

Five poems from

WHAT TO DO IF YOU TRIP OVER A HIPPO

by Edward van de Vendel and Martijn van der Linden

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WHAT TO DO
IF YOU TRIP OVER A HIPPO

First,
act humble.
Apologise.
But then, visualise
how to make that hippo stumble.
And when.
As if you have to be a pachyderm
to throw your weight around!
Don't sit and grumble.
Think long term!
And search the whole house high and low
until you've found
every muffin, bun and apple crumble
and wolfed them down.
And keep it up! Just eat and eat
until you've got a bubbly belly,
and a bulging bumble.
Then send every hippo you meet
for a flying tumble.

WHAT TO DO
IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DRAW

Draw a bear,
one that's sitting quietly on a chair,
with two birds
fluttering round:
one is big,
the other's small;
one is happy,
the other not at all.

The bear is listening.
One bird is whispering
about fish, flowers,
a fiery ball!
The other one's talking about a wall
you should be able to look over.
'But can't,'
it says gloomily.
'Yes, you can!' the other one shrills.
'The sky is free!'

Draw that.
Because:
that bear with those birds is you.
There's always a voice in your head
that doesn't believe in fun and fantasy.
But there's that other one too,
the one that sings,
'Oh my, oh my, look what I can see!'

And if you want to know
which bird
you've heard
the most,
look how you've drawn them.
Which one's biggest?
Which one's close?

WHAT TO DO
IF YOU'RE IN LOVE
WITH A BOY

Boys are mad about recorder music, it's what they love to hear.
Especially when it's being played by a girl with a tin ear.

For a hundred pounds or thereabouts you buy a lovely Moeck
plus a book of lovely tunes to charm your average bloke.

The book is called "This Squeaking's Fun" (that's just to let you know).
You'll skweet and screet and scrangle – you don't need to be a pro.

Now find a spot to linger, use roadworks as a ploy,
and when you see him coming, leap out and grab your boy.

Recorder at the ready, just say, "I wrote this one for you."
Then give him a big screeching blast that turns his face to goo.

That's how to get a boyfriend.
It's how to win a heart.
It's guaranteed.
I'm glad to help.
I like to do my part.

Oh, and if that boy just runs away
(there is a chance he might)
that means you blew it way too soft
and didn't play it right.

WHAT TO DO
IF YOUR MOTHER IS CRYING

Go
and sit down next to her:
your arm against hers,
shoulder to wrist.
Leave the talking to dads,
to best friends and sisters.
You don't need to kiss
the tears from her cheeks.
You don't need to get it
or ask any questions.
You only need
to slide up close,
be there,
and make sure she knows.

When she feels that she can lean on you,
that's what she'll do,
and a little bit of mess,
will wash out of her head.
How?
How couldn't matter less.
Something to do with burden distribution,
angle of inclination,
and percentage concentration,
but for you and your mum
that doesn't matter a bit.
You're sitting skin to skin
and notice
after a lovely, gentle while
that it's worked.
At last, Mum's not pouring
sadness out over everything.
Somewhere a Mediterranean sun
has started to sing.

WHAT TO DO
IF THIS BOOK IS YOUR BOOK PRESENTATION

Hi.

My name is..... ← say your name here
and this..... ← show this book to the class
is the book I am giving my presentation on.

It's called

What to do if you trip over a hippo

and if you take my advice,
you definitely will never read it.

It's not nice. Not to hippos.

Who are peaceful and never say an unkind word.

Unlike, for example, a certain,
large and flightless bird.

Where was I?

Yes, this book.

It drives me crazy.

It's full of poems

written by Edward van de Vendel,

who was obviously too lazy

to fill up the page.

That's must be why he became a poet.

And all he does is make fun of hippos!

That's not right and he should know it.

Hippos are great.

On the street they always make way!

And that's something an ostrich would never do –

ostriches just act all fancy and grand,

shouting "HEY, YOU,

HOW DO I GET TO THE SAND?"

Anyway – on with my presentation.

The illustrations

are by Martijn van der Linden.

He knows his stuff I suppose –

I'll give you a look... ← hold up the book

But the problem is

he works with a writer who hates hippos.

Look at this picture of a hippo lying flat

on the pavement:

you think, yeah,

um,

fat.

And I have to say:

a hippo would never do something like that.
Did a hippo ever write:
MARTIJN VAN DER LINDEN IS AS BIG AS A JUMBO JET!
No!
But ostriches?
They just chuck it straight on the Internet!

Oh, my time is almost up.
There's just two more things you need to know.
First: the publisher is Querido,
and their books are usually okay,
but this one is way, way, way
worse than that.
It falls flatter than flat.
It would have been better
if Edward van de Vendel
hadn't written a single letter.
And second, and this is vital:
WHAT TO DO IF YOU TRIP OVER AN OSTRICH
would have been a much better title.