips. ‘Shh! Look!’

‘There’s nothing hap—’ The boy stopped suddenly. ‘It just moved.’

Clementine and Angus watched as one of the little eggs rocked from side to side. They peered closer and then looked at each other and smiled.

‘Something’s coming out!’ Angus exclaimed.

‘Angus, Clementine, neither of you have finished your work,’ said Mrs Bottomley as she emerged from the storeroom. ‘I said that you could look at the eggs once your drawings were done.’

‘Mrs Bottomley,’ Clementine called. ‘One of the eggs is moving.’

The whole class stopped what they were doing and looked around.



‘Cool,’ said Joshua. He slid out of his seat and raced over.

‘Joshua Tribble, go back to your desk,’ Mrs Bottomley directed.

Clementine and Angus hadn’t moved. Their eyes were glued to the glass case.

‘There’s a beak, there’s a beak!’ Clementine shouted.

The rest of the class ran towards the incubator.

‘Sit down at once.’ Mrs Bottomley’s voice boomed, but she didn’t stand a chance against a mob of excited five-year-olds.

The head teacher, Miss Critchley, happened to be passing the classroom and looked in to see the children rushing around like a swarm of bees.

‘What’s going on in here?’ she asked cheerfully as she strode into the room.

‘Children, sit down!’ Mrs Bottomley demanded.

‘Miss Critchley, there’s a beak,’ Clementine shouted above the din.

‘All right, everyone, settle down.’ Miss Critchley’s voice was like honey. The children stopped their shouting at once. ‘You don’t want to frighten the chick, do you? Gather around. If you’re in the front, please kneel down so the people behind you can see.’

Mrs Bottomley harrumphed loudly and moved in behind Joshua.

The whole class was transfixed as the little egg shook and the tip of a beak broke through again.

‘It needs my dad’s saw,’ Joshua said.

‘I think it’s doing a wonderful job with its beak,’ said Miss Critchley, smiling. The little hole was spreading out to become a line around the middle of the egg.

‘As if a chicken would have a saw inside an egg. That’s stupid,’ said Angus.

Joshua poked out his tongue. ‘*You’re stu—*’

Miss Critchley interrupted the lads. ‘There’ll be no name-calling, thank you, boys. Let’s just see what happens.’

The children watched as the chick made

more cracks in the shell. They oohed and aahed as the tiny creature began to break free.

‘This is boring,’ Joshua complained. ‘How long does it take to get out of an egg?’

‘You could sit down and do your work,’ Mrs Bottomley suggested.

‘That’s more boring,’ said Joshua.

There was a loud gasp as the egg finally broke in two and a wet chick wobbled to its feet.

‘It’s brown,’ Angus said, clearly surprised.

‘Like Mrs Bottomley.’ Joshua laughed and turned around to look at his teacher. She was dressed in her usual uniform of brown shoes, brown stockings and a brown suit.

Clementine bit back a smile. She couldn’t remember seeing her teacher wear any other colour.

Mrs Bottomley simply raised her eyebrows and the grin slid from Joshua’s face.

‘Do you think the other chicks will hatch soon?’ Clementine asked.

Miss Critchley nodded. ‘Yes, they shouldn’t be too far behind.’

‘Will we be able to hold them?’ Sophie asked.

‘You have to be careful,’ said Poppy, ‘because they can get cold.’

Everyone knew that Poppy was an authority on animals, as she lived on a farm.

‘I’m gonna hold it first,’ Angus declared. ‘I saw it first.’

Astrid stared at the boy. ‘Clemmie saw it first. She should have first hold.’

‘Yes, I think that sounds fair,’ said Miss Critchley. She winked at Clementine.

‘Angus can go first if he wants to,’ Clementine said.

The boy shrugged. ‘It’s okay, you can go.’

Clementine smiled. Sometimes it was hard to believe that Angus was the same boy who had been so horrible to her at the start of the year.

‘I think we should give the chick a little while to get used to its surroundings,’ said Miss Critchley. ‘Why don’t you all head back to your desks and I’ll come around and have a look at your work.’

The children sped to their seats, eager to show their writing to the head teacher.

‘Mrs Bottomley, do you have any stickers?’ Miss Critchley asked.

Ethel Bottomley had a very large collection of stickers in the bottom of her desk drawer, but she used them sparingly.

‘I suppose you could have these.’ She pulled out a flat page of silver stars. The corners were slightly dog-eared.

Miss Critchley walked through the room admiring the children’s work and sprinkling each page with stars, much to Mrs Bottomley’s displeasure.

When she reached Clementine, Miss Critchley congratulated her on her efforts and suggested they sneak over to the incubator to see how the chick was getting on.

Clementine’s eyes widened as she looked at the little bird. ‘It’s fluffy!’

‘And I think it’s about to get a new friend.’ Miss Critchley pointed at another egg that was rocking gently. ‘Would you like to hold the chick now?’

Clementine nodded. She'd never held a newly hatched chick before.

Miss Critchley reached in and gently picked up the baby. She told Clementine to hold her hands open and then placed the chick inside.

'It's so soft.' Clementine's smile was wide and her eyes sparkled.

'What do you think we should call him or her?' Miss Critchley asked.

Clementine thought hard. 'I think it's a girl. Her feathers feel like the velvet material Mrs Mogg used to make me a winter dress. Could we call her Velvet?'

'I think that's perfect, Clemmie,' Miss Critchley declared. 'Hello Velvet.'