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opening extract from

Running on the Cracks

written by

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Running on the Cracks by Julia Donaldson. TRY IT!

I don't care if someone does recognise me. I had to get out. I had to.

So now I've got a new job and a new name.

The job is Ross McGovern's paper round. Ross wasn't very good at getting up in the mornings, so Rab sacked him, and Finlay introduced me. Or rather, he introduced Emma Clark - that's what we told Rab I was called.

I've got a disguise too. Not just the school sweatshirt, but some white make up. It's the Goth look, though I think I look more like a ghost.

Glennie Avenue has old-fashioned paving stones. Don't tread on the cracks and you'll be all right. Tread on the cracks and a dragon will get you. I'm not a child any more and I don't believe in dragons, but I do avoid the cracks - just in case.

It's all right. No one will recognise me. No one is after me. Everyone has forgotten about me. I haven't been in the papers since that *Big Issue* piece two weeks ago.

Oh, it's so good to be outside, away from the clutter and the noise. And away from *her.* Poor Mary. She's such a kind soul, and I owe such a lot to her. She's funny too, and plucky. But now she's got this wild look in her eyes all the time. And she just talks nonsense, streams and streams of it. And worst of all, she doesn't sleep.

That's it – 147 Glennie Avenue, the last house. It's 8.45. Finlay will be on his way to school but I'll have to go back to Mary's now. Please let her be asleep!

I'll go back along the canal. It looks different from when I sketched it a month ago. I'd like to sketch it again, with all those leaves floating in it.

This is the place where I snatched Finlay's camera. Funny to think he was the enemy then. Now I don't know what I'd do without him. He's got me this job, and this disguise. Yes, he's better at running my life than his own. But I do worry about him. He spends so much time at Mary's and he keeps missing bits of school.

Finlay doesn't seem to care. And he doesn't give up. He still thinks he can track down my grandparents. He wants me to write a letter for the music college to forward to them. I'm still dithering about that. It seems so risky. But wouldn't that be better than just vegetating in Mary's flat doing nothing?

All these questions flitting round my head. What am I going to do about Finlay? What am I going to do about Mary? What am I going to do about me?

It's so quiet here by the canal. If I stop there'll be silence. Lovely, lovely silence.

But there's not. I can still hear a crunching of leaves. Someone's walking along behind me.