

Z for Zoo

We're all going to the Zoo tomorrow. We're very excited. It's the Summer holidays. Mum and Dad are taking us out for the day. A Special Treat; we were asked where we wanted to go. For once, we all agreed.

Belle Vue Zoo is near Manchester. We have to take two buses to get there. Mum has packed sandwiches and a flask of tea. We queue at the turnstiles to get in.

We want to see the lions and the tigers first. The animals seem very sleepy. They are dozing in the hot sunshine. I remember the story of Albert and the lion which my aunty Mary recites in her best Lancashire accent every Christmas.

*"There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool, That's noted for fresh air and fun,
And Mr & Mrs Ramsbottom went there with young Albert, their son,
.....so seeking for further amusement, they paid and went into the Zoo
.....there was one great big lion called Wallace, whose nose was all covered with scars
He lay in a som-no-lent posture, with the side o' his face on the bars*

These lions don't look very scary or very hungry; they are ignoring the big lumps of meat which lie mouldering, attracting a cloud of black flies.

One of the cages has an unusual animal. The sign tells us it is a Tigon called Maude. Mum explains she is a cross between a tiger and a lioness. She yawns a terrible yawn (Maude not Mum).

We wander over to the polar bears. One lonely bear is in a concrete pit below us. I gaze down at her, looking at her yellowing fur and her sad eyes. There is a small pool covered in green algae which seems a poor substitute for the Arctic wastes. I'd feel sad too if I was remembering ice and snow.

There's a queue of children waiting for a ride on the elephant. My brothers are not keen o I join the line. The elephant kneels down and about seven of us climb some steps to scramble on to a wooden seat on the elephant's back. We sway perilously as the elephant regains her footing. Then we're off. We rock gently from side to side as the elephant lumbers with slow plodding steps. I look down, then wish I hadn't because we are a long way from the ground. I hope no-one startles her and makes her run. She might decide she's going to pack her trunk and trundle off to the jungle.

Our next stop are the monkey cages. Some gibbons, all long arms and legs, run and jump and cling to the bars as they bare their sharp little teeth. Two monkeys with bright red bottoms are fighting. They scream and claw at each other's faces. I like the giant gorilla who sits in the corner of his cage like a fat old gentleman, enjoying the sight of plenty of visitors who have paid especially to see him.

The sun is hot and there's a horrible smell, probably rotting meat. Most of the animals look rather sad. Only the monkeys seem to be having fun.

My brothers want to see the aquarium. We gaze into the green depths of the tanks where brightly coloured fish dart about. We try to spot the greater spotted this and the lesser striped

that. I do spot some seahorses hanging motionless in their turquoise tank. They really do live up to their name-little pony heads and small curled tails.

Mum says it's time for lunch so we try to find space for a picnic on the crowded lawn in front of the lake. As I take my first bite of a warm tomato sandwich, a wasp attacks my hand. The sudden sharp sting makes me scream. My hand begins to swell. Mum drags me into the tearoom where a lady dabs my hand with vinegar. Gradually the pain subsides but I am aware I must smell like a fish and chip shop for the rest of the day.

The crocodile is stock-still, his eyes closed. He looks just like the one in "Peter Pan". He ate Captain Hook's hand. I don't want to linger too long in case he smells my hand and decides I smell good enough to eat.

One last stop to see the penguins. They look like serious little business men in smart black and white suits strutting around their bare concrete enclosure. That little pool of water cannot be big enough for them all to swim in? They must miss the oceans even if their fish is delivered by the bucket-load.

We're all tired now. John has to have a piggy-back to get us back to the bus. The birds, the antelopes, the kangaroos and the camels will have to wait for another day.
