

# THE ZOO RULES

a children's story by John Boyne

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On the day that they went to the zoo, Ralph's grandfather gave him very strict instructions about what he was allowed to do and what he wasn't allowed to do.

'Rule number 1 is no running off on your own,' he said. 'There are so many people at the zoo that you could get lost very easily.'

'Alright,' said Ralph. 'And what's rule number 2?'

'Rule number 2 is that neither of us can eat anything that's good for us today. Lunch will be hot dogs and chips and afterwards we'll fill up with ice-cream and candy-floss.'

'I like rule number 2 better than rule number 1,' said Ralph.

'I thought you might,' said his grandfather.

Later that afternoon, when Ralph had already broken rule number 1 and was lost in the zoo, he tried not to panic by visiting the different animals. They all seemed very calm and weren't running around screaming because they'd lost their grandfathers.

The first place he visited was the monkey-house and – to Ralph's great surprise – he thought he could hear the monkeys talking to him.

'He told you to keep hold of his hand,' said one of the monkeys in monkey-speak.

'It was rule number 1,' said another.

Ralph ran on and a few minutes later he was standing in front of a row of long, glass cases where the snakes were all kept and – to Ralph's even greater surprise – he thought the snakes were talking to him too.

'He said it was easy to get lost in the zoo,' said one of the snakes in snake-speak.

'Don't you remember rule number 1?' asked another.

Ralph frowned and left there as quickly as possible and a few minutes later he was standing at the railings in front of a group of lions. They opened their mouths to roar and – to Ralph's greatest surprise yet – the lions seemed to be talking to him too.

'You didn't listen to what you were told,' said one of the lions in lion-speak.

'You can't tell him anything,' said another.

This was too much for Ralph. He'd seen enough of the animals by now and was very sorry to have broken rule number 1, but it was past his lunchtime and he was getting hungry. He wanted hot dogs and chips for lunch and then to fill up with ice-cream and candy-floss.

'Grandad!' he called out, standing still in the middle of the zoo and shouting as loud as he could.

'He told you,' screeched the monkeys.

'Grandad!' roared Ralph.

'He said it could happen,' hissed the snakes.

'Grandad!' screamed Ralph.

'You never listen,' roared the lions.

'Ralph!' said his grandfather, appearing out of nowhere and reaching down and taking his hand. 'There you are. I'm very sorry.'

'You're sorry?' asked Ralph, looking up in relief. 'What for?'

'I saw a group of peacocks and went over to look at them and I lost you. I broke rule number 1.'

Ralph nodded and thought about it. 'You need to keep hold of my hand and pay more attention in future,' he said as they walked towards the café. 'Grandads can get lost too, you know.'