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opening extract from

Grubtown Tales: Trick Eggs and Rubber Chickens

written by

Philip Ardagh

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GRuBtoWN taLes

Book Five

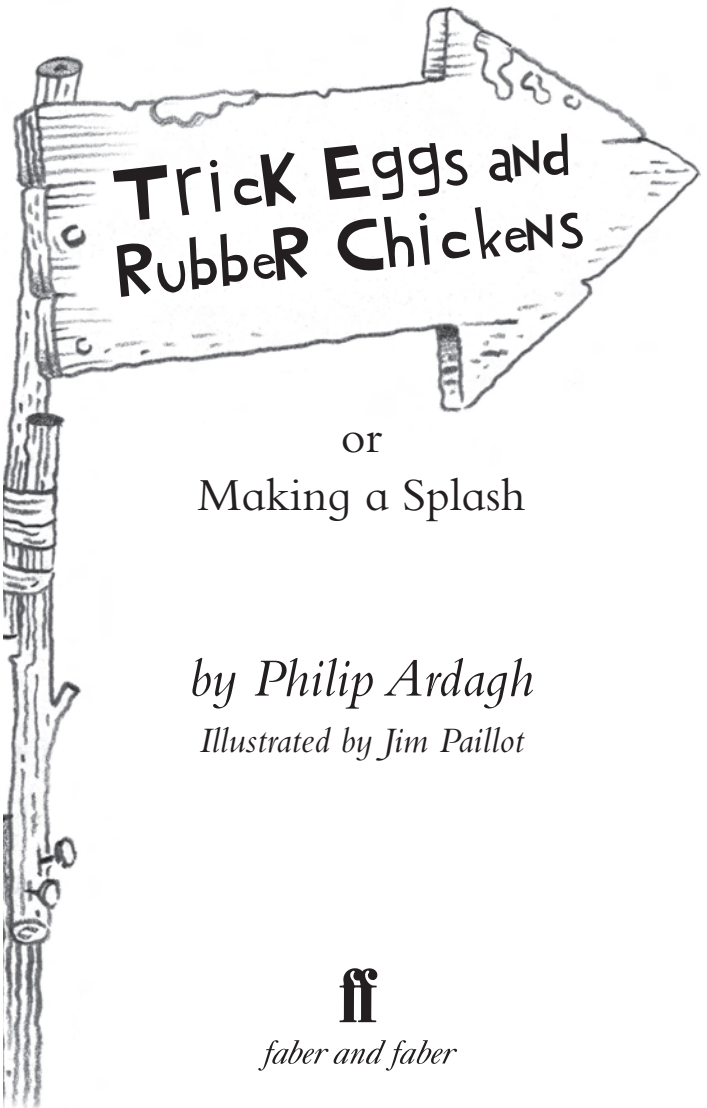
Trick Eggs and Rubber Chickens

or

Making a Splash

GRuBtoWN taLes

Book Five



Trick Eggs and Rubber Chickens

or

Making a Splash

by Philip Ardagh

Illustrated by Jim Paillot

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For John Boyne.
Yes, THE *John Boyne*

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A bit about Grubtown

You won't find Grubtown on any maps. The last time any mapmakers were sent anywhere near the place they were found a week later wearing nothing but pages from a telephone directory, and calling for their mothers. It's certainly a town and certainly grubby – except for the squeaky clean parts – but everything else we know about the place comes from Beardy Ardagh, town resident and author of these tales.



A cheery 'hello!'

I've been accused of being a bit of a grump-bag lately, so I thought I'd make this a hippy-happy-hoppy-bunnies kind of message.

'Greetings, kiddywinks! Here's the fifth lovely book about the lovely people of lovely Grubtown. Aren't you lucky?'

Oh, whooppeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

Now get on with it.

Beardy Ardagh

Grubtown

A word from Beardy Ardagh

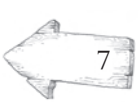
ENJOY!
(as if)

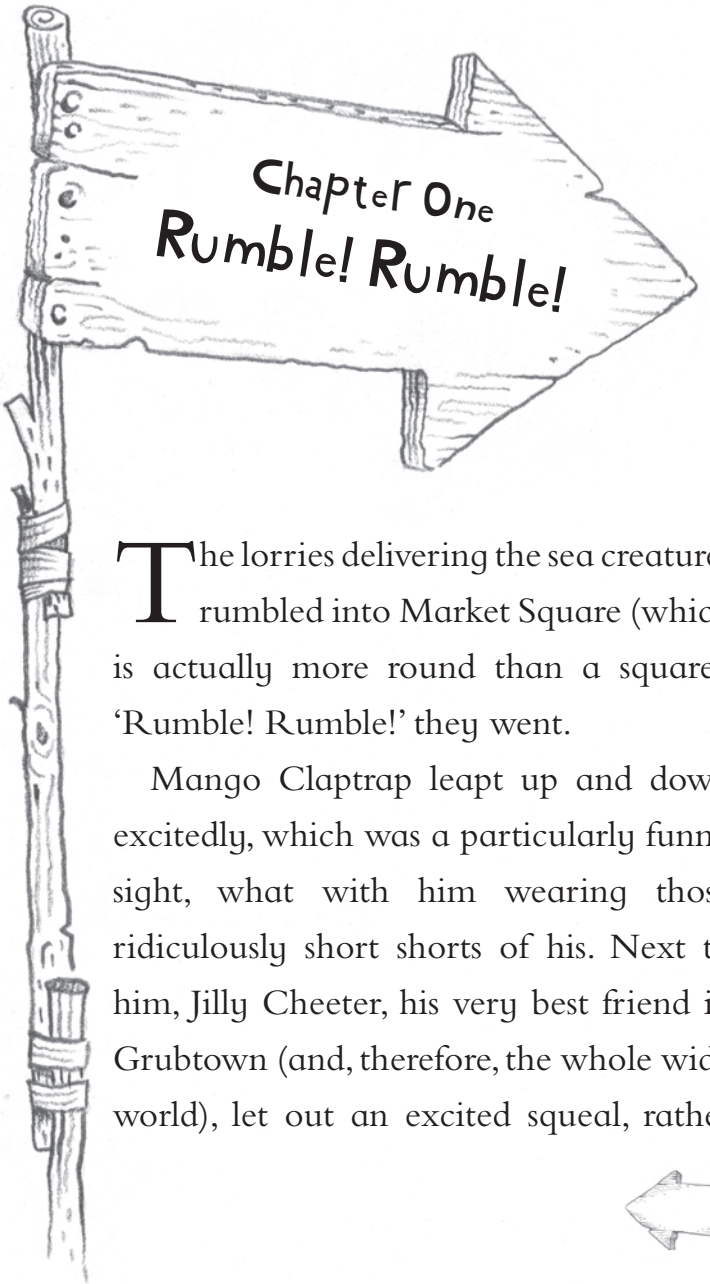
Beardy Ardagh

Grubtown

Yet another quick word (or twelve)

I don't care what you think. I'm NOT in a bad mood.

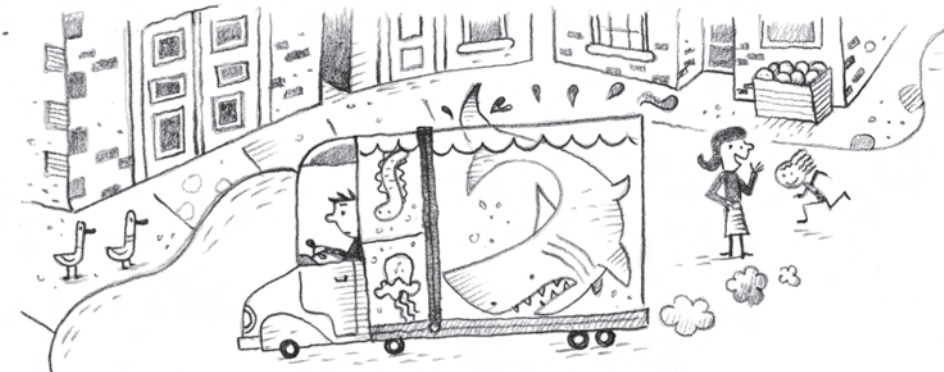




Chapter One
Rumble! Rumble!

The lorries delivering the sea creatures rumbled into Market Square (which is actually more round than a square). 'Rumble! Rumble!' they went.

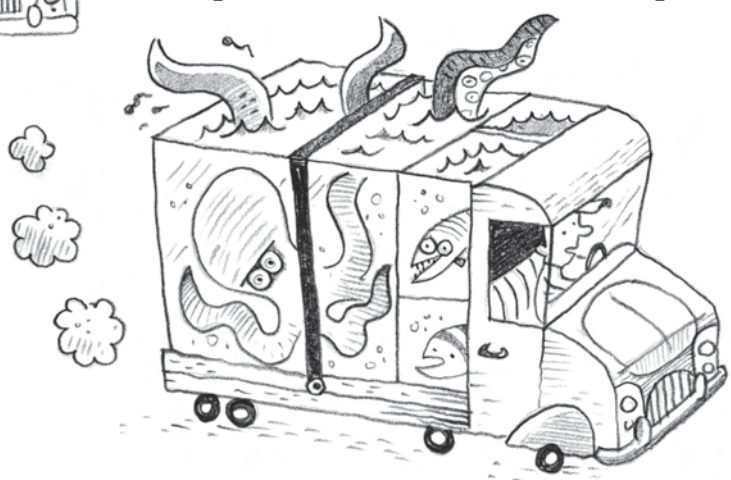
Mango Claptrap leapt up and down excitedly, which was a particularly funny sight, what with him wearing those ridiculously short shorts of his. Next to him, Jilly Cheeter, his very best friend in Grubtown (and, therefore, the whole wide world), let out an excited squeal, rather





like the noise a pig might make if it won a free mud bath or a year's supply of potato peelings.

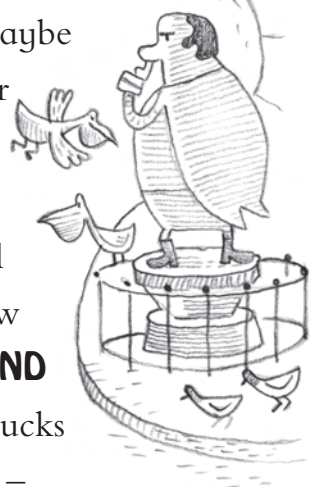
Neither Jill nor Mango had ever seen an octopus or a shark or a great big eely-thing (which might well have been a great big eel) in real life before, but here they were in enormous tanks strapped on to the backs of the lorries with special thick, black rubber straps.

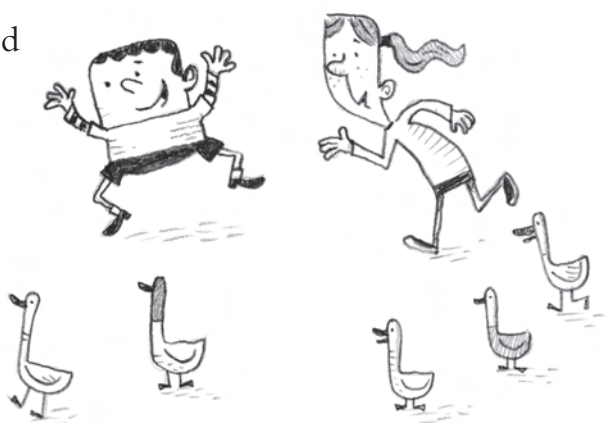




Mango Claptrap waved at the octopus. Perhaps he was hoping the octopus would wave back, maybe even with all eight of its arms. (Or are they legs?)

Jilly and Mango weren't the only ones watching the arrival of the first inhabitants of the new **GRUBTOWN AQUARIUM AND CARWASH**. Many of the local ducks – including one called Orlando – had waddled





into the square to catch the excitement, along with the usual mob of squawking seagulls.

Jip the town mascot and his partner Binkey – a pair of pelicans – came in to land on the railings surrounding one of the many statues of Big Man Gomez dotted around Grubtown. The pelicans studied the smaller fish in the tanks with a glassy stare that suggested that they were eyeing them up as a possible mid-morning snack. Not that either of them can have been that hungry because Mayor Flabby Gomez is always feeding them titbits.

The driver of the first lorry switched off his engine and the drivers of the three lorries snaking behind him did the same.The first driver jumped down from his cab, looked around the square, hitched up his baggy blue trousers and then ambled over to Jilly Cheeter and Mango Claptrap.

'I'm looking for Slackjaw Gumshoe,' he said.

Slackjaw Gumshoe owns **SLACKJAW GUMSHOE'S**

PAINT & HARDWARE STORE over on Gibbon Street. (It used to be called Hillock Portal's Paint & Hardware Store, but that was back in the days when Hillock Portal owned it.) Slackjaw is also the person who had the bright idea of building **THE GRUBTOWN AQUARIUM AND CARWASH**.

No, that's not quite true. The aquarium had been his idea and when he presented it to a meeting of the town council, along with a big bag of money he thought the mayor might like as a present, it was Mayor Flabby Gomez who came up with the idea of the carwash. Slackjaw Gumshoe could keep all the money he made from the aquarium, but Flabby Gomez would get all the money for the carwashes.

('People always need clean cars but don't always need to see fish in tanks,' Mayor Gomez later explained to me. He's smart like that.)

'I saw Mr Gumshoe buying a cup of coffee over at the Rusty Dolphin Cafe,' said Jilly

Cheeter. She'd seen him going in there with Hacking-Cough Gomez, the mayor's brother, who'd won the contract to build the aquarium (and carwash).

'Well, he should be right here, right now,' said the driver angrily, as though it was somehow Jilly's fault that he wasn't. The driver's name was John Jones. It said so on a name tag sewn above the pocket of his shirt.

'Here comes Mr Gumshoe now.' Mango pointed. 'He's the one without the hacking cough.'

'Thanks,' muttered John Jones but he didn't sound like he meant it.

While the driver went over to talk to Gumshoe, Jilly Cheeter and Mango Claptrap went right up close to his truck and stared up at the tanks.

'That octopus is enormous!' said Jilly.

'Super-huge,' agreed Mango. 'He's brilliant!'

'Fantastic,' agreed Jilly. 'I wonder if we could

get jobs at the aquarium when it opens?'

'I expect you can,' said Mango Claptrap. 'You have experience working with animals.'

This is true. As some of you already know, Jilly Cheeter used to be Grubtown's official duck-gatherer. It was her job to round up all the ducks and put them in The Duck House.

'But everyone knows how good you are with animals too,' said Jilly, which is also true. One of the big companies in Grubtown is ***Wretching's Dairy*** and Mango Claptrap used to go and help with odd jobs there, such as taking the cows out for a walk, or taking stones from their hooves.

Hacking-Cough Gomez and Slackjaw Gumshoe wandered over to the truck with Jones the driver. Jones was frowning, Hacking-Cough appeared to be choking on a cappuccino – there was some frothy milk involved – and Slackjaw Gumshoe seemed deep in thought.

Gumshoe's eyes fell on the children, as if he'd



only just noticed that they were there. 'Ah!' he said, grinning a happy grin. 'You know the way to the new aquarium, don't you, Miss Cheeter?'

'Yes,' said Jilly Cheeter.

'We most certainly do,' said Mango Claptrap.

'Good,' said Slackjaw Gumshoe. 'Would you mind showing Mr Jones, here, the way?'

'Happy to oblige,' said Mango.

'Then jump in,' said John Jones as he climbed back into the cab of his lorry. Jilly and Mango scrambled up after him.

The building site that would soon be the aquarium was at the top of Clear-Day Hill. Clear-Day Hill was originally called You-Can-Get-Quite-A-Good-View-On-A-Clear-Day Hill because you could indeed get quite a good view of the sweeping bay around which much of Grubtown is built. (On a clear day.) It was Big Man Gomez who had renamed the hill. And no one dared argue with him.

The convoy of lorries came to a halt and Jones the driver gave another grunt of thanks to Jilly Cheeter and Mango Claptrap who'd shown him the way. They all jumped down on to the hard dry mud, worn flat by the tracks and tyres of the diggers, cranes, dumper trucks and lorries which had driven up and down, up and

down the hill over the previous ten months.

The aquarium building was almost complete. Only a couple of months previously, it had been little more than an empty shell. Now the huge glass tanks were not only in place but also filled with water of exactly the right temperature. There were even inviting rocks and colourful friendly weeds in them.

'This place is amazing!' said Mango Claptrap.

At that moment a bright orange minibus drew up alongside the first lorry and a whole bunch of people piled out, each wearing bright orange clothes. It made them look a bit like traffic cones.

Jilly Cheeter and Mango Claptrap both recognised the one who was obviously in charge. It was none other than Farflung Heaps, leader of the Angry Mob, who has a house very near mine. (Mine is much nicer.)

He didn't look at all angry, though. In fact,



he looked smiley-happy.

'What are you doing here, Mr Heaps?' asked Jilly Cheeter.

'I'm in charge of getting all the animals safely into the right tanks,' said Farflung Heaps. 'When I'm not with the Angry Mob, running around with flaming torches and pitchforks, I'm a marine biologist.'

'Someone who knows all about sea animals?' asked Mango Claptrap.

'Precisely.' Farflung Heaps nodded.

'I never knew you were a marine biologist,

Mr Heaps,' said Jilly Cheeter with a well-you-learn-something-new-every-day expression on her face.

'That's why I live in Grubtown,' he explained. 'To be near the sea. The opening of the new Aquarium –'

'And Carwash,' Mango reminded him.

'– and Carwash,' said Mr Heaps, 'is the first time in ages I've had the chance to use my expert knowledge. But – if there's anything to get really angry about – I'm only a phone call away and still ready to lead the Angry Mob at very short notice.'

'Can we help?' asked Jilly Cheeter. 'With getting the fish and things into the tanks?'

'No, I'm afraid not, Jilly,' said Farflung Heaps. 'But you and Mango can watch.'

So they did. And had a great time.