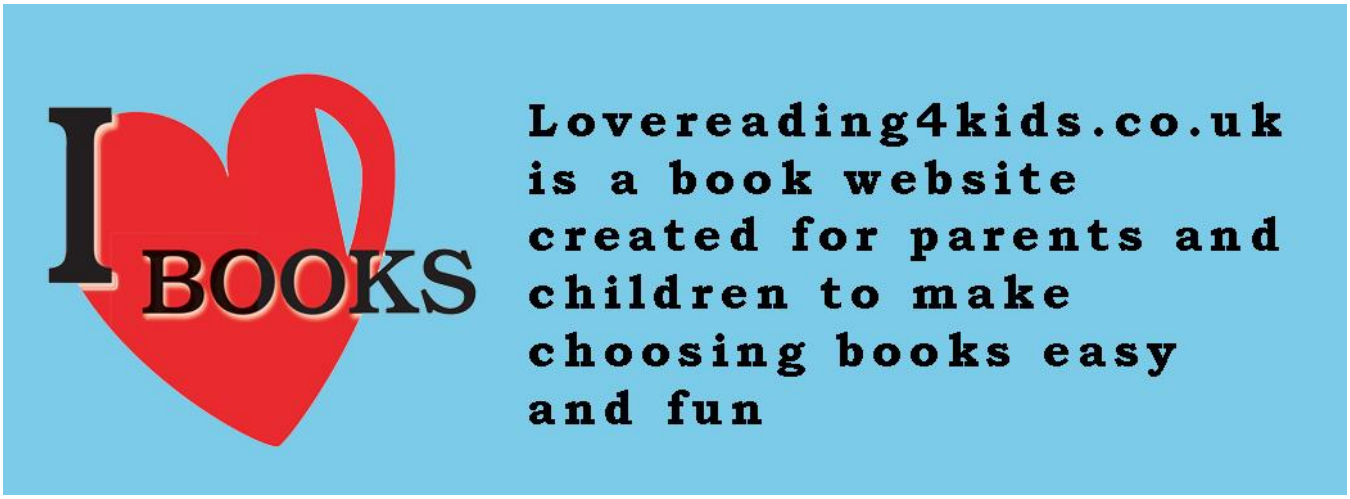


Opening extract from

Car Wash Wish

Written by

Sita Brahmachari

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For all those who have meandering minds

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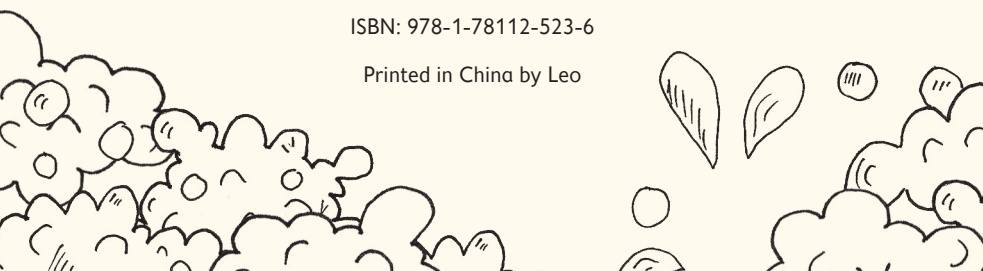
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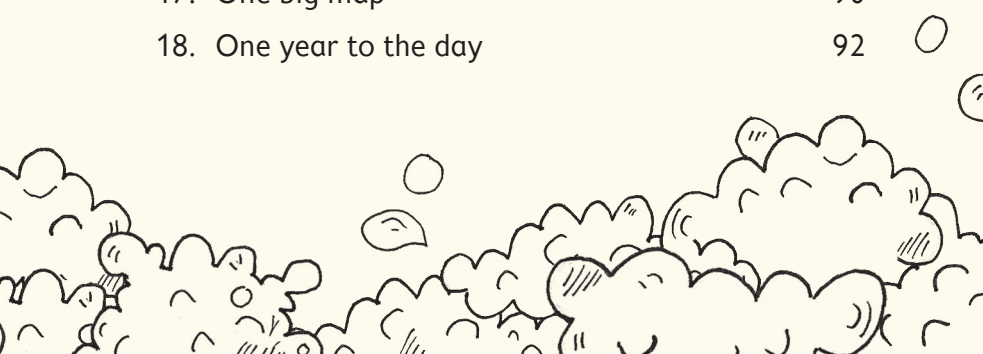
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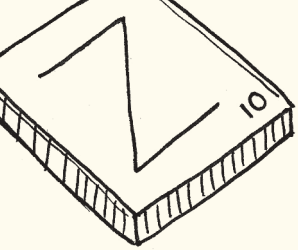
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1.

HI THERE, ZED, I'M YOUR BROTHER

If I was a letter, I would be a Z, even though my name starts with an H.

H for Hudson. If we're going to be talking, then you need to know my name.

Today feels more zed-ish than most days.

It's not every day that you –

- Go to your grandad's funeral
- Find out your mum and her boyfriend are going to get married, and sooner rather than later because …. Wait for it … Here's the final bow on this bundle of news …
- I'm going to have a half-brother or half-sister – that's you. You'll be here in just under 8 months' time, if – as Mum says – "all goes well".

I already knew that I had to go to the funeral and I had just about got my head around that. But the triple whammy of news just about made my brain explode. That's what I mean when I say it's a zed-ish sort of day.

You might not think about Zs, but I do. When you first look at a Z, it might seem all balanced. Two straight lines linked with a diagonal one. Well, don't be fooled. It's the kind of letter that could topple over or spin faster and faster into a spiral and land as an N. This would not be a good thing because N is a letter I've never liked. N is for "no" and "nerd" and "nutter" – words that make me feel like a "nothing".

I bet you think I'm weird – most people do. Well, since you're going to be my half-brother or half-sister you'll just have to get used to the way I think. Louis says I have a way of seeing things that other people don't, and so I should think about what I *can* do – not what I can't. Louis is your actual dad and, by the time you're born, he'll be my official step-dad.

What I'm not very good at is talking to people and understanding what they mean, because my mind wanders off into zed-ish stuff all the time.

Louis says I should remember that the way my brain works lets me into different worlds. When Louis says stuff like that, I think it makes Mum love him even more. It's Louis's job to work with people who think zed-ish thoughts of one kind or another, so I suppose he *should* understand.

I feel sorry for my real dad because I reckon he's a bit like me … he can't put thoughts into words like Louis can. Not so they come out right and impress Mum anyway.

The weird thing is, Zed, that it's so easy to talk to you and you don't even exist yet out here in my world. So maybe Louis is right – when I don't have to concentrate I should go with the flow and let my mind wander. I suppose I don't have to deal with you saying anything back, and I don't have to focus on what you might be thinking or what your face and body is telling me because you haven't even really got much of a body or a face … yet! Can you even think?

I might not be able to read people, but I can read words quite well. I'm faster than most of the people in my class at finishing a book, but sometimes I haven't got a clue what the writer's on about.

So – I bet you're wondering why I call you Zed. Well, Mum calls you a "zygote". I know you're a baby-to-be, but she's being cautious in case anything goes wrong. It makes you sound more like something from outer space, an alien coming to take over ... but maybe that's exactly what you are.

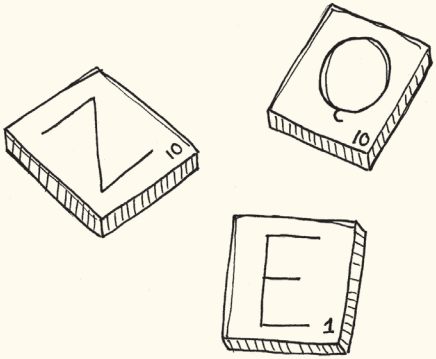
Zygote feels like a zed-ish name. My high-word-score, zed-ish brother or sister. I'll explain about high word scores.

One time, Dad, Mum and me were on holiday in Wales. It rains loads in Wales, so we played a lot of Scrabble. I'm the best at it – I'll teach you one day. I'm a real dictionary nerd. Once I looked up how many words in English have a Z in them. It's 1,413.

That's a lot, I know – but it's true! Check it out when you get born and you learn to read, if you don't believe me.

I know you don't know a single word yet, Zed, but on the scale of things 1,413 is not *that* many words. One day you'll know millions of words. For that reason, Z is one of only two letters in Scrabble that get you a score of 10. (F.Y.I. – the

other one is Q.) Z words have a bit of an edge to them – they're not everyday words at all.



Look, I'll go and get my dictionary.

Here it is.

Let's look for some words with Z in them.

In Scrabble, the word doesn't have to begin with Z – all words with a Z in them are high score, and I reckon they deserve to be. When I write them down it helps me to remember them. Things like "Al**Z**heimer's" and "**Z**ygote". Those are words that you might not understand unless you looked them up ... or your grandad had Alzheimer's or your mum had just told you the "great" news about the zygote growing in her belly that might turn into a baby.

When I was learning to write I always found it hard to get my head around the Z.

Head
Bed
Zed

(Do you like that rhyme? Babies like rhymes, so maybe zygotes do too.)

When I put my pen on the paper I have to be very careful not to think of an S, which is just about the worst thing I can do, because it sends me in the wrong direction with the letter. If you think about Z and S they are sort of opposites – if the S wasn't curvy. But then, Zed, you don't know about any of this stuff yet.

So my dictionary says that this is what you are –

Zygote

1. (Biology) the cell resulting from the union of an ovum and a spermatozoon

2. (Biology) the organism that develops from such a cell

Let's just look at the Z and ignore the gross-out rest of it.

If you do turn into an actual baby that gets born then I could teach you all this stuff about words and letters and what they mean.

But Mum and Louis say, "You mustn't get too excited, it's very early days," and, "It might not happen."

I said to Mum, "Like that time it didn't happen when you and Dad were together."

She pulled a face and didn't answer me, so I suppose I must have said the wrong thing. No matter what they say, Zed, I still can't stop thinking about who you might be one day.

That's why I'm sitting on my bed looking up "zygote" in the dictionary instead of getting ready for Grandad's funeral.