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Opening extract from

# Aubrey and the Terrible Yoot

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DEDICATION

CHAPTER 1

# Rambunctious Boy

Aubrey's first scream was so loud it blew the wax out of his nurse's ears. All babies cry when they are born, but Aubrey's WAAAWWLL! was so fierce it also set off a doctor's car alarm.

She was an elderly nurse with a face like a kindly gargoyle. She washed him and wrapped him in a blanket.

'This child has the howl of a wolf!' the nurse exclaimed.

Aubrey took another breath and yowled so loudly he went purple. He kicked like mad too, catching the nurse a good hoof in the guts as she handed him to his mother.

'Guh!' she gasped. 'And he's...' she searched for the right word, unable to breathe until she found it, '...Rambunctious!'

The nurse could not remember the last



time she had said 'rambunctious' but she knew that it was an American word which means exactly what it sounds like. Blowing out ear wax, winding his midwife and setting off a car alarm were Aubrey's first rambunctious acts, and he achieved them in under a minute.

There is a theory that very small children subconsciously remember everything they hear. I don't know if it's true, but *Rambunctious! Wolf!* It might explain what happened next.



Next, when he was less than a year old, Aubrey saw someone running past the house where he lived with his parents. He decided it was time he ran, too. At his age wolf cubs can run marathons. Aubrey had barely learned how to stand.

Quick! he thought, get moving!

He jumped up, threw himself forward and flung out a leg, just like the runner. His body kept going forward but the leg gave up suddenly. The floor flipped up and bashed him. He tried again, many times...

## Bonk, bump, thump

...it was like listening to apples rolling off a table.

'That's Aubrey again, smashing the place up,' remarked Mr Ferraby with a grin, as the thuds and blows of Aubrey's running practice reverberated through Woodside Terrace. The Ferrabys lived next door. Mr Ferraby was an expert on the astonishing array of sounds Aubrey created

as he became bigger, stronger and more adventurous.

Aubrey's parents begged him to be patient.

'Please try walking first!' implored his mother, Suzanne. Suzanne was a nurse. She knew her son was tough but she was worried he would hurt himself.

'It's the traditional next step!' his father said. Jim was an English teacher who loved stories. He was secretly delighted that his son did not seem interested in following the normal story pattern of stand, then walk, then run.

The little boy ignored them both. He specialised in ignoring Jim and Suzanne. He loved them, but you can't spend too much time listening to your parents, not if you want to live to the limit.

'Live To The Limit' was Aubrey's philosophy at this point. Having a philosophy is a very good thing, especially if it leads you on a life-saving quest.



However, having a philosophy is not such a good thing if it leads you to crash two cars before you are old enough to drive one, which was Aubrey's next trick.

When he was four years old Aubrey thought it might be fun to take the car for a spin. He had often watched his parents driving: it was easy. One Sunday afternoon, when his father was upstairs sleeping under one of

FOOTNOTE: Aubrey's philosophy at this point is somewhere near Hedonism: live life for pleasure and excitement, nothing is more important. An ancient Greek genius called Democritus came up with the idea that contentment and happiness are the aim of a well-lived life, and if you feel them, it proves you are living well. You might feel it does not take a genius to come up with that but Democritus also came up with the idea of atoms, two thousand years before their existence was proved.

FOOTNOTE TO FOOTNOTE: Like Hedonism, atoms turn out to be something of a mixed blessing.

his favourite books, and his mother was in the garden, poking around in the vegetable patch and talking to the woodpigeons
Aubrey climbed a chair and took the car key off the table. He was banned from using the front door by himself because the lane was just there, but now he did – using the chair again to reach the catch – and stepped out. He pointed the key at the car and pressed the button. The car clicked and flashed its lights at him in a friendly way.

'Hello car!' Aubrey whispered.

The view from the driving seat was mostly sky, with a steering wheel across it. He stood up on the seat: much better! He could see down the lane towards town, and he could see Rushing Wood rising up on both sides of the valley, and he could see Mr and Mrs Ferraby's smart blue German car, parked smack in front of him. He would have to go around that.
Although Aubrey forgot to put the key in the ignition, which meant that the engine did not switch on, which meant he was never going to get very far, he did not forget to let the handbrake off. He had watched Jim and Suzanne haul it up, push the button and let it down. Aubrey did this with both hands while standing on the seat. It worked a treat. The lane just there tilts slightly down towards the town, so as soon he released the brake the car began to move.

'Yup!' cried Aubrey. It was one of his favourite words.

'YUP!' he shouted, as the car began to roll properly, and he turned the steering wheel hard to the right, because Mr and Mrs Ferraby's car was very close now and he had to go round it or –



Mr Ferraby's car began to shout and wail like a goose and a donkey having a fight - HONK HONK! - HEE HAAW! - and flash all its lights in distress.

Because Woodside Terrace is a very quiet place, where nothing really disturbs the peace except the postman, the parking ticket patrol, the waste disposal truck, the delivery lorry to the tearoom in the old mill, the 10,000 tourists who pass every summer on their way to explore the Rushing Wood, as well as all the people who go walking, running, cycling and exercising dogs every day, the sound of car alarms is seldom heard there. Mr Ferraby had never even heard his car's alarm before. He burst out of his house, ready to rescue his beloved machine. Thieves, bandits and vandals were rarely seen on Woodside Terrace but now Mr Ferraby imagined a horde of them attacking Liebling Trudi. (This was his secret name for his car, because she was so German, so glossy and so sleek.)

FOOTNOTE: Liebling is German for 'Darling'.

Mr Ferraby believed he was going to have to fight about ten vandals and/or bandits, certainly two or three. He was determined to defend Liebling Trudi to the last. His chances of victory were non-existent, he knew, and it was a pity he must die now, in the prime of his late middle age, but if his time had come he was ready. His doomed last stand would make Trudi proud of him, and Mrs Ferraby too.

Braced for a death-struggle with all the crazy-faced cohorts of hell, Mr Ferraby was entirely unprepared for the sight of Aubrey, standing in the driving seat of his father's car – the nose of which was rammed into the back of Liebling Trudi – gripping the wheel with both hands and smiling a reassuring smile. 'You little vandal bandit!' Mr Ferraby cried.

As soon as she heard Trudi's alarm Suzanne felt a familiar conviction: her son was in action somewhere nearby. Suzanne could