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Opening extract from

The Grunts in Trouble

Written by

Philip Ardagh

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Philip Ardagh

THE GRUNTS in Trouble



Illustrated by

Axel Scheffler

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For FCRC,
with thanks for his permission
to use the name "Ginger Biscuit"



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www.meetthegrunts.com

Chapter One
Meet the Grunts







Mr Grunt woke up with his head down by the footboard and his feet up by the headboard. He didn't realise that he'd got into bed the wrong way round the night before, so he thought someone had turned the room round in the night. And who did he blame? His wife, Mrs Grunt, of course.

Mr Grunt was FUMING. He reached over the side of the bed and, feeling something fluffy and stiff, curled his hairy fat fingers around it. It was Ginger Biscuit's tail. Ginger

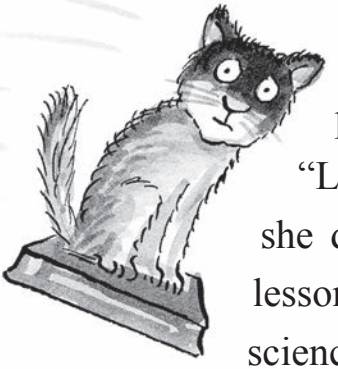


Biscuit wasn't a biscuit and, although he was great-big-ginger-cat-shaped, he wasn't a great big ginger cat either. Ginger Biscuit was a doorstop: a doorstop stuffed with sawdust and *very heavy* (as doorstops should be). Mrs Grunt loved that old cloth moggy so much that she made Mr Grunt stuff him with fresh sawdust every time he sprung a serious leak. (Whenever Mr Grunt refused, she hid his favourite hat in the back of the fridge until he did.)

Mr Grunt struggled out of bed and stomped over to the window, accidentally brushing Ginger Biscuit's tail against Mrs Grunt's nose. She was snoring like an old boiler about to break down any minute, and had her mouth half open showing a jumble of yellow and green teeth. "Wh— What?" she spluttered, sitting up with a jolt. "What are you playing

at, mister?"

"Teaching you a lesson, wife!" grunted Mr Grunt, opening the window and throwing the stuffed cat straight out of it.



Mrs Grunt watched it go with a mixture of puzzlement and anger. "Lesson? What lesson?" she demanded. (She had hated lessons at school, except for science when she could make explosions – she *loved* a good explosion – and certainly didn't want Mr Grunt teaching her a lesson first thing in the morning.) She swung her legs over the side of the bed and rammed her feet into a moth-eaten pair of old bunny slippers.

"I can't remember what lesson!" said Mr Grunt, which was true. He couldn't. "I want

my breakfast."

(I don't usually eat breakfast myself, but there are those people who say that it's the most important meal of the day. One thing you can be sure of, though, is that people who say that about breakfast have *never* eaten one of the Grunts' breakfasts.)

Mrs Grunt snorted. "Then MAKE some breakfast," she said.



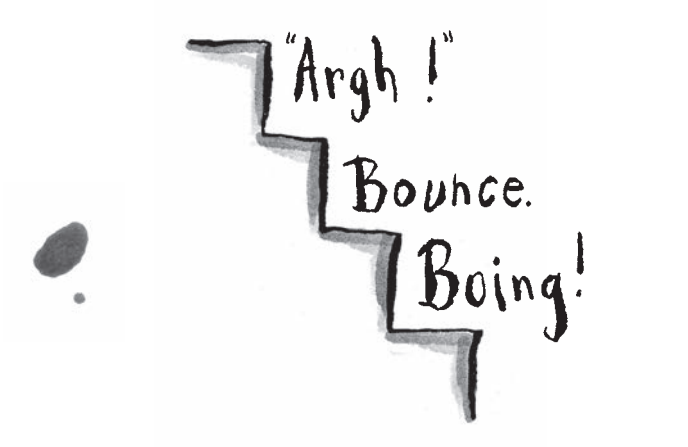
"But it's your turn!" Mr Grunt insisted. "I made us that lovely badger porridge yesterday morning." (The Grunts usually made meals from things they found squashed in the road. Squashed squirrels were a favourite, but even old car tyres didn't taste too bad to them, if they added enough salt and pepper.)

"It was badger STEW, not porridge," grunted

Mrs Grunt, "and you made it for *lunch* not breakfast, so it's YOUR TURN."

"Huh!" grunted Mr Grunt grudgingly. Mrs Grunt was right. He could now remember the bird-seed-and-sawdust cereal she'd served up the previous morning. Not bad. Not bad at all. He watched her stomping off in those tatty old bunny slippers of hers. She looked beautiful. Well, she looked beautiful to *him*. "Where are you going?" he demanded.

"I've got a cat to collect," said Mrs Grunt. She stepped out of the bedroom, tripped over something on the landing and promptly fell down the stairs.





The something she'd tripped over was Sunny. Sunny wasn't the Grunts' flesh-and-blood child. They didn't have one of their own, but Mrs Grunt had always wanted one and on one of those rare occasions when Mr Grunt was in a good mood and feeling all lovey-dovey towards his wife, he'd got her

one. Well, *stolen* one. (Not that he'd planned it, you understand. Oh no, it wasn't planned. It kind of just *happened*.)

Mr Grunt had been out pounding the pavement in search of something else – I've no idea what – when he'd glanced over a garden wall (or maybe a fence, he could never remember which) and caught sight of a washing line. On that washing line had been an assortment of things hanging up to dry, one of which he was pretty sure was a spotted sock and another of which had been a child. The child was held in position by large, old-fashioned clothes pegs clipped to each ear. And before you could say, "Put that child back, it's not yours . . . and, anyway, it's not dry yet!" Mr Grunt had leaned over the wall (or fence) and whipped that child off the line.

Mrs Grunt had been very pleased. Sunny

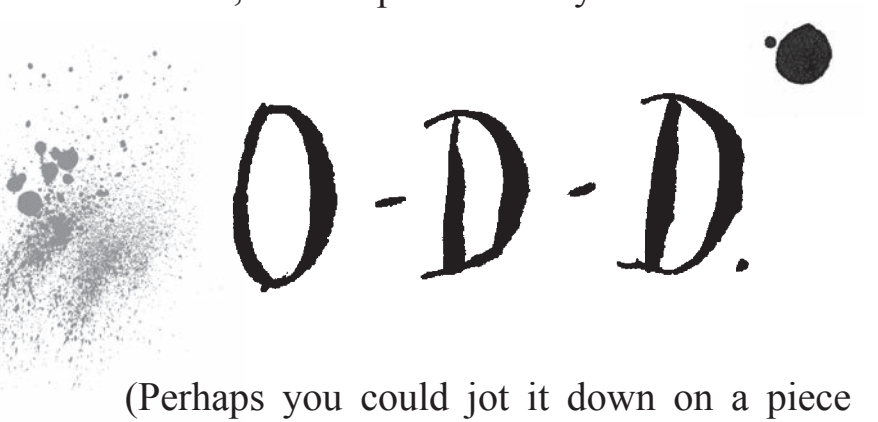
was the best present Mr Grunt had ever given her (with the possible exception of a pair of very expensive gold-coloured sandals and some old taped-together barbecue tongs, which she used to pull out her nose hairs). Mrs Grunt didn't know much about children but she could tell this one was a boy.

Mrs Grunt knew that boys should always be dressed in blue so she took a bottle of blue ink out of Mr Grunt's desk and tipped the contents into a great big saucepan full of boiling water. Next, she found some of her old dresses back from when she was a little girl and added them to the mix. She'd kept the dresses to use as cleaning rags, but now they were dyed they didn't look bad. Then, because she didn't like to waste things, she went on to serve up the boiling blue water to Mr Grunt, who'd liked it so much he had seconds. But he wasn't so

happy when he had a blue tongue and blue lips for eight weeks.

Sunny was already an odd-looking boy, what with his left ear being higher than his right ear and that kind of sticky-up hair which NEVER goes flat, even if you pour glue into it and then try taping it into position with rolls of sticky tape, but in a badly made, badly dyed blue dress he looked really, REALLY odd.

Here, let me spell that for you:



(Perhaps you could jot it down on a piece of paper and keep it under your beard until I ask you for it later. If you don't have a beard



then perhaps you could ask for one for your birthday.)

Sunny had been very young when Mr Grunt had snatched him from that washing line, so he didn't remember much about his real parents. He couldn't remember his father at all (though he did have a memory of a pair of amazingly shiny polished black shoes). As for his mother, what he seemed to remember most about her was a nice warm snuggly feeling and the smell of talcum powder. Once in a while, snatches of a song would drift into his mind on little wisps of memory. The song was something to do with fluffy little lambs shaking their lovely little lambs' tails, and – in his mind – it was his mother singing it. She had the voice of an angel who'd had singing lessons from a really good teacher.

The Grunts were very fond of Sunny in their

own way, but their own way was a *strange* way. Let me give you some examples (and if you don't like my examples you can always give them back).

For example: Mr and Mrs Grunt knew that boys don't like washing, so they never made Sunny wash. They knew that boys don't like tidying their bedrooms, so they didn't give him a bedroom. They made him sleep on the landing outside *their* room.

The truth be told, there wasn't room for a second bedroom in the Grunts' house because they didn't live in an ordinary house. They lived in a caravan.

Not a lovely, pretty, brightly painted wooden caravan.

No, not one of those. Put such thoughts out of your mind.

Nor a sleek, modern, metal caravan.

No, not one of those either.

They lived in a caravan Mr Grunt and his dad (Old Mr Grunt) had built together out of *stuff*. Stuff that included an old garden shed, the sidecar of a motorbike-and-sidecar, the less interesting half of an ice-cream van and some bobs (from a collection of bits and bobs) including an old dog kennel, some wooden planks and a frothy-coffee-making machine. The end result usually made most sensible people run away if they saw it being towed round the corner by the Grunts' two donkeys, Clip and Clop.

Ah, Clip and Clop. I was wondering when I'd get a chance to tell you about them, and now here we are.

Clip and Clop were sister and brother and/or brother and sister. They both had ridiculously long, lovable ears and big, lovable noses.

For a long time the Grunts thought that there was only one of them – that they were one and the same donkey – and they called "it" Clip-Clop. It was only when Sunny pointed out they could see them both at once, next to each other, that they realised that there must be TWO donkeys.

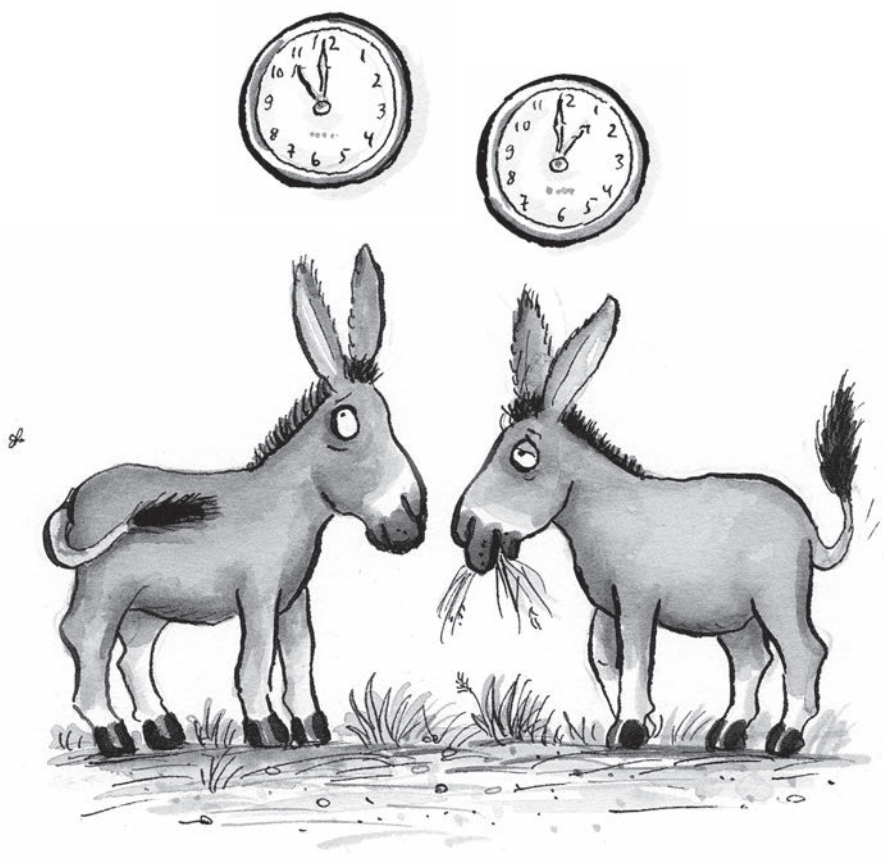
(This may not make much sense to you or me, but it's the Grunts we're talking about here, remember. They're not like the rest of us. Well, certainly not like ME. I can't be sure about you, come to think of it. I've no idea how ODD you may be. Which reminds me. I hope you've still got that piece of paper tucked safe and sound under your beard.)

The easiest way to tell Clip from Clop at a glance was to imagine that their ears were the hands of a clock. Clip's ears appeared to be saying eleven o'clock and Clop's said one



o'clock. If you've no idea what I mean – and, amazingly, this does happen sometimes – here's a picture to explain it.

See? Good.



It was one of Sunny's many jobs to unhitch Clip and Clop from the caravan every evening so if the donkeys decided to go for a little wander in the night, the Grunts' house stayed put.

Back in the days before Mr Grunt took Sunny from the washing line and gave him to Mrs Grunt, it was up to them to unhitch the pair. And as you've probably realised by now, Mr and Mrs Grunt aren't the two most reliable people in the world.

More often than not, Mr Grunt would think that Mrs Grunt had unhitched the donkeys and Mrs Grunt would think that Mr Grunt had done it, so the job wouldn't get done and they'd wake up MILES from where they thought they'd parked their house the night before.

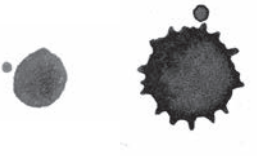
On one memorable occasion they woke up

on a golf course to find Clip sticking her nose down one of the holes, Clop thoughtfully chewing the little flagpole next to it, and a VERY angry, VERY red-faced man running towards them with a double-barrelled shotgun.

Mr Grunt knew that it was a double-barrelled shotgun because the man was firing at them WITH BOTH BARRELS! It took Mrs Grunt a week to dig the buckshot – the little round pellets inside the shotgun cartridges – out of Mr Grunt's bottom with a pair of rusty eyebrow tweezers. (And please don't ask me how you get rusty eyebrows because that'll make me almost as angry as



the golf-club groundsman had been with them and the donkeys.) Mrs Grunt had a big grin on her face every time Mr Grunt went "Ouch!" as she dug out another tiny pellet, but that's not to say she didn't secretly love him as much as he secretly loved her. (Shocking, I know, but true.) How much Mr and Mrs Grunt loved Clip and Clop was unclear. Lately, Sunny had heard Mr Grunt grumbling about the pair "not being as hard-working as they used to be" and muttering, "What good are donkeys that won't do the donkey work?"



Now, where were we?

Oh, yes.

When Mrs Grunt tripped over Sunny outside the bedroom door and went tumbling down the stairs, she ended up tumbling out of the doors of the caravan and on to the ground. She narrowly avoided a patch of extremely

stingy stinging nettles but did land head-first in a mole hill.

"If you're going to fall downstairs, then do it *quietly*, wife!" Mr Grunt shouted from the bed. "Some of us have more sleeping to do." He pulled the duvet over his head, rolled over and fell on to the floor.

He landed on Sharpie, Mrs Grunt's stuffed hedgehog. A real one.

"OUCH!" yelled Mr Grunt.

His cry of pain could be heard as far away as Bigg Manor (if you were an exotic bird with very good hearing). That's BIGG MANOR, with two Gs. But more about *that* later.

Lots more.

