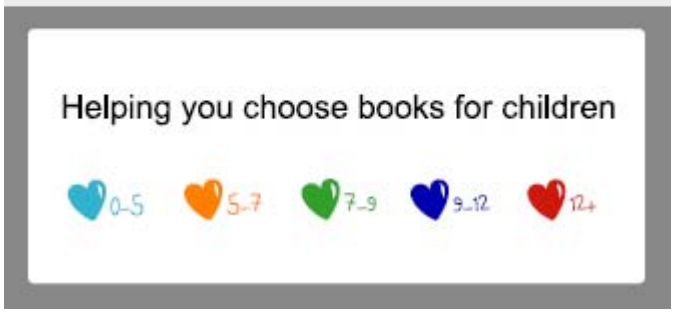
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opening extract from

Toby Tucker Sludging though a Sewer

written by

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The Allen house, present day

Toby Tucker arrived home from school to find his two friends, Jake and Amber, waiting at the gate. 'I didn't know you were coming round,' he said. 'How did you get here so quickly?'

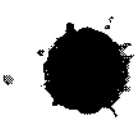
'Bikes,' said Jake, pointing to where they'd flung them behind the hedge.

The front door opened, and Toby's foster mother, Evie, looked out. 'Hello, you lot,' she said. 'Are you coming or going?'

Amber looked at Jake, who nodded. 'Coming, please, Mrs Allen!' Evie was known for always having something decent in the cake tin.

They all trooped in. Toby stopped dead when he saw Don, his foster father, surrounded by what looked like junk. 'Why are you packing up boxes?'

'Bits for the car boot sale,' said Don. 'Hiya, kids. Come round for one of Evie's sawdust sponges?'





'You'll get one on your head in a minute,' said Evie. 'Raspberry jam and all!' She cut the cake. 'Here, you lot, why don't you take it up to Toby's room . . .' She stopped when she saw his face. 'No, better have it here.'

Once they were eating, Jake asked Toby if he was putting anything in the car boot sale.

'Not likely,' said Toby. 'I haven't got much.'

Amber kicked Jake. 'Idiot,' she muttered.

'It's OK,' said Toby. 'Just about all I brought from the children's home was a wooden chest, my clothes and a few other bits. But Evie and Don have given me a CD player and lots of books and



all sorts of great stuff.' He grinned. 'I'm not taking any of that to a sale!'



Jake helped himself to a second slice of cake. 'What was in the wooden chest?'

Evie and Don glanced at each other.

'Just papers and stuff,' said Toby. 'Why did you come round, anyway?'

Amber said, 'Jake's got a new games thingy –'

'Console,' said Jake.

'– and it's got four controllers,' Amber continued, 'and we wondered if you want to come round tomorrow and play this brilliant game. You're a gladiator in Ancient Rome and –'

'Actually,' said Don, 'I really need Toby's help tomorrow. Can you make it Sunday?'

'We go to my nan's on Sundays,' said Jake. 'Maybe next Saturday?'

'Sure,' said Toby.

When the others had gone, he went up to his

room at the top of the house. Don followed a moment later. 'Sorry about that, lad, but I could use your help tomorrow. Evie's going to be busy stripping the bathroom door before we start tiling the walls.' He made a face. 'She won't let me do it – you know what a mess I made of the last one.'

Toby chuckled. There was a great big gouge in the airing cupboard door. Evie had gone ballistic!

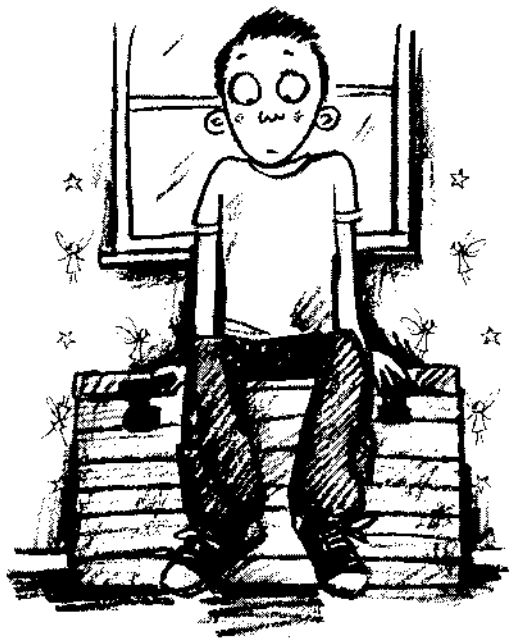
He looked out of the window. 'Be nice to have a bike,' he said. 'I could get up later, because it wouldn't take so long to get to school, and I could come home earlier, and go out to play with my mates. I can't have them up here.'

Don looked round. When Toby came to live with them, he and Evie had only just moved in themselves. Weeks and weeks later, the walls were still covered in pink fairy paper.

'We will get it sorted, lad,' he said. 'Promise. Anyway, you get pocket money now. Why not start saving for a bike? You can pick nice ones up second-hand.'

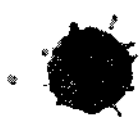


Toby sat on the wooden chest that stood beneath the window. 'That would take too long,' he said. 'I don't have much left over at the end of the week – it's not worth saving.'



Don turned to go. 'Pennies add up,' he said, and checked his watch. 'Can you come down in half an hour and help me load the car?'

'Course,' said Toby. 'I'm going to . . . You know.' He reached down and patted the chest.



Don nodded. 'Hope you're successful. You've got two now, haven't you?'

Toby looked up at his pinboard. Two names were stuck up there. The first was 'Seti', the name of an Ancient Egyptian, and the second was 'Nikoleon', who was an Ancient Greek donkey driver.

Toby had been trying for ages to add a third name. Maybe this afternoon he'd be lucky. He waited for Don to go. His stomach squirmed with excitement as he knelt to open the chest. Nobody, not even the people at the children's home, had any idea of where Toby came from, or who he really was.

But the chest held a secret. He reached in and pulled out the framed photo of the elderly man with the gentle face. As always, a warm feeling came over him as he looked at it.

The mysterious message written in pencil on the back of the photo was sort of a clue, Toby supposed.



The paper in the chest is your family tree. I wonder which little baby tore it up, eh, Toby Tucker? Piece it together and you'll find out who you are and when you come from.

Gee.

When you come from! Not where!

That was the key to the chest's secret. That and the huge mound of torn paper inside. All he had to do was piece together a name, and the magic would begin again. He hoped!

But that was easier said than done. Toby settled on his tummy on the deep red carpet with a pile of paper before him. Propped on his elbows, he began sorting through them. Scraps of names from down the centuries – Toby's family tree. His ancestors.

'Jul,' he read. 'Lan . . . iko . . . Cel . . . veta . . . ' None of those seemed likely to go together. He remembered last time, when he'd tried a system. The idea was to choose just one piece – any





piece – then work through until you found the bit that matched. Toby closed his eyes and took a scrap at random.

'tus,' he read. 'Definitely the second part of a name, so the matching bit must have a capital letter.'

He found 'Sus', 'Laf' and 'Art', then 'Raf', 'Pol', and a tiny scrap with 'Ti' on it.

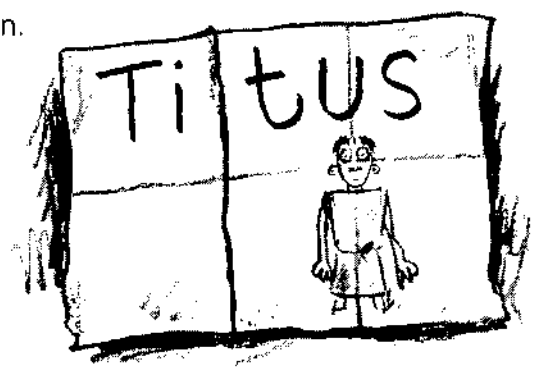
Useless. He pushed them aside, but the little one with 'Ti' stuck to his hand. He shook it off and it fluttered down beside 'tus'.

Toby caught his breath. Titus! Yes, that could be a name! He put the two pieces edge-to-edge,



rested his chin on his hands and waited. His heart pounded.

Just as before, a drawing began to appear, all by itself, beside the name. It was a drawing of a boy in a very worn tunic. And as soon as the picture was fully formed, it began to change again.



'It's me!' Toby whispered excitedly. He watched as the picture of himself changed back into the boy in the old tunic. It began to shimmer.

'Exactly like before,' Toby breathed, and waited. He knew that the shimmering light would grow, half as high as his room, then it would move towards him.

So it did. Look out, thought Toby, here comes



the eating-cold-jelly feeling. As the shimmering light passed over the length of his body to his toes, Toby turned his head.

'Yesss!' As he'd hoped, there in the window, in place of his wooden chest, was the boy in the picture – the boy in the old tunic. Toby knew all he had to do was get up and walk forward and the magic would begin. He'd be drawn towards the boy as if pulled by some powerful magnet. And then . . .

He jumped up. Too quickly.

'Uh, oh! Head rush!' He tottered dizzily across the floor. He was going to knock the boy over! 'Out of the way!' he shouted. But he was pulled in – there was nothing he could do to stop himself falling.

The room was spinning. Everything turned misty as he fell with a thump.

'Ooomph!' he said. 'My head! I feel peculiar. Why am I all wet? Where am I?' He screwed his eyes up for a second. '*Who* am I?'

