

The X-rated Parrot

Nelson was becoming a problem. What he had just suggested to the ladies from the Monday book club had sent them skittering home early.

Mavis shook her head as she surveyed the barely touched cups of tea on her front-room coffee table. Someone had even left their gloves behind in the scramble for the door. She looked at Nelson again as he nudged his beak deep between his feathers, and wondered if her pet parrot had any idea of the havoc he had just caused.

Who was teaching him to say such terrible things? It definitely wasn't her and she was sure it wasn't Alec. She thought of her mild-mannered, gentle husband. He couldn't abide foul-mouthed people.

So, who was feeding Nelson these titbits?

As if sensing he was at the centre of his owner's thoughts, Nelson raised his head and blinked his little eyes at her.

"Pretty Mavis," he said, and bobbed up and down.

"It's a bit late for sweet-talking me, Nelson," Mavis reproached him.

"Unless you behave, it's the spare room for you."

Nelson made a little squawking noise, as if in protest.

Mavis didn't want to move him from the front-room, but his language was getting beyond a joke.

Someone was teaching Nelson bad ways and she was going to get to the bottom of it.

At tea-time, Mavis looked at her 'butter wouldn't melt in her mouth' granddaughter and said, hesitantly, "Jessica, have you been teaching Nelson any new words?"

"Words?" the little girl said, pausing as she nibbled the icing delicately off the top of her fairy cake.

"Yes, Jessica. Bad words."

Jessica's face brightened. "Am I allowed to do that?" She started to get up out of her chair.

"No," Mavis said hurriedly, gently shepherding her to sit back down again. "I didn't mean you **could** teach Nelson bad words. I just wondered if you had."

"No, Granny," Jessica said, "All I've taught him is nursery rhymes."

As if on cue Nelson started to recite 'Baa Baa Black Sheep.' Mavis and her granddaughter both laughed as he swayed back and forth, splaying out his tail feathers in a little flourish.

Then, he ruined it all with an expletive or two, causing Mavis to clamp her hands very quickly over Jessica's ears.

When Mavis's son, Tony, called round later, he tempted Nelson out of his cage and soon, the parrot was sitting on his arm. Now and again, Nelson did a delighted little shimmy as Tony talked to him about his day.

All very innocent, but what did they talk about when Mavis wasn't there, she wondered.

Mavis made an excuse about needing to bring in the washing from the back garden and, after a couple of minutes lingering outside, positively sprinted back into the front-room to see if she could catch Tony at it.

But he was only telling Nelson about his new car.

Tony gave his mother, who was now clutching her side after her exertions, a quizzical look.

“Someone’s been teaching Nelson bad language.” Mavis said, struggling to get her breath back. “I was just eliminating you from my enquiries.”

“You sound like you’re in an episode of *The Bill*,” Tony laughed and nodded at Nelson. “Or do I mean *The Beak*?”

As the rest of the week went by, Mavis was no nearer to solving the mystery of her X-rated parrot.

On Friday, after Nelson had said something particularly embarrassing to the man who came to mend the boiler, Mavis tackled Alec about moving the parrot into the spare room.

Her husband lowered his newspaper slowly, and looked across at Nelson, who was tearing at a piece of spinach held firmly in one claw.

“But he’s so contented here, Mave,” he protested. “He’s always loved the company.”

Mavis couldn’t help noticing there was a certain moistness about Alec’s eyes, and she was about to put her hand on his arm when Nelson let rip with a stream of expletives that left them both open-mouthed.

“OK,” Alec said folding up his paper, morosely, “You’re right. When we come back from the cinema, we’ll move him. “

They were both quiet as they got ready for their regular Friday trip into town. Normally they’d chat away about the film they were going to see and where they fancied eating afterwards, but not tonight.

Alec went to start the car, as Mavis pulled the curtains in the front room and made sure Nelson was settled in his cage.

“See you later, Nelson,” she called as she left.

“Bye bye,” he squawked back.

Once or twice during the film Mavis had to ask Alec to stop fidgeting, but she couldn't concentrate on what was happening on the screen, either. She kept imagining Nelson sitting forlornly in the spare room over the coming weeks.

When the film finished, neither of them could face going for a meal.

They drove home in silence and, while Alec was putting the car into the garage, Mavis unlocked the front door of the house and went to check on Nelson.

She stopped, frozen in the hallway by a torrent of swearing.

But it wasn't Nelson who was speaking.

She knew that voice.

As she pushed open the front room door, her suspicions were confirmed.

The TV was on, and there on the screen was the chef who was as famous for his bad language as he was for his cooking.

“Well, would you look at that,” Alec said, coming into the room. “The clever devil's been switching on the TV while we've been out.”

As if to confirm it, Nelson suddenly leapt out of the cage and used his beak to turn off the TV.

“Well, at least we’ve solved the mystery of who’s been leading him astray,” Mavis said feeling a little guilty at having suspected her innocent family.

Three weeks later, Nelson’s language was much improved thanks to the holiday programmes they left on to keep him company when they went out.

He was becoming quite an expert on the Greek Islands.

“Beautiful sunset,” he squawked, with no need at all for an expletive.

“Good boy, Nelson,” replied Mavis, with a smile.