

## Harold goes missing

It was a wet rainy day at the Wellington Zoo. Harold, the Hippopotamus was miserable. His cage was wet. There was water in his cage. There were pools of water everywhere. All day Harold had listened to the comments of the human animals with two legs who came to look and talk about him. They said the same things about him again and again.

Oh. He is fat. I am so sad he has left Africa. What does he eat? He is the only hippo in the zoo. Poor old hippo. He should never have left Africa. That is his real home.

Harold was so angry. He had no idea where Africa was. And why should he go there? He liked Wellington. Perhaps Africa did not exist. The monkey said Africa was near Auckland. The zebra was sure it was in Christchurch. His friend, the tall giraffe said he had looked across the harbour and he thought Africa was there. The meerkat said Africa must be in Australia. Harold had no idea where Africa was. Harold talked with the tiger. He grunted, and said that he thought Africa was in India. It was so confusing.

Harold became angry. So when his friends arrived to talk with him he stepped in a huge puddle and splashed dirty water over them.

The peacock was angry as his beautiful feathers turned brown. The white parrot watched her coat go brown too, and the zebra said in a sad voice,

“The mud has covered all my stripes. How will the children know I am a zebra?”

Harold, the Hippopotamus liked the rain and mud. He thought it was fun, as he loved to hide in the water and walk in the mud.

But he was unhappy and began to sigh and moan.

“I am the only hippopotamus in Wellington. Its lonely”

Harold decided to run away. He didn't know where he would go, but he thought to himself, I will leave this zoo.

He waited until Keeper Peggy came to feed the animals. She was wearing a big red raincoat, blue gumboots, a strange looking hat and carrying an umbrella. She didn't even speak to him.

Harold was sad. He walked around the zoo and asked the other animals if they would like to leave the zoo with him. They all said “Yes,” but when Harold came to collect them at midnight, they had changed their minds.

The lion said, “I will go after breakfast”

The tall giraffe said, "I will go next week"

The monkey laughed, "Hee, hee, tricked you. I'm staying here for a feed of nuts and bananas"

The zebra said she had forgotten and she had to feed her children. The elephant was fast asleep. Harold tried to wake him, but he still stayed asleep.

Harold thought, I will go by myself. He began walking towards the front gate of the zoo. When he arrived he heard a big noise and saw a huge truck with many lights. He hid behind a tree and tried to hear what everyone was saying. It was difficult, as he did not understand human language and the people spoke very fast.

Harold watched from under the tree until all the people who were talking went inside an office. Harold came out from the tree and looked inside the truck. He saw a big open box, big enough to even hold the elephant. So he went inside it to have a look - it was beautiful. There was hay on the floor and water and many small boxes. Harold opened the boxes. They were full of lettuces and other green vegetables. He ate all the food in one box, in two boxes, in three boxes, in four boxes and from all the boxes. Afterwards he felt tired, lay down on the hay and went to sleep.

That night he had a long dream. He dreamed about the sound of a truck moving, the sound of a ship hooting as it left the harbour and then he thought he could hear the sound of waves. It was a lovely dream and Harold felt so happy. He slept and slept. Then he woke up.

His dream was still going on, but he was awake. He could hear the sounds of the waves and he could feel himself moving up and down and side-to-side as if he was on a ship.

What is happening thought Harold – why is my dream still there when I wake up? Then he went to sleep again and started dreaming again about the waves. All a sudden he heard a voice. He woke up and heard the voice again. He heard a shout as the door of the big box opened.

The voice got louder, and he heard shouts

" Look, there is a hippo in here. Get out. Shoo shoo"

Harold felt people poking sticks in him. He got up and growled and then walked out of the box.

"Get off my ship," shouted the voice,

Harold looked around. He was on a ship. How strange. He walked off the ship and said to himself, I am hungry, I want some food. He looked around saw some cabbages and green vegetables. So, he walked over to them and began eating. Yum, yum he thought, these are much nicer than the old cabbages he ate in Auckland zoo.

He was just eating cabbage number one hundred, when he felt someone poke him with a sharp stick and shout out loud. It was a small boy.

“Go away hippo and stop eating all my cabbages”

Harold looked at the little boy. He was all black, with beautiful shining skin and teeth. Then Harold heard another voice and he looked around. There was a woman with black shining skin wearing bright clothes. Harold was so surprised. Then he heard some people laughing. He looked around. There were black people everywhere. Where am I thought, Harold?

So he said to the little boy. “

“Is this the Auckland zoo?”

“No – you big fat hippopotamus, this is Africa.”

Harold was surprised “Africa, Africa, Africa – where is Africa, little boy? I thought this was Wellington’

The boy smiled at him and said he had never heard of Wellington.

“This is Africa –the place where wonderful animals were born – we have birds, crocodiles, elephants and big fat hippopotamuses, like you.”

\The boy laughed, gave Harold a big green vegetable and told him to eat it.

“Yummy” said Harold, “I would like another one. I will ask Keeper Peggy for another when I get home.”

The boy looked at him in a funny way and said he had never heard of Keeper Peggy. He showed Harold where the river was.

“There are green vegetables around there.,” he said.

Harold walked slowly towards the river, it was so big and he saw a flamingo, a crocodile and a wildebeest. They stared at him

“Aaaah, I have not seen you before, where are you from?”

None of the animals had heard about New Zealand or Wellington. He began eating all the green vegetables. Then he saw a small bird with a black beak and red feathers. It chirped at him

“ Hi Hippo – can I sleep on your back, it’s a hot day”

Harold did not know what to say, so he yawned and ate more cabbages. Soon he felt so full. He gave another big yawn and sank to the bottom of the river for a rest. When he work up to his surprise he was surrounded by other hippos.

“Who are you?” they grunted as they rose from the muddy water. .” You have not been here before. You’re a stranger”

“I’m from Wellington Zoo” murmured Harold with watery smile. He talked all about Wellington, the wind, the children and Keeper Peggy who gave him cabbages to eat.

One of the hippos looked at Harold and said with a sneer that she did not believe anybody would give a hippo cabbages and who was Keeper Peggy?

So Harold tried to explain. The hippo said she did not believe him, but she did like Harold and she asked if he would become her husband.

“We could have children and at night before they sleep you could tell them those fairy stories about that strange country called New Zealand, the imaginary Wellington Zoo and Keeper Peggy who gave you cabbages.”