

Rewarding reads for the family to share

## My Friend Maya Loves to Dance



Written by Cheryl Willis Hudson  
Illustrated by Eric Velasquez  
Abrams Books £9.99  
ISBN: 978-0810983281

Maya is a young black girl living in an American city, but her story is universal. It is illustrated by big, stylish pictures accompanying a spare, rhyming text showing the ways she dances to different types of music. Maya loves it all, and her sense of deep enjoyment is unmistakable throughout. This lovely book should appeal not just to all would-be dancers but also to children still at the stage of exploring what sort of pursuits they might like to follow one day in the big world outside home.

Nicholas Tucker

## Where on Earth is the Moon?

Written by Ruth Martin  
Illustrated by Olivier Latyk  
Templar £10.99  
ISBN: 978-1840112825



Luna wonders where the moon goes during the day. In her dreams she looks for the moon under the sea, at the top of mountains and up in the sky. Eventually her imagination takes her into space where she finds out the truth about where the moon lives. The simple storyline has a rather hypnotic quality that chimes well with its dreamy, night-time theme although the book ends with a wide-awake question which sets you thinking rather than sleeping. Olivier Latyk's strange and beautiful illustrations are the highlight of this gorgeously produced picture book. They are simple but compelling, and are deservedly credited with inspiring the writer to create the story.

Stella Madden

## The Ugly Duckling

Written and illustrated by Sebastien Braun  
Boxer Books £11.99 ISBN: 978 1907152030



Stunning illustrations embellish every page of this retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's story about difference and belonging. Upon her return after a short break, Mother Duck finds another egg in her nest, which is different from the rest. It soon hatches and out steps a large and ungainly baby chick. The retelling poignantly captures Mother Duck's steadfast love for her baby, his suffering as he is jeered at and his glorious triumph as he happily discovers his identity. The book is

beautifully produced, with text and illustrations set large against crisp white backgrounds. The illustrations are strong in design and luminous in colour. Thick black lines are used to great effect in outlining the solid shapes and flat colours, and in creating linear rhythms. They are also used at times to enclose the picture within a frame, so creating a woodblock effect. This is an elegant book, in both words and pictures.

Anne Faundez

## Iggy Peck, Architect

Written by Andrea Beaty  
Illustrated by David Roberts  
Abrams Books £5.99  
ISBN: 978-0810989283



This is a splendid, unconventional, arresting picture book about a small child who has an unstoppable urge to build things. He upsets his parents when he makes a great tower out of nappies and glue. Before they can complain about the smell he is out in the garden constructing sphinxes, churches and temples. At school Iggy comes up against a teacher who has an aversion to architecture and is keen to subvert his passion into more acceptable activities. Her opposition is unwavering until her class is trapped on an outing to the Blue River Pass. How Iggy steps forward to become a school hero is beautifully realised in the swinging, rhyming text of Andrea Beaty and the quite startling illustrations – part Modigliani, part Dali, part Freida Kahlo – of David Roberts. Wonderful.

Jack Ousbey

## Lulu and the Birthday Party



Written by Belinda Hollyer  
Illustrated by Emma Damon  
Frances Lincoln £11.99  
ISBN: 978-1845074739

Can any child be entirely happy when it is a brother's or sister's birthday? Certainly not!

Lulu is no exception when the day of her brother Billy's party arrives. An opportunity presents itself, and she snatches one of Billy's presents. But then events take an unexpected turn. This thought-provoking tale is enhanced by colourful, expressive illustrations.

Marianne Adey

## Lola and the Rent-a-Cat

Written and illustrated by Ceseli Josephus Jitta  
Frances Lincoln £11.99 ISBN: 978-1847801395

Lola and John have been married since they were young. They eat together, shop together, bathe

together, grow old together. John gets sadder, weaker. One day he dies. Lola mourns.

After fifty-six years, she is alone again. To fill her time, she surfs the internet... So begins the story of Lola's widowhood, and the solace she finds with a new-found feline companion. Old people – decrepitude – death – widowhood: a bold agenda for a children's picture book. But it emphatically *is* a book for children. Not just as a gentle introduction to the subject of old age and dying – though certainly that – but also for its joy and fun and fulfilment. Because this is a story that finishes in the ascendent, with the promise of what tomorrow may bring. On top of which, Tim the rent-a-cat is a first class animal, Lola is a game old bird and readers will respond to both. A superb book by a Dutch writer/illustrator whose artwork is as striking as the story she tells.

Chris Stephenson



## The Heart and the Bottle

Written and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers  
HarperCollins £10.99 ISBN: 978-0007182305



Prepare yourself, as an adult reading this book, to be utterly floored by its gorgeously poignant reflections on matters of the heart and how we as humans deal with grief.

It made me cry almost as much as the recent children's film *Up*, which shares more than a passing affinity with Oliver Jeffers' latest offering. Using the analogy of putting a heart into a bottle, it expresses in physical terms – for the benefit of the younger reader – the all too familiar emotional act of burying one's feelings in order to get on with life. As always, Jeffers' quirkily beautiful illustrations are fizzing with life and allure, drawing you deeper into the (in this case, broken) hearts of the characters. Whether taken literally or understood at its deepest level, *The Heart and the Bottle* is a wonderfully intelligent and meditative book that will hopefully fuel many a philosophical discussion. And fear not, for there is a happy – and hugely uplifting – ending.

Rowan Stanfield

## When Willy Went to the Wedding

Written and illustrated by Judith Kerr  
HarperCollins (R) £5.99 ISBN: 978-0006613404

This is a wonderful classic by Judith Kerr with a characteristically simple text and pictures which say so much. Willy's grown-up sister is getting married



and Willy is very disappointed when everyone says his pets are not allowed to come to the wedding. He has the important job of holding his sister's train and a smart blue suit to wear which has the right sized pockets for

his hamster and frog. But just bringing two pets doesn't seem to be enough and to Willy's delight, and the horror of the other guests, his cat and her three kittens decide to follow him. And, of course, all the pets want to be included in the wedding photo and from then on things just get worse. But none of it is Willy's fault; he can't help it if his pets want to be involved! Willy is in disgrace and his Aunt has fainted in shock at the sight of what she thinks is a mouse on the wedding cake when Bruce, his new brother-in-law, saves the day. A funny book to savour and enjoy time and time again.

Louise Stothard

## Donkeys

Written by Adelheid Dahimène  
Illustrated by Heide Stöllinger  
Translated by Catherine Chidgey  
Gecko Press £6.99  
ISBN: 978-0958259804



Jack and Jenny are two ageing donkeys looking forward to their silver wedding anniversary. They both bear the physical signs – in the shape of a bump and hollow – of a close and loving partnership where they have grown tenderly together. But, through a misunderstanding where Jack sleeps through the special day, Jenny cannot contain her fury. In the ensuing argument they decide to go their separate ways – confident in finding new and better partners. But with disappointment following disappointment, Jack and Jenny are reunited and realise that, despite each other's faults, they are meant for each other. This is a charming story of surviving relationships and that the grass definitely may not be greener on the other side. Adult readers may well find themselves relating to some of the events and feelings in the story! The wonderfully subtle oil pastel illustrations, that are quite neutral in tonal range, lend themselves to the simple but effective appeal of the book. Originally published in Austria it is now translated and re-issued by the innovative New Zealand publisher, Gecko Press.

Heather Blackham

## Hey! What's That Nasty Whiff?

Written by Julia Jarman Illustrated by Gary Parsons  
Scholastic £6.99 ISBN: 978-1407109961

This amusing tale takes a fresh look at caring for our environment and gives a strong message for us all about recognising our joint responsibility for the fate of the planet. The rhyming text is witty as it tells of Hyena who was

... a cleaner, she kept things spick and span.  
She picked up after others with a little brush and pan.



Hyena is diligent in her tasks as she hovers the savannah, mops and dusts the plains and trees and loves nothing more than recycling and admiring her compost heap. But, as often happens, no-one

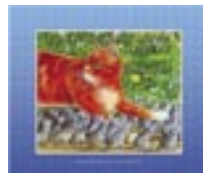
notices her hard work so she decides to stop. The only one to appreciate her efforts is Vulture who has been similarly occupied for years. He persuades her to go away on holiday and see what happens. Before long the animals realise how smelly and obnoxious everything has become and appeal to Hyena to come back. But before she returns Vulture insists they sign a contract to make sure all help to keep the savannah, and the planet, green! Bright, lively illustrations add to the humour and transform the animals into real characters. A good, fun read with an underlying theme for us all.

Louise Stothard

## The Church Mice Adrift

Written and illustrated by Graham Oakley  
Templar (R) £10.99  
ISBN: 978-1848770621

First published in 1976, this beautiful picture book well deserves its re-launch as a modern classic. Its text may now seem a little wordy at times, with a reference on one page to a proposed lecture on Etiquette in the Court of Louis XIV. But the art work is still breathtaking in its wit and general attention to detail. The story of how a ginger cat helps the church mice oust some unfriendly rats from their proposed home can only be understood by paying close attention to the illustrations as well as to the text. With pictures as good as these, young readers should take to this task like ducks to water, revelling in all the sly jokes that their parents may sometimes be missing.



Nicholas Tucker

## The Sorely Trying Day

Written and illustrated by Russell and Lillian Hoban  
Frances Lincoln (R) £9.99 ISBN: 978-1590173435



Out of print for more than forty years this is a cautionary tale about the build-up of tension in a family. Father returns, after a sorely trying day at work, to find his wife exhausted after a series of upsetting

incidents involving their four children, the dog and the cat, and a tiny mouse who pops up at the end of the chain of catastrophes. The story unfolds as each incident is revealed and explored, with accusations and refutations, with claims and counterclaims. Told in balanced, musical prose, and illustrated with restrained yet lively observation, this is a welcome reissue of a book showing the Hobans working in charming harmony. May we hope the

next Hoban revival will feature the irrepressible Tom and his mighty adversary, Captain Najork?

Jack Ousbey

## Over the Hills and Far Away

Edited by Els Boekelaar and Ineke Verschuren  
Illustrated by Deniela Drescher  
Floris Books £14.99 ISBN: 978-0863157301

One of the fascinations of fairy tales, myths and legends is the discovery of stories that are basically the same the world over, with slight variations. In this collection from around Europe, the common theme is dwarfs, fairies, elves and gnomes. So here you have Tom-tit-tot (known to us as *Rumpelstiltskin*) and the Magic Lamp (*Aladdin*), side by side with stories less well known in the UK but with the same underlying moral tone. In *The Gifts of the Little Folk* we see the penalty that's to be paid for greed and the rewards of a generosity of spirit; in *The Goatsherd of Klosters*, a community turns on someone they perceive to be 'different', only to regret their cruelty when, too late, they discover the impact of the loss of his special gifts. Daniela Drescher has a sense of colour and balance in her delicate, almost dreamlike illustrations that makes you want to linger over them. It's a big, heavy book for young hands to hold, but well suited to the armchair snuggle with a wealth of lovely stories to share.



Yvonne Coppard

## Instructions

Written by Neil Gaiman Illustrated by Charles Vess  
Bloomsbury £9.99 ISBN: 978-1408808641



This wonderfully intriguing book was created by one of our most imaginative writers. The 'story' takes the form of a list of instructions that lead the reader on a journey, along

with an unnamed Puss-in-Boots, through a land populated by characters from fairy tales, myths and nursery rhymes. Everyone goes on their own, personal journey accompanied by wonderful images, reflecting a more classical children's book illustration feel towards the style of Randolph Caldecott. The pictures, like the text, are there for the reader to look *into* rather than just observe. For instance on one page you can see, in the background, three blackbirds escaping from a pie left to cool on a cottage windowsill. A few pages on we find ourselves in a wild wood and resting in the trees are twenty-four blackbirds. The text has a softly didactic but lyrical tone and it could be said that the message is to encourage the reader to have faith in their beliefs or ambitions and not to be afraid of taking risks. Truly captivating and comforting for both adults and children.

Heather Blackham