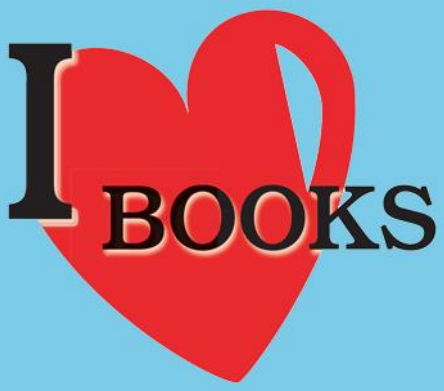


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Opening extract from

Henry Haynes and the Great Escape

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1 THE CHATTERING BOOK

As Henry Haynes cocked his head sideways, trying to read the titles on the library book spines, he was sure he could hear a faint noise. Like distant voices. Murmuring. *Chatter* even. Not normal everyday chatter. This was definitely chatter of the most unusual kind – anything *but* normal as far as Henry was concerned. For a second he thought it was coming from the wall behind the bookshelves, but that was impossible as the wall backed onto the street and he was on the first floor.

He swung round. No-one. Only old Mrs Glyn smiling at him from the checkout desk. ‘Three more minutes, dear,’ she called. Her voice echoed strangely through the gloom.

Henry narrowed his eyes and glanced sideways, left then right, trying to work out where the voices had come from. Then he realised the chatter had stopped. He gave a puzzled frown, shook his head and turned back to the bookshelf where he was surprised to find a book sticking out at a sharp angle in front of him.



Henry cocked his head sideways and read out loud: **'Jeremy James and The Great Escape'**. He grinned broadly, grabbed the book between his chubby fingers and made his way to the desk.

As Henry laid the book down in front of Mrs Glyn, for a split second he thought he heard the murmuring again. And, for just the briefest of moments, he thought it was coming from the book! He darted a look up at the old lady. But she was busy typing at her computer. Click, click, click. The keys danced merrily beneath her fingers as she hummed a soft tune. Henry frowned. Was it possible Mrs Glyn had been muttering to herself just now?

Mrs Glyn stopped, picked up the book and swiped it in front of the scanner. 'Bleep!'

'There you go, dear,' she said, gently, twirling

round on her chair. And now, as Mrs Glyn handed Henry his book, she gave him the strangest of smiles.



At the same time (was Henry imagining this?) her eyes seemed to be *twinkling*. In fact (no, he definitely wasn't imagining it), the twinkle in old Mrs Glyn's eyes that afternoon was quite unlike

anything Henry had ever seen before.

'I think you'll enjoy this one,' she said, in a gentle, smiley kind of voice.

'Thanks,' said Henry, wide-eyed. And he stuffed the book into his rucksack and hurried towards the exit.

§

'Supper, Henry!' His mother was calling up the stairs.

'Drat!' said Henry. He'd only just got home and was eager to make a start on The Great Escape. He yanked the book from his rucksack and opened the first page. He pressed his right ear hard against it, and listened. Silence. He shrugged, then put the book on his bedside table and pulled his stopwatch

from his shorts pocket. **"Start!"** At the press of the button Henry flung himself towards the door, switched off the light and thundered down the stairs.

Precisely 12.68 seconds later (a new bedroom-to-kitchen-table record) Henry Haynes shovelled his first mouthful of warm mashed potato into his mouth. At precisely the same time, unknown to Henry, the crisp white pages of *'Jeremy James and The Great Escape'* began glimmering, ever so slightly, in the darkness up in his room. Then – just as Henry's fork pierced his first 'Big Dan' fishcake – it started. The words in the book began whispering, the letters on the pages began nudging one another playfully.

Henry Haynes, who was soon downing 'Big Dan' fishcakes and warm mashed potato faster

than an Olympic Eating Athlete, had no idea that things were suddenly *happening* inside his book. No indeed. Henry Haynes, whose tummy was fast filling up, hadn't the faintest inkling.

