



As Mr Badger broke into the expensive Merc, two blue-tits inside the luxury saloon started calling out loud, like two rusty bed-springs. One bird sat on the dashboard, the other on the parcel-shelf at the rear. Mr Badger continued with his work with the wire coat-hanger, and was soon clambering into the driver's seat. The birds called out a few more times, then stopped, peering at Mr Badger in a worried way.

"That's better," said Mr Badger gruffly. "Too much bloody noise for a small set of birds, that's my view." He said "bloody", and not anything coarser, because he was, at heart, a kindly badger and did not like upsetting small birds. He stretched under the steering-wheel and fiddled with some wiring. The blue-tits could not see what he did, but in seconds, they heard the powerful engine spring to life. "That's the bloody business," grumbled Mr Badger in a satisfied manner. He settled behind the wheel, adjusted the mirror, and swung the car out into the main thoroughfare.

The blue-tit at the back thought it best to make some more noise like a squeaky spring, and then gave up. The one at the front, now perched on the rear-view mirror and hanging on tight as Mr Badger swung the car easily round corners, sighed.

"You too, then?" said the bird, cocking an eye at the badger.

"What d'you mean?" asked Mr Badger, suspiciously.

"Down on your luck, I mean," said the blue-tit. "Like us. After they came and took the wood from us?"

Mr Badger grunted and pretended to concentrate on the road ahead. It was too painful to talk about. The bloody humans came and took their wood away from them. "Who do you think you are?" they demanded, "Do you think you own the place?" they wanted to know, "Who do you think you're bloody talking to?" they asked when the animals tried to ask what was happening with all the bulldozers and chain-saws, except they didn't say "bloody", they said something far worse. And took the wood away without waiting for any answers. Because the animals of the wood did not really know who they were talking to, not having been introduced formally, and yes, they thought they owned the place, but were surprised at the question even being asked, and they thought they were the animals, but felt that if someone needed to ask, then a more precise answer was required. And so the wood was chopped down and ripped up, and the bloody humans started to lay concrete and tarmac and build "Wildlife World" where the wood once stood, and conservative expectations were of up to 10,000 visitors in the first year.

The blue-tit nodded, and his friend from the back shelf came and joined him. "Yep, just like us, then, pal," he said. "Down on our luck. The only job we could get was car-alarms. Demeaning labour - fifteen hours a day sitting in their cars, on the off-chance someone might steal something. But there's nothing else out there, and we've got to eat." His friend nodded and cleaned his beak viciously on the stalk of the mirror. "Got to eat," repeated the first blue-tit.

Mr Badger eyed the two birds and felt kind of protective. "Aye, got to bloody eat, haven't we?" he agreed. "Like me - stealing this car to order - got to get it to Newcastle before the nine o'clock ferry to Belgium. You coming with me?" he asked, "Or will I let you off here?"

The blue-tits squeaked a couple of times. "No, what the heck!" they said, "We'll come along - nothing to lose. Must have lost the contract anyway."

"Sorry, boys," said the badger in a kindly manner.

“No, not your fault, pal,” said the first blue-tit, “Just the situation we’re all in, eh?”

“Could be worse,” said his small friend. “You heard about the heron?”

The first blue-tit groaned.

Mr Badger glanced at them quickly as he powered the Merc on to the motorway, and wove out on to the outside lane. “What’s with the heron, then?” he inquired, keeping his eyes on the mirror, in case of the Filth. He remembered the heron - strange bloody fellow, kept himself to himself. But the two of them never got in each other’s way.

“He was hit hard after they covered over the river - had to get a job working in the pet-food department at Wildlife World,” said the blue-tit in a glum tone. “You know - biscuits for dogs, treats for cats, specialised seeds for robins and wrens and finches...”

“Specialised, my foot!” exclaimed the first blue-tit. “Specialised in the sense of costing lots of money for nothing!”

“Now, don’t get yourself worked up, Dale,” said the second blue-tit. “We’ve been through all this. Let me just tell Mr Badger about the heron.”

The first blue-tit ruffled his feathers vigorously, and subsided.

“So anyway, they put him in charge of that. And he does all right, shifts his monthly target of bones and biscuits and packs of seed. Then they say, right, we’re branching out into the specialty market, they say. And what do they get him doing? Carrion for the vultures and condors, gobbets of goodness-knows-what for pet crocodiles, sacks of bleeding stuff for domesticated hyenas. Poor guy, he can’t stand it, but he can’t leave: he’s got three kids at school...”

Mr Badger shook his head silently. “Bloody humans,” he muttered, clenching the steering-wheel, and, against his better judgement, cutting up a boy-racer in a souped-up Ford. “Poor Mr bloody Heron,” he murmured, tears pricking his eyes.

“They’ve done us all in, haven’t they, Chip?” squeaked the first blue-tit, “They’ve been and gone and done us all in!! It makes you want to end it all, just fly out the window and be done with it...”

The blue-tit hopped over to the passenger-door and pecked blindly at the window.

“Here, old friend,” said Mr Badger quickly, “You don’t want to be doing that. Listen, I’ve been hearing things about Mr Hedgehog that might interest you.”

“Mr Hedgehog?” asked Dale. “Here, don’t make me laugh out loud! He doesn’t know whether he’s coming or going! Anyway, he’s down at Wildlife World, too - looking after the Insecticide Section, if the stories are true...”

Mr Badger nodded sagely, as he powered the Merc up to the ton and steered it effortlessly towards Newcastle Docks. “Old Fuzzy might not look too bright. But he’s been studying humans at their own game this past couple of months. And he’s on the brink of Something Big...”

The blue-tits bounced up and down. “What then?” they asked breathlessly.

“He’s developed anti-car pellets,” announced Mr Badger.

There was a stunned silence.

“What?” asked Chip after a few moments. “You mean like those nasty blue anti-slug pellets that my mum told me not to eat? That kind of thing?”

Mr Badger pursed his lips and winked. “Just like that, young nipper,” he said. “Only they’re anti-car. And bright green. Does away with bloody cars once and for all.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Dale, all chirpy once more. “And do they work?”

Mr Badger looked severely at the blue-tit, before speeding through an amber light as he entered the docks. “Do they bloody work? he asks!” He laughed in a hollow manner. “Do they just work? Well, let’s say we tried them out two nights ago in one street, and there’s no car to be seen now. All gone. Vamoosed.”

“All gone?!” shouted Chip. “You mean - gone gone?”

“Exactly that, my fine feathered friend,” confirmed Mr Badger. “Mr Hedgehog and me, we puts down them green pellets, one under every bloody car we can find. And scarper fast, obviously. Went back last night - not a car to be seen.”

The blue-tits squeaked dementedly. Mr Badger turned the wheel in one powerful paw and cruised to a halt beside a peeling portacabin with a hand-written label announcing it to be the worldwide headquarters of “All-Russia Import-Export SA”.

“Yes, I think we’ll pay Old Fuzzy a visit when we get back,” mused Mr Badger as he hand the keys of the Merc to a rather grubby-looking man. “What do you say, boys?”

The blue-tits squeaked and squeaked. So much did they squeak that the proprietor of the Import-Export empire offered them a job on the spot, as permanent security-guards to his compound. But Mr Badger guided the blue-tits safely away, and they set off, back to Wildlife World and Mr Hedgehog’s promising green pellets.

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