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opening extract from

The Thing with Finn

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A brick with three holes in it

(part one)

I didn't want to put a brick with three holes in it through old Grundy's window. But I just couldn't think of any other way to get at that stupid stuffed otter of his.

I dug the brick out of the rockery in our back garden. That was on Saturday, the day after I started speaking again, when I finally told them my name. I hadn't said a thing for six weeks. Don't ask me why because I'm not really sure myself yet.

The rockery is my mum's idea of a joke. It's really a pile of rubble left over from the new shed. My dad reclaimed the bricks from a building site because reclaimed bricks are more environmentally friendly. Obviously not all three-holed bricks are reclaimed or better for the environment. I mean there isn't any law about it. At least none *I've* heard of.

My dad spent the whole of last summer building the shaky shed. He uses it to keep *his* dad's carpentry tools in. He doesn't get to use them much because he spends most of his time teaching kids like me. It's

one of the slightly smaller things that gets him down. The news on TV is another. Sometimes he even shouts at the TV and calls politicians rude names.

My dad doesn't teach me, because he said that would be unbearable for both of us. He's sad most of the time now since the thing with Finn. He doesn't speak very much either, because he's too busy counting everything he can find to count. Speaking's one of the things my family doesn't really do any more since Finn.

Just telling you about putting a brick through old Grundy's window makes me feel sad. Holt Street, where I live, isn't the kind of street that just leaves eco-friendly bricks lying around. I'm not saying we're poor. We just don't leave bricks lying around either, if you know what I mean.

That's something you have to know about me from the start. I'm always going off on one. My mum says I'm highly imaginative but my dad says I suffer from acute diarrhoea of the mouth. So you can take your pick. If you want to, you can skip those bits when you feel like it.

A brick with three holes in it

(part two)

When I finally dug the brick out I didn't immediately think, This is exactly the right reclaimed brick to put through old Grundy's front window.

I'm not saying the plan wasn't sneaking around inside my head for a while because it was. But it wasn't an:

X = the front window
Y = the place by the hedge
Z = the brick with three holes soon to pass through X

kind of plan either. Though I did wash the mud and cat poo off the brick before I put it inside my schoolbag beside the maths homework I keep forgetting to do.

Sunday seemed to go on forever. It felt like it was made up of the time you get at the dentist's, and I kept on thinking, Am I really going to do this? Am

I really going to do this? The next thing I knew it was Monday morning and I was running away from Briggs Street in case old Grundy'd called the cops already.

Touch 1 touch 2 touch 3

Even though I'm on the run now and even though I'm not going to school I have to stop at Clemens Road to do *touch 1 touch 2 touch 3.*

Clemens Road has a lot of trees on it. It also has a lot of hedges that have been trimmed into animal shapes, like birds and cats and giraffes. It makes the street look like a zoo where all the animals have paused for a photograph while escaping. They're covered in car fumes but they still look alive. Touch 1 touch 2 touch 3 is this game I made up about a million years ago but I can't stop doing it no matter what. And it changes depending upon what's going on. It started off as just one of those things you do. But it stopped being a laugh and became more like work, like the time Finn and me cut old Grundy's garden for him.

Now I just have to do it. I have to run up to the tree outside number 9[1] and touch it three times saying touch 1 touch 2 touch 3. Next I have to do the

1 When it happened to Finn.

tree at number 10[1], then I have to go back and do number 5[2]. Lastly I have to go back to number 10 again.[3]

1 My age at the moment.
2 My sister Angela's age at the moment.
3 Because I didn't have a real birthday this year.

About old Grundy

I know in things like this people like to know what other people look like and that sort of thing. So I'll put it in as I remember it.

Grundy is a greying crumple with no teeth who looks like he should be in a cartoon or something. His hands are amazing because they twist and turn like old tree roots and look too big for him. He also has the biggest ears I've ever seen. I asked my dad about this. He said men's ears keep on growing no matter what. He said their noses keep on growing too. For ages Finn and me followed all these old blokes around to see if my dad was winding us up or not.

Turns out it's true.

Another thing about old Grundy is he's always cracking one off. And it isn't just the noise either. I mean, it isn't exactly whizzpopping or anything like that. This one time we were helping him cut his back garden. Finn and me were at the other end of the garden, raking up the cut grass. It was hot but there was a breeze that kept blowing stuff towards us. Old Grundy just kept cracking them off one after another. And the breeze kept shoving the radiation

cloud down towards our end of the garden. You could even smell them over the smell of cut grass. And that's quite a strong smell. The weird thing was that old Grundy kept pretending that nothing was happening. No matter how loud or lethal, he just went on using his lawnmower.

I couldn't look at Finn because he kept pretending to choke and his face always makes me want to laugh myself to bits anyway. Which is funny because it looks like mine.