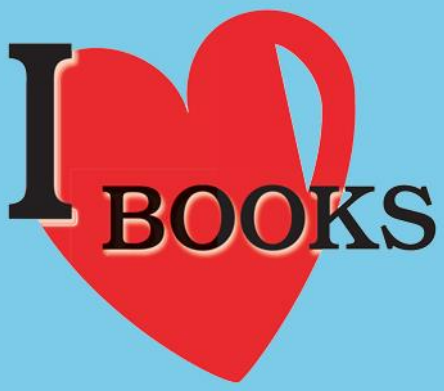


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Opening extract from

Zoo Boy

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Illustrated by

Rebecca Ashdown

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One

Hello, dear reader.

Are you sitting, lying down, standing on your head, eating a jam sandwich comfortably?

Then I'll begin . . .

I want to introduce you to a boy called Vince, whose birthday

it is today.

Here's some information about him, written by the birthday boy himself, in the new diary given to him by his gran.





Dear diary,

Hello, I am your new friend Vince.

I am now ~~offishally~~ officially eight. Yippety yip. (Gran says it's a magic number.)

Your pages smell nice and I've decided to write in an orange pen today as it's my favourite colour.

I had orange juice for breakfast, freshly squeezed by Gran as a birthday treat, AND she gave me a whole tin of orange wine gums.

It gave Gran a good excuse to eat all the other colours herself. Ha ha. When you are at least a hundred and eight years old you are allowed to do that. Can't wait!

Mum is still off at the circus with that lion keeper man with the silly bobbly ~~mussels~~ muscles, I'm afraid. I was rather hoping that because it's my birthday a miracle might have



happened, and Lion Keeper Man would have been eaten by one of his lions, and she'd have come home, but no such luck. Dad's still very weepy about the whole thing. He put on a brave face this morning, which ~~acktully~~ actually made me feel even sadder, but it's perking me up talking to you, dear diary . . .



Derek. I'll call you Derek.

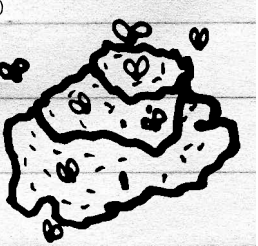
Anyway, Derek, the only present Dad gave me was . . . wait for it . . . a GOLDFISH!

A goldfish, I ask you. (I suppose it fits in with the orange theme.) I should probably tell you now that I dislike animals intensely but Dad is STILL trying to convert me. It's tragic. I've already lost ~~too~~ two hamsters. Well, when I say lost, they escaped. I think they could sense my lack of commitment. The

Great Marzini was clearly never meant to be a pet – he got out of the cage even when it had a padlock on it – and as for Polo, I suspect she ran off to warmer climes as she was forever getting stuck behind the radiator. Anyway, at least I don't have to stroke a silly goldfish. It just swims round and round its bowl like a nutcase. I have 'Supreme Flaked Food' to feed it, which smells very fishy. That doesn't seem right. I certainly

wouldn't want to eat any food that smelt like ME.

Just because Dad's WHOLE LIFE is animals – he's a zoo keeper (I know, YUCK! the variety of poo alone is distressing) – he is desperate for me to change a habit of a lifetime . . . well, eight years, to be ~~presice~~ precise. Poor, deluded Dad. I suppose, if you want to know, I'm jealous of those grotty,

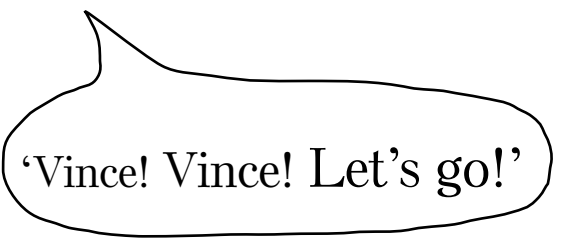


pongy animals and all the attention Dad gives them. Since Mum left he works the whole time! THERE. I've said it. Talking to you is fun, Derek. I can say what I think and not worry about hurting people's feelings.

ANYWAY. As I said, Dad gave me a goldfish. NO balloons, NO cake, just a goldfish. He has officially lost the plot. And Gran has knitted me a massive orange birthday jumper.

I know. Embarrassing. Perhaps I could unravel it accidentally on purpose.

Oh, and I did get a whole tenner in the post from bad Uncle Stanley . . .



Sorry Derek, must dash. Apparently, now I'm eight it's time I started helping Dad at work. What's that about! Ghastly idea. He says it's a `family tradition`, handed on from father to —

