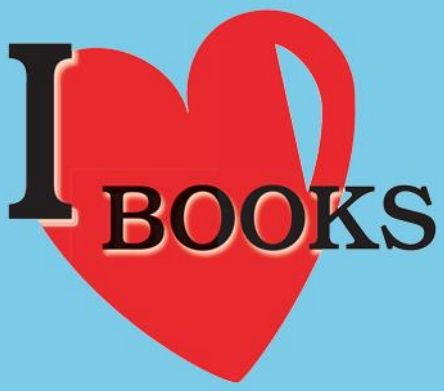


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Opening extract from

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For Ernie, Walter, Gaia,

Tindy and Elbie



Prologue

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. Some of you might have met him



before, so you must forgive me if I am repeating myself – but for those of you who don't know him, not very long ago and far away, on his eighth birthday, Vince discovered he could talk to animals.

I know!

What a turn-up!

And this is a boy who previously didn't even like animals!

Life can be very cheeky, can't it?

Anyway. Vince lives at number 21 Alberkirky Street, and his house



backs on to the zoo where his dad is the zoo keeper. In fact there is a gate at the bottom of their garden that lets them into the zoo – once they have sung the secret Zoo Keepers' Song, obviously.

Vince's dad has cheered up no end since Vince's talking-to-animals

revelation. He had been a bit blue, you see, as Vince's mum recently ran off with the circus, and (more to the point) a lion-taming man called Reg, who is very muscly and has no sense of humour (tragic).

Vince's gran also lives at number 21. Gran used to be an entertainer and travel around the country, dancing and singing in pubs and clubs with a troupe called The Moonbeams. She is a wonderful woman – I think you would get on. Gran gets on with everybody, except, coincidentally, with someone in this story who you shall hear more about in a moment.



I'm pretty sure that's all you need to know for now about the residents of number 21 Alberkirky Street, dear reader – so now I can start to tell you about Vince's new adventure . . .



One

Six a.m. Greenwich Mean Time. (Why 'Mean'? Let's call it 'Generous Time'.)

A blue light wiped across Vince's closed eyes and BLAP! he was awake!

What was that? Vince wondered, padding to the window.



It was a police car, parked at number 19, right next door, where Mrs Footlecrannoch lived.

Mrs Footlecrannoch was a rather unapproachable smarty-pants lady, who apparently had inherited a lot of money from a

relative who sold heaters (that wouldn't melt igloos) to Eskimos. She wore a different hat daily, and she also had a plethora of JEWELS, but she never wore them because



they were far too precious. Which just seemed plain silly to Gran. I mean, what is the point of THAT? Gran's jewels are only pretend, but she wears them all the time. She says (very wisely, I think) that she doesn't need the excuse of a special occasion because every day is a special occasion.

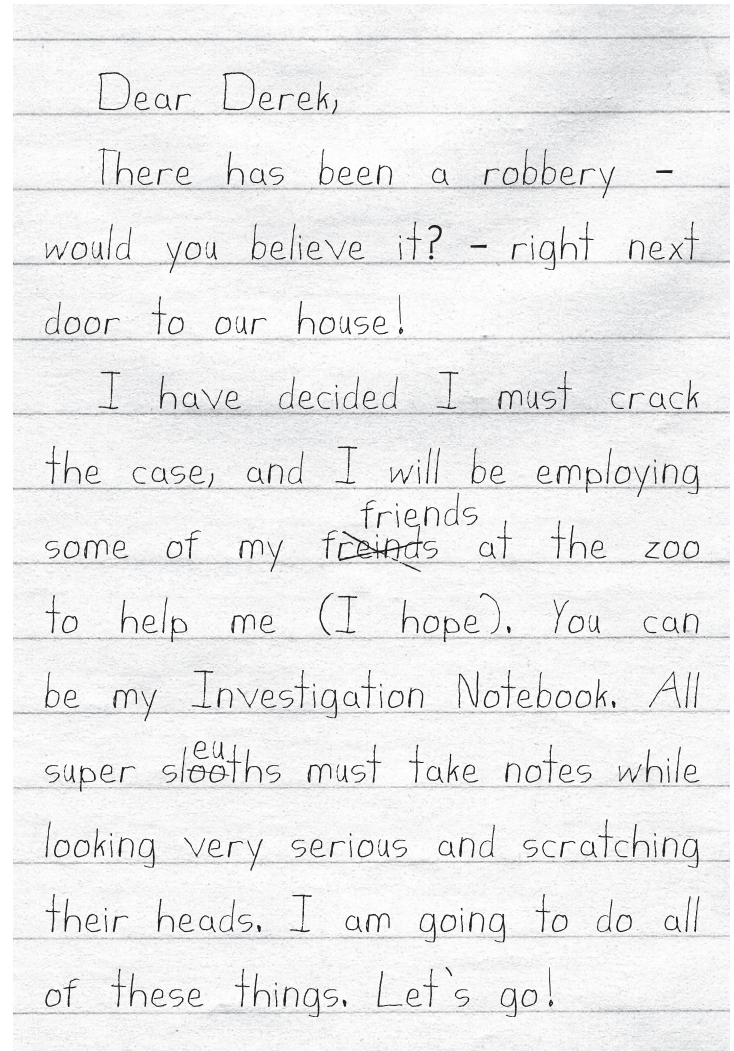
Just as Vince was wondering what had happened, Gerry the local copper emerged from Mrs Footlecrannoch's elaborate front door.

‘Don’t you worry, Mrs F., we’ll get your precious jewels returned in no time – I feel sure of it.’

‘I will pay a substantial reward: all the Swiss roll they can eat!’ Mrs Footlecrannoch exclaimed, spluttering like a tap with a wonky washer.

Well, there was an offer. Vince had always quite fancied being a super sleuth, and he had always been particularly partial to a bit of Swiss roll.

So he got his diary (called Derek) off the shelf, and started a new entry.


Dear Derek,

There has been a robbery – would you believe it? – right next door to our house!

I have decided I must crack the case, and I will be employing some of my ~~freinds~~ friends at the zoo to help me (I hope). You can be my Investigation Notebook. All super ~~sloo~~ sleuths must take notes while looking very serious and scratching their heads. I am going to do all of these things. Let's go!