Book Review:
The Search for Silva by Fiona Goulding

Few would argue against the value of teaching children empathy and compassion, but there is a side to this education that is distinctly less palatable; in order to understand these virtues it is necessary to look at and discuss suffering. Doing so in an age appropriate way can be a daunting task, as kids' developmental needs evolve so quickly, which is why well executed children's books of such complex subjects are a gift.

For parents keen to explore the compassionate underpinnings of ethical veganism with kids in later childhood, *The Search for Silva* by Fiona Goulding is a beautiful option. A sumptuously illustrated tale of a mother's search for her missing calf, the story is a guided tour of various animal exploitation industries, as told by the suffering animals. It might sound like a thoroughly miserable exercise — and *Silva* is certainly not out to sugar-coat the realities — but Goulding tells the story with an energy and whimsy reminiscent of the best anthropomorphic fairy tales, buoying the dark material with an adventurous spirit and warm heart.

The tone is further lifted by pages of beautiful illustrations, familiarising raiders with a colourful cast of animals who have survived their various abuses at the hands of humans; hunted fawns and crate-confined pigs, rodeo bulls and escaped lab mice. The colourful, detailed paintings are also Goulding's work — she is Aotearoa's first member of the international Artists for Conservation group — and they are simply stunning.

The book is structured as a fun 'armchair treasure hunt' story, challenging young readers to deduce the whereabouts of young Silva. The real mystery being tackled, though, is just how we allowed our treatment of other living creatures to plunge to such shameful depths — and how we might raise the future generation to instill hope of change.

The Search for Silva is self-published by the author, available for $24.99 by emailing fiona.goulding@xtra.co.nz.

Reviewer: Adrian Hatwell