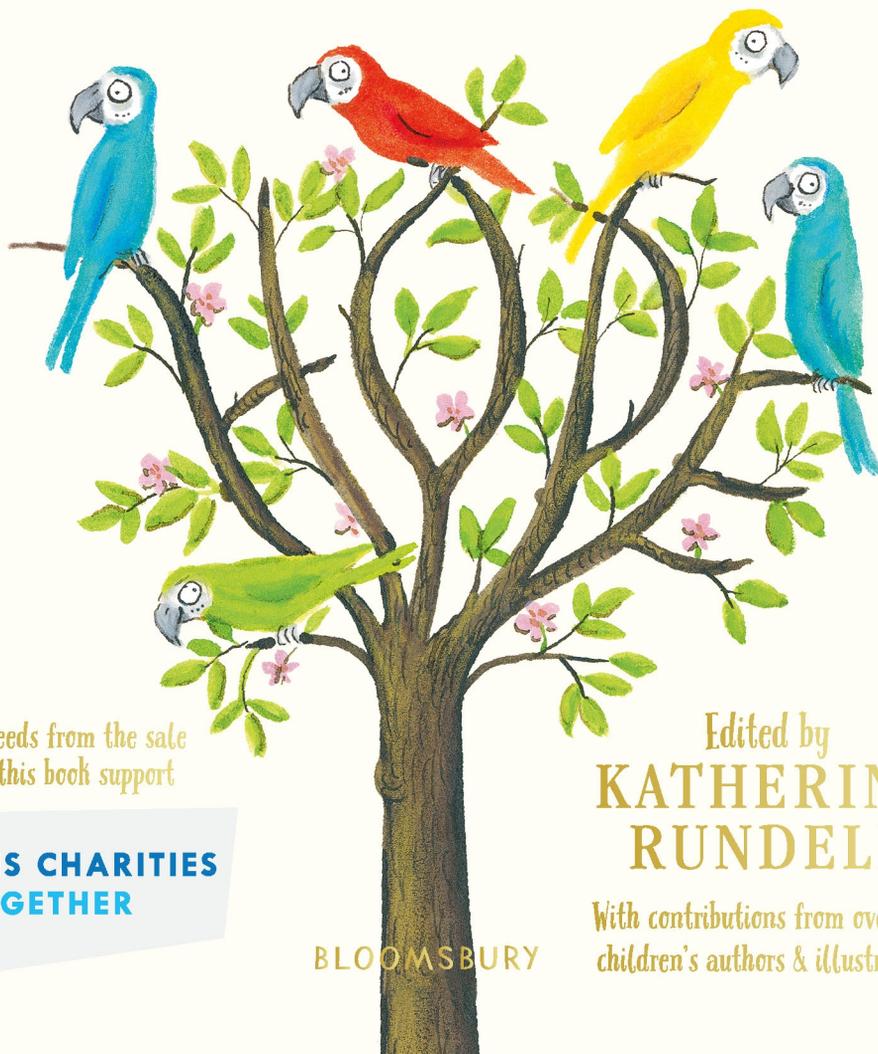


THE BOOK OF  
**HOPES**

*Words and Pictures to Comfort, Inspire and Entertain*



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**NHS CHARITIES  
TOGETHER**

*Edited by*  
**KATHERINE  
RUNDELL**

*With contributions from over 100  
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**BLOOMSBURY**

T H E B O O K O F  
H O P E S

*Edited by*  
KATHERINE  
RUNDELL

BLOOMSBURY  
CHILDREN'S BOOKS  
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

*This book is dedicated to the doctors, nurses, carers, porters,  
cleaners and everyone currently working in hospitals: you are  
the stuff that wild, heroic tales are made of.*

# A very short note about hope

When the coronavirus pandemic began in the UK in 2020, I found myself urgently in need of hope. Because they are my greatest love, I went looking for it in books: old books, new books, terrifically serious books with footnotes in Latin and terrifically unserious books with jokes too rude to repeat here. And I found that, with each book I read, I felt just a little tougher: a little bolder, a little more ready to face the world.

And I think this is why: I think stories of transformation, of wild glories and everyday glories, of magic both real and imaginary, can act like a map. They give us a push towards hope. Real true hope isn't the promise that everything will be all right – but it's a belief that the world has so many strangenesses and possibilities that giving up would be a mistake; that we live in a universe shot through with the unexpected. There's never been a single decade in human history when we have not taken ourselves by surprise: we, the ungainly, wonky-toothed human species, have an endless potential for change. I am not an optimist, or a pessimist; I am a possibilityist. The possibilities out there for

discovery, for knowledge, for transforming the world, are literally infinite – there are spectacular ideas that we will have in the next ten years that we can't even begin to dream of now.

So, during those first long months I began a Hope Project; I emailed some of the children's writers and artists whose work I love most. I asked them to write something very short, stories or facts, or draw something, anything, that would make the people reading it feel like possibilityists: something that would make them laugh or wonder or snort or smile. The response was magnificent, which shouldn't have surprised me, because children's writers and illustrators are professional hunters of hope. We seek it out, catching it in our nets, setting it down between the pages of a book, and sending it out into the world.

We put it online, to read for free, at the National Literacy Trust website, and the reception knocked me sideways. Schools made their own Books of Hopes; children sent me poems and stories and pictures and photographs of hope. It was a sudden and unexpected joy. Amid those hopes, my own is this: that this book (each copy of which raises money for NHS Charities Together) will be read long after the coronavirus pandemic has passed. I want it to be a book you can turn to whenever you find yourself in need of a shot of hope. It is, I think, a testament to what happens when you ask more than one hundred people to make something that will kick-start the engine of delight inside the human heart.

You could read this collection all in one sitting if you wanted to, but it's designed so that you can dip into it. There are true accounts of cats and hares and plastic-eating caterpillars, there are doodles

and flowers, revolting poems and beautiful poems, there are stories of space travel and new shoes and elephants and dragons. None are longer than 500ish words, so they can be devoured in a bite: one story for breakfast and another at midday, with a poem, perhaps, for dessert.

*Katherine Rundell*

*July 2020*

# A Song of Gladness

by

**MICHAEL MORPURGO**

I've been talking every morning to blackbird, telling him why we are all so sad at the moment. He sits on his branch and listens.

It was blackbird's idea. He sang out this morning at dawn from his treetop in the garden, to fox half-asleep behind the garden shed. She thought it a good idea too. It was a wake-up call. Fox was on her feet at once and trotting through Bluebell Wood, where she barked it to deer who ran off across the stream. Kingfisher was there, otter and dipper too. They heard and piped it on, and swallow swooped down over the meadow and passed it on to cows waiting to go into their milking, and to sheep resting quietly under the hedge with her lambs in the corner of the dew-damp field.

And they all agreed, bleating it out to bees already busy at their flowers, to weaving spiders, and grasshoppers, and scurrying mice. Trees heard sheep calling too, the whole flock of them, and waved their budding leaves in wild enthusiasm; and high above, the clouds wandered through the skies driven by wind, and wind took blackbird's idea over the cliffs across heaving seas, where gulls and albatross

cried it out, and whales and dolphins and porpoises heard it, and wailed and whooped it down into the deep, where turtles listened, and they too loved the idea. So did plankton and every fish and crab and sea urchin and whelk, they all whispered that it was a fine notion, the best they ever heard. And the whisper went over the sea on the curling waves to the shores of Africa, where lions roared their approval, and elephants trumpeted it, leopards yawned it, water buffalo belched it, wild dogs yelped it. Wildebeest murmured it out across the savannah; and storm lifted the idea up over rainforests, where rain took it and poured it down on gorillas in the mist, on chimpanzees in their sleeping nests. Howler monkeys and gibbons echoed their calls loud over all the earth – they are that loud; and then from far up high, sun heard it too and shone it down over deserts where oryx stamped her foot, impatient to be getting on with it and doing it – she loved the idea that much. Even camel, who rarely joined in anything, thought this was the best and most beautiful idea he had ever heard.

Back in the garden, blackbird waited till everyone was ready. And then he began to sing. And the whole carnival of animals, every living thing on this good earth, joined in, until the globe echoed with the joy of it.

And blackbird was very pleased.

But I was still lost in sadness, as I heard the earth singing around me. It was a song of forgiveness. I knew that. So I asked blackbird if I could join in. And he sang his answer back to me.

‘Why do you think we are doing this, you silly man? We want you and yours to be happy again. Only then will you treat us and the world right again, as you know you should. Only then will all be well. Sing, silly man, sing, sing. Our song is your song, your song is our song.’

So I sang, we all sang, sang away our sadness. In every house and flat and cottage, we clapped and sang, in every hut and tent, in every palace and hospital and prison. And they heard and we heard our song of gladness echoing all together, in glorious harmony across the universe.

# Care of Exotic Pets. Number 1. The Axolotl at Bedtime

by  
**CATHERINE JOHNSON**

Never give your axolotl chocolatl in a botl,  
Serve it in a tiny eggcup, not too cold and not too hotl.  
Make him sip it very slowly, not too much, never a lotl.  
After all, he's just a sleepy, snuggly, bedtime axolotl.

Then tuck him – very gently – in his hand-carved wooden cotl.  
Turn the light out, seven thirty, never later, on the dotl.  
Sing him songs of salamanders, give it everything you've gotl,  
As there's nothing like a tune to serenade your axolotl.

Brush his gills out on the pillow, never mind the whys or whatl.  
Once he's deeply all a-slumber, sweetly snoring, off you trotl.  
Think of him, snug in his dreamland, flying kites or sailing yachtl.  
Then you'll sigh, you've done your duty, time to clean the pans  
and potl.  
Come tomorrow he'll be one fresh, keen as mustard axolotl.

# The Monk and the Armadillo

by

ONJALI Q. RAÚF

Situated somewhere between the cold, snowy peaks of Nepal and the tall, swaying mango trees of India, stands the highest mountain your imagination can possibly imagine. And right on the very top of this mountain's tip lay a single straw hut, inside which lived a monk – a very holy man, who believed it was his calling to sit on top of this mountain in complete isolation until he understood the depth and breadth of the universe, and everything in between.

Now, sitting in a straw hut all day and all night, with nothing but the sun and the moon and the wind to keep you company, can get awfully boring. Especially if you've been doing it for fifty years, as this very wise monk had. And so, deep down in his heart, the monk began to grow restless and started to hope for a sign. A sign that would tell him his knowledge was complete, that he had learned everything he could possibly learn, and that he should return back down the mountain to the beautiful village he had once grown up in, the friends he

had left behind and the food he couldn't help dreaming about. Having survived on nothing but grains and seeds collected from between the rocks of the mountain for fifty years, the monk secretly hoped his sign would come soon. For oh! How he longed to taste a bowl of hot, delicious noodles, floating with a million spring onion hoops, just like his mother used to make. And even though he could have left the mountain at any time, the monk knew in his heart that he had to wait for a sign if he was to leave it in peace.

A year went by. And another. And another. And still the monk continued to secretly hope. Until one day, all the way from the golden, hot sands of Arabia, his sign began to make its way to him! For a mighty storm was hurtling across the desert plains and, like the inside of a giant washing machine, had snatched a poor armadillo up in its arms. The armadillo, frightened and alone, curled itself up into a tiny ball of iron armour and, squeezing its eyes tight, hoped with all its heart that it would land safe and sound and not too far from home. The storm was fierce and wild and hungry and, unknown to the armadillo, loved to travel. So imagine its surprise when, on feeling itself being dropped, the armadillo found itself not in a desert at all! But outside the door of a straw hut, situated on the snow-capped peak of a mountain that stood so high above the clouds it could almost touch the stars!

And imagine the monk's surprise when, just a few hours later, he opened his door to find a poor armadillo shaking at his feet.

'It is here!' cried the monk, lifting the armadillo up in his hands with a joyous smile. 'My sign is here! And it is in need of help!' And thanking the skies that had brought this little life to his door, the monk ran down the mountain at once to find help for his new friend.

I am pleased to say that the monk and the armadillo went on to become great friends, for each had fulfilled the hopes of the other. The monk by forever after keeping the armadillo warm and fed and happy, and the armadillo by inspiring the monk to become a vet and eat just as many bowls of hot, delicious noodles as he liked.

# Murkaster

by

**FRANK COTTRELL-BOYCE**

You won't find Murkaster on a map. Maps show rivers, mountains and cities. They don't bother with clouds because clouds come and go.

Except in Murkaster.

The clouds came to Murkaster.

But they did not go away again.

They sat there on the roofs and in the squares and streets and gardens, until it was wiped off the map.

The world forgot Murkaster and Murkaster forgot the world.

If you were a Murkaster girl, like Sunny Hotspur for instance, you'd wear your hair in the Murkaster fashion – high and curly, like your own personal cloud. You'd shop or chat using Murkaster's special app, which was called Gloom. You would not go out, not without a mask and snorkel, because inside a cloud it's wet, dull and endless. Once, Sunny asked her mum, 'My name – Sunny – what does it even mean?'

'It's just one of those words that make you feel nice but don't actually mean anything.' There were a lot of words like that in the Murkaster dialect. For instance, 'view'.

There was a painting on the dining-room wall in the Hotspur house called *Foggy Day*. It showed a foggy day. There was another called *Cumulostratus* – which showed thick, grey clouds with streaks of golden yellow shining through the gaps. What were the streaks of yellow?

‘It’s because the painter ran out of grey and had to use that different colour,’ said Mum.

Unconvinced, Sunny sat at her window scanning the passing murk for a glimpse of yellow.

She never saw the streak of yellow.

But she did see an eye – a deep, dark eye, set in a wrinkle of murk, staring at her. ‘The murk,’ reasoned Sunny, ‘has an eye. So it must have a head. If it has a head, it must have a bottom. Which means the murk must have an end!’

Grabbing her mask and snorkel, she dashed outside. The moment she opened the door, she could hear something breathing. ‘The murk has a voice,’ she said to herself, and wondered if she could talk to it. That moment, something sniffed at her. Then, as if she was a flower, picked her up and hoisted her into the air.

You would have known right away that this was an elephant and that it was lifting her with its trunk. High into the damp air she rose until she was, yes, above the murk. The sky was blue. The distance was green. And sometimes blossom white. Above her head, streaks of yellow!

The elephant waved her around in the air. What was it doing? What did it want?

‘You’re lost!’ yelled Sunny. ‘You’re lost in the murk, like us. You want me to find a way out?’ She could guide the elephant out of here

and leave the murk forever. But what about everyone else? Could she leave them all behind?

While she thought, the elephant blew impatiently and, where it breathed, the murk grew thinner and light showed through. And when it breathed, it sounded like a trumpet. And another trumpet answered and another and another. There must be a dozen elephants lost in the murk.

Sunny swung the trunk this way and that, steering her elephant towards the nearest elephant, then leading the two to the next elephant and the next until she brought a dozen elephants together in the centre of the murk. 'Now sing!' she cried. 'Sing me a city.'

And a dozen elephants trumpeted their happiness at finding each other and their trumpeting tore the murk apart like tissue paper and unwrapped a city – with domes and towers and bridges and minarets and waterways – the city Sunny had lived in but never till that moment seen.