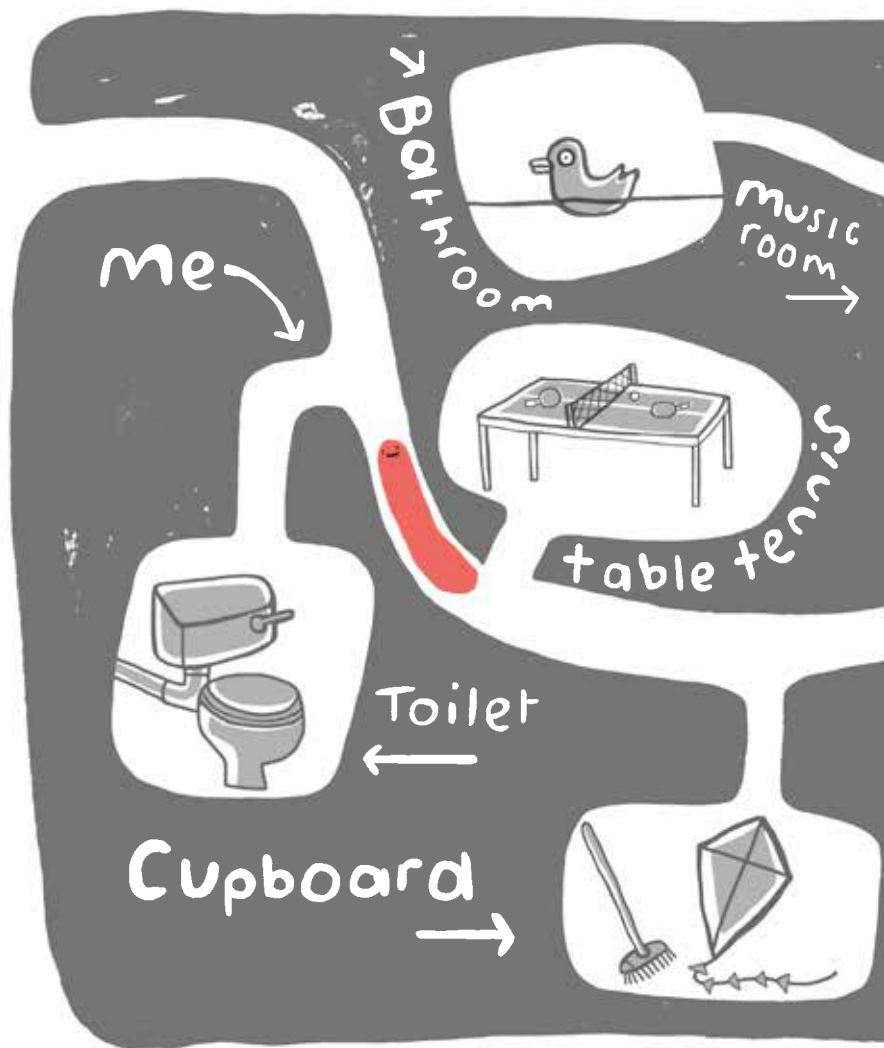


Chapter One



My name is Marcus.

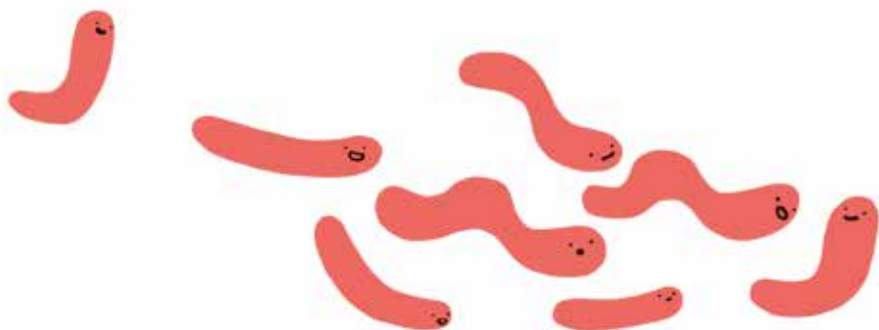
I am a worm and this is where I live.




My favourite colour is brown.

That's because mud is brown and I really,
really, really like mud.

My favourite things are other worms.






And my hobby is digging holes in the ground.
There is nothing I enjoy more than making a
complicated underground tunnel system.

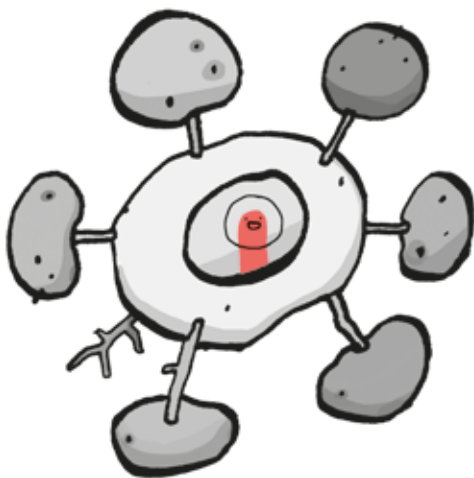
But when I met Laurence,
everything changed.

Let me tell you about
how I met him...



I was digging a hole, like I usually do (like all worms do), but I must have fallen asleep because the next thing that happened was that I was flying a spaceship in outer space.

The spaceship was made out of potatoes.



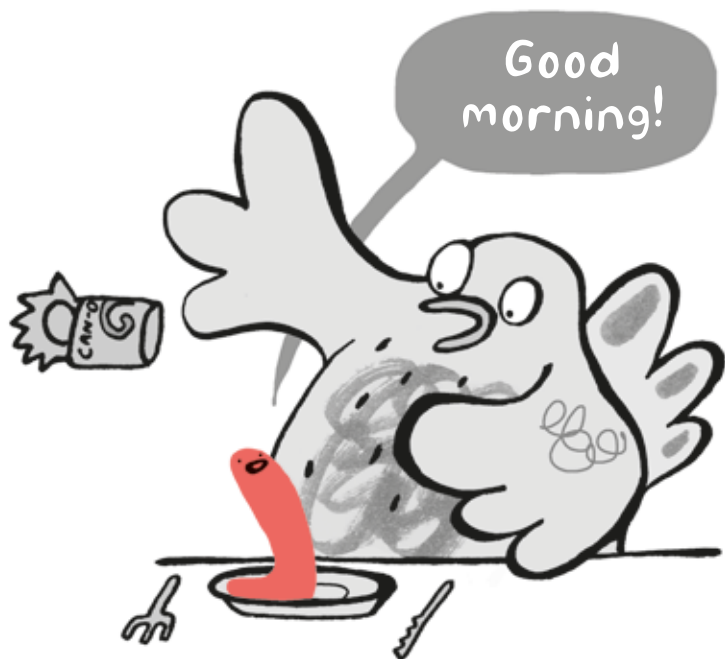
Then, I dreamt I fell out of a can into a cereal bowl. Staring at me was a scruffy, fat bird who looked a lot like a chicken. It was a really good dream until it got to the bird part. The bird had intense and menacing eyes.

The worst thing was that the last part of the dream wasn't a dream at all. I really had been in a can and there really was a big, fat bird staring at me!



What would you do if you were a worm and there was a bird two centimetres away from your face looking at you with his beak open so wide that you could see his tonsils?

Maybe you would do what I did. I smiled a big smile and said in my most cheerful voice,



The bird looked confused. He mumbled “Good morning” back and then opened his beak again with his head tilted at a slightly different angle.

Before he could eat me up, I shouted very

loudly and quickly, “MY NAME IS
MARCUS. MY FAVOURITE COLOUR
IS BROWN, AND MY HOBBY IS
DIGGING HOLES IN THE GROUND.

WHAT IS YOUR NAME AND DO YOU
HAVE A HOBBY, PLEASE, SIR?”

I added a “sir” at the end to be polite.

The bird seemed taken aback. He closed
his beak.

“My name is Laurence,” he said.

He was about to open his beak again. “AND
WHAT about hobbies?” I asked. “DO you have
a nice HOBBY, Laurence?”

Laurence sat down, looked at his fat belly
and then looked at me again. “No one’s ever
asked me that question before,” he said.



“Really? WELL take your TIME and make yourself COMFORTABLE,” I said, encouraging him to lie down on the sofa. I positioned myself a little bit closer to the window. “I’d love to hear all about your hobby. It is very, VERY interesting.”



I didn't mean to keep shouting, but I was scared and I didn't quite know what I was doing. Laurence didn't seem to notice. He obediently put his feet up.

"My hobby is travelling," he said.

"How fascinating!" I said, trying not to shout as much. "And where have you been to?"

Laurence thought for a while. "That's the problem," he explained. "I haven't been anywhere. I'm terrible at map-reading. I'd love to visit Kenya in Africa, but it's such a long way to fly, I would definitely need a map to get there."

I paused to try to give the impression that I was thinking deeply about what he was saying.



"Why ... Kenya?"

While he was thinking of his answer, I looked out of the window.

We were in
a birdhouse
in a tall tree.
The latch on
the window
was too high
for me to reach.
Even if I could
have reached
and pushed
the window
open, I wasn't
too keen on
wriggling down
the tree from
that height.
They didn't
teach us how
to do that at
worm school.



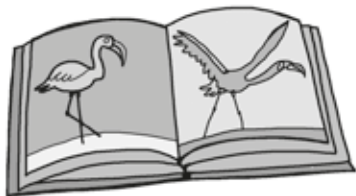
Laurence was looking at his belly again. Why did he keep looking at his stomach? Was it because it was large, or was it because he was hungry? I decided to keep talking to distract his mind from food thoughts. “Tell me what it is about Kenya that you love so much.”



Laurence sat up. “I’ll show you,” he said, reaching for a glossy travel book from a pile of books on the floor. He opened it. “This is the Maasai Mara National Reserve. Look at these



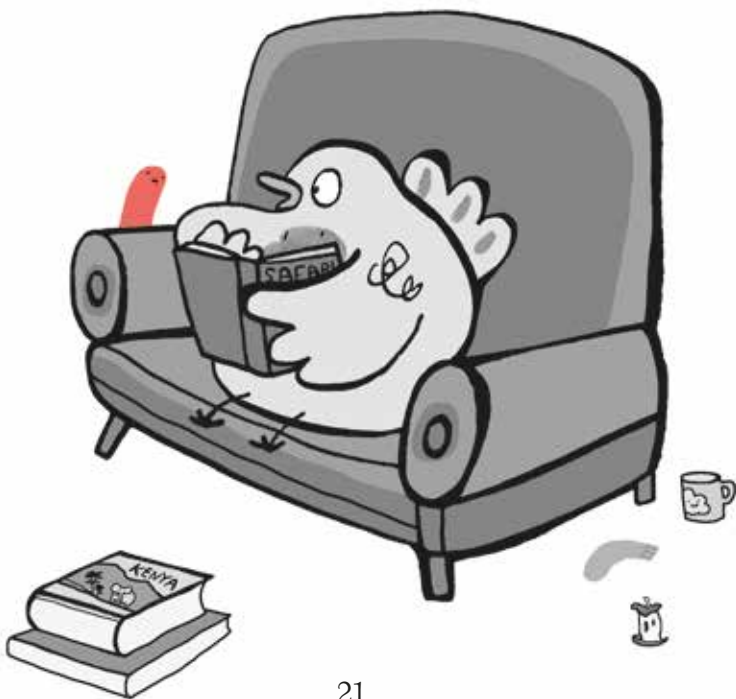
beautiful wide open plains. There are so many animals that live in the nature reserves in Kenya. You just don’t see animals like that around here.” Laurence flicked through pages with photographs of lions, elephants, zebras and wildebeest. He stopped at a page that had pictures of pink birds with skinny legs.



“*This*,” he said, slamming his wing on the page dramatically, “is why I need to go.” Laurence looked at me. “Do you see what I mean?”

“Hmm ... yes,” I said, nodding in agreement, pretending to understand what he meant.

“Thank you. I’m glad that you see it too – that I am actually a flamingo.”



“A flamingo,” I repeated firmly, trying my best not to laugh out loud. Laurence doesn’t look anything like a flamingo.



He looks like a chicken.

LAURENCE



“I don’t belong here with ordinary birds. I belong *here*,” he paused to read the caption at the bottom of the photograph, “in the Lake Nakuru National Park, with other flamingos. That is my real home, and it is the only place where I can be truly happy.” He slammed the book shut and clasped his wings together.

The thing that stopped me from laughing at Laurence was the fact that I was in a very bad situation. At any moment he would remember how hungry he was and slurp me up like a piece of spaghetti. I needed to use every part of my worm brain to come up with a cunning plan to escape from the birdhouse.

MY WORM BRAIN



Instead, I accidentally blurted out my worst fear:

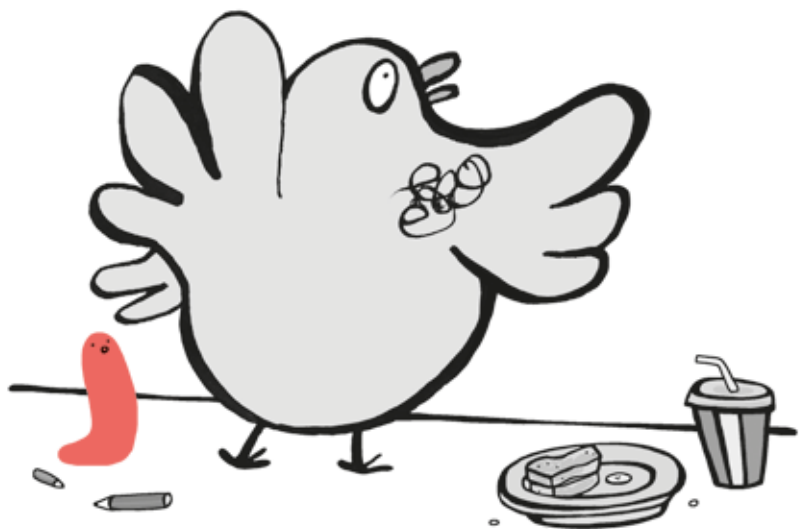


“Probably not,” said Laurence, sighing. “It feels funny eating you for breakfast now that we’ve had a conversation.”

I almost felt relieved at this, but I was not reassured by Laurence’s use of the word probably. Keeping the conversation going seemed like a good idea.

“What’s to stop you flying to that park in Lake Nakuru?” I asked.

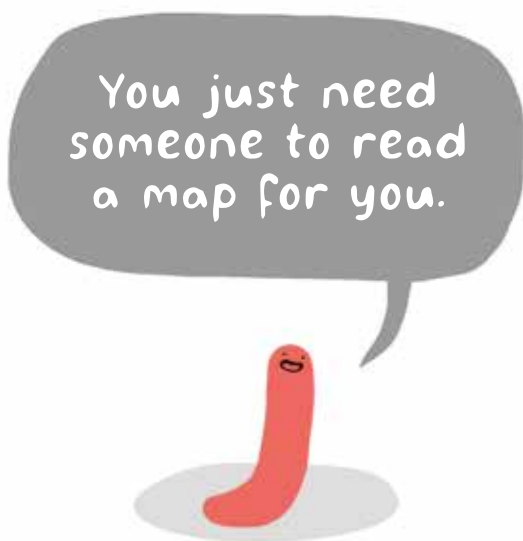
“I told you, I can’t read a map. I don’t know the way,” said Laurence, standing up and facing the wall, unable to meet my eyes.



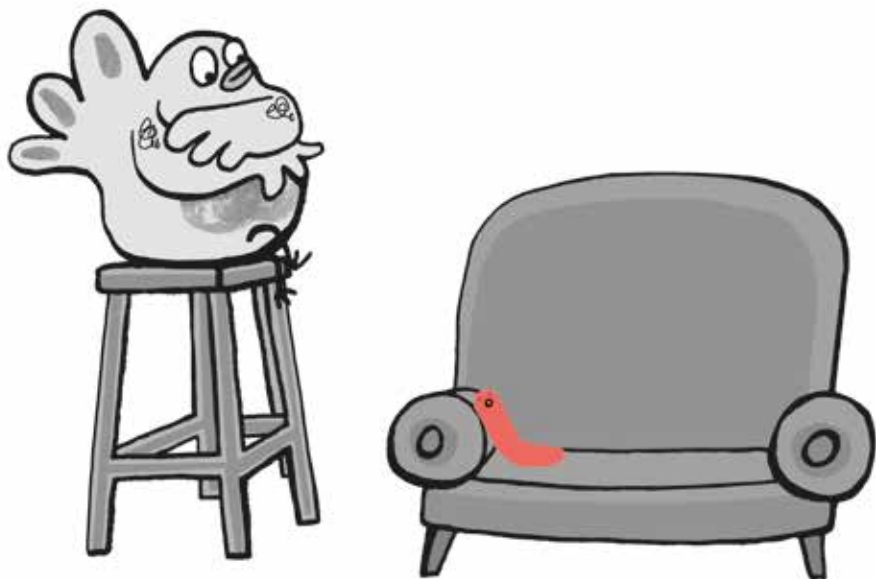
I wriggled on the floor to where he stood and said softly, “Laurence, you must follow your dreams. If Lake Nakuru is where you belong, then surely there will be a way for you to fly there... There will be a way.”

It suddenly felt like we were in a film. It was an excellent film.

If Laurence did fly to Kenya, then he wouldn't be able to eat me for breakfast or lunch or dinner. "There must be a way," I continued.



Laurence sighed, then looked at me with those intense eyes. "Tell me about your hobby again," he said, beckoning me to sit on the sofa.



“Umm...” I was a bit worried about the look in his eyes but thought it might be best to keep talking. “I like digging holes in the mud. It’s very relaxing, and I make escape tunnels to interesting places, like near a tree so that I can eat apples that have fallen on the ground, or near the compost heap, which is fun, it’s a bit like going to the beach and—”



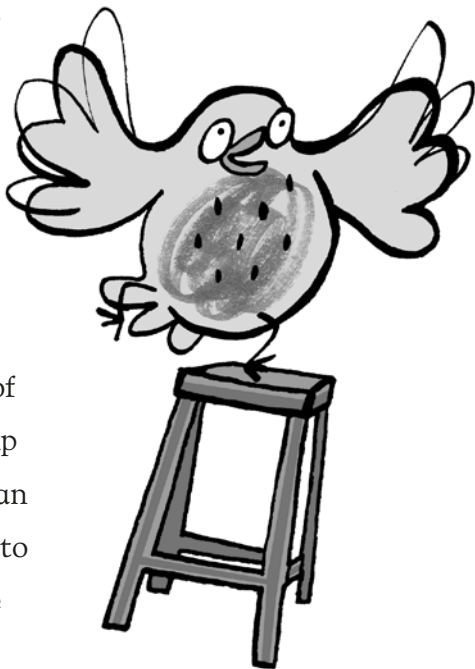
“Don’t you get lost when you’re underground?” asked Laurence, interrupting me. “It must be quite dark down there.”

“No. I always know where I am. I just kind of feel it.”

“That’s THAT, then!” said Laurence, triumphantly laughing and clapping his wings together.

“What’s WHAT?” I asked, feeling quite worried again.

“You, Marcus, with your funny ideas and marvellous sense of direction – you can help me fly to Kenya. You can be the navigator! And to think that I almost ate you for breakfast—”





I was shouting again.

We were going to fly to Lake Nakuru National
Park.

I had no choice.

It was either that or be eaten for breakfast.