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Opening extract from

The Odds

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Chapter One

BREAKFAST WITH THE ODDS



It was a Monday morning, and Mr Odd, Mrs Odd and the twins were at the breakfast table. The Odds didn't limit their prankery to the poor residents of Trott. Oh no indeedio. They also loved playing tricks on each other, so breakfast with the Odds was a dangerous affair. In fact, almost *everything* to do with the Odds was a dangerous affair.

Mr Odd sat reading Trott's best and only newspaper, *The Daily Week*, whilst sprinkling his

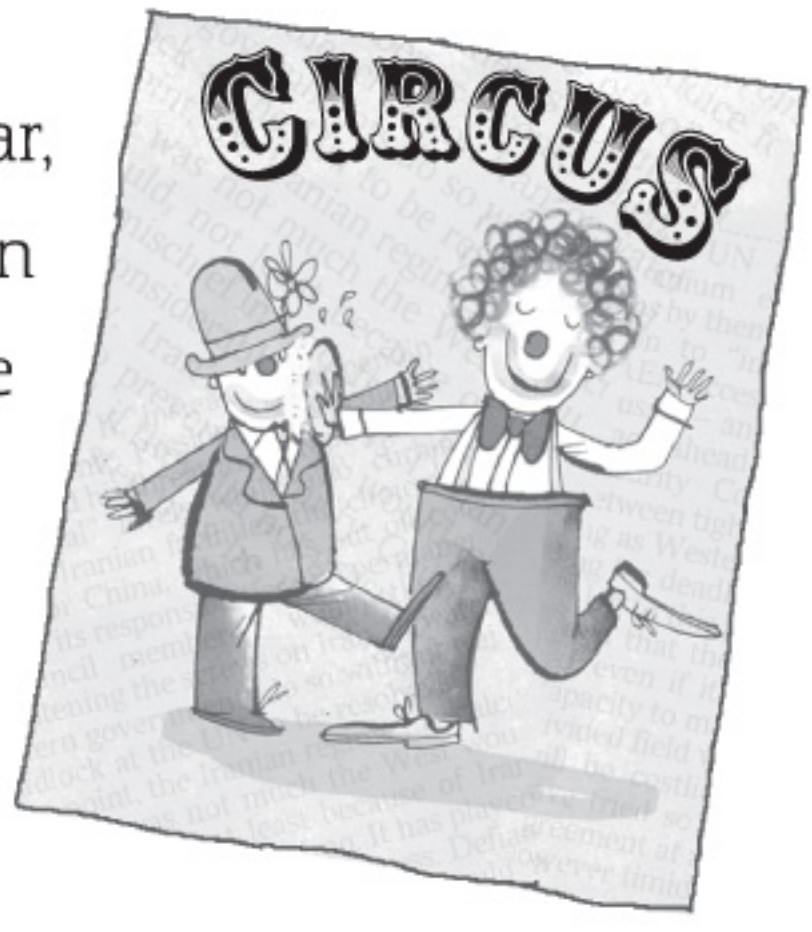
usual eighteen-and-a-half spoonfuls of sugar on to his porridge. Mrs Odd was frying some lovely thick rashers of bacon in the kitchen. Edgar and Elsie were dressed in their murky snot-green school jumpers, Edgar in grey shorts and Elsie a grey skirt, munching their cereal and trying not to giggle.



Bob was asleep under the table, which was usually the safest place to be when the Odds were in the same room. In his younger days, he and Mr Odd had been quite the pair of practical pranksters, getting up to all sorts of japes and tricks together. But now Bob was content to enjoy his retirement either sleeping or sitting around, counting his fleas. Still, in his dreams he relived the glory days when he had been an expert pranking pooch. The kind who could piddle a rude word on a Persian rug in a crowded room and be gone before anyone had even noticed.

Mr Odd turned a page and grunted. "Hmph. Says 'ere there's a new fancy-pants pair of money-baggers movin' into Snootypants Manor on Choffingly Way. There's my meddlin' fer the day, I thinks."

"Look!" said Edgar, peering at an advert on the back page of the paper. "It says the circus is in town. Can we go?"



"I don't see why not," said Mr Odd, heaping a huge, sugary spoonful of porridge into his mouth. He chewed once, twice, three times and then swallowed. He was about to eat a second spoonful when he froze. His eyes began to water and his mouth began ... *foaming*. There was a moment's pause before he leaped from his chair and began spitting all over the dining-room floor. Spitting, as I'm sure you know, is a disgusting habit, but to the Odds it was perfectly acceptable. They were, after all, the stinkiest, finkiest, toilet-water-drinkiest family in all of Trott, if not the entire world.

"SOAP!" cried Mr Odd, belching a great big whopper of a soap bubble between spittings. "YOU'VE SWAPPED THE SUGAR FOR SOAP POWDER!"



Elsie collapsed in a heap of giggles, and Edgar laughed so hard the milk from his cereal squirted out of his nose.

You might think that Mr Odd would be angry at his two children for playing such a rotten prank on him first thing in the morning, but he wasn't. He grabbed his glass of nettle juice, drank it all in one great gluggle and smiled at the twins.

"Well done, my little ferret-sniffers!" he beamed. "You've not done the sugar and soap swap since..." He scratched his stubbly chin. "...Ooh, yesterday evening!"

"When you told us to swap them back," said Edgar, rocking on his chair in hysterics, "we didn't!"

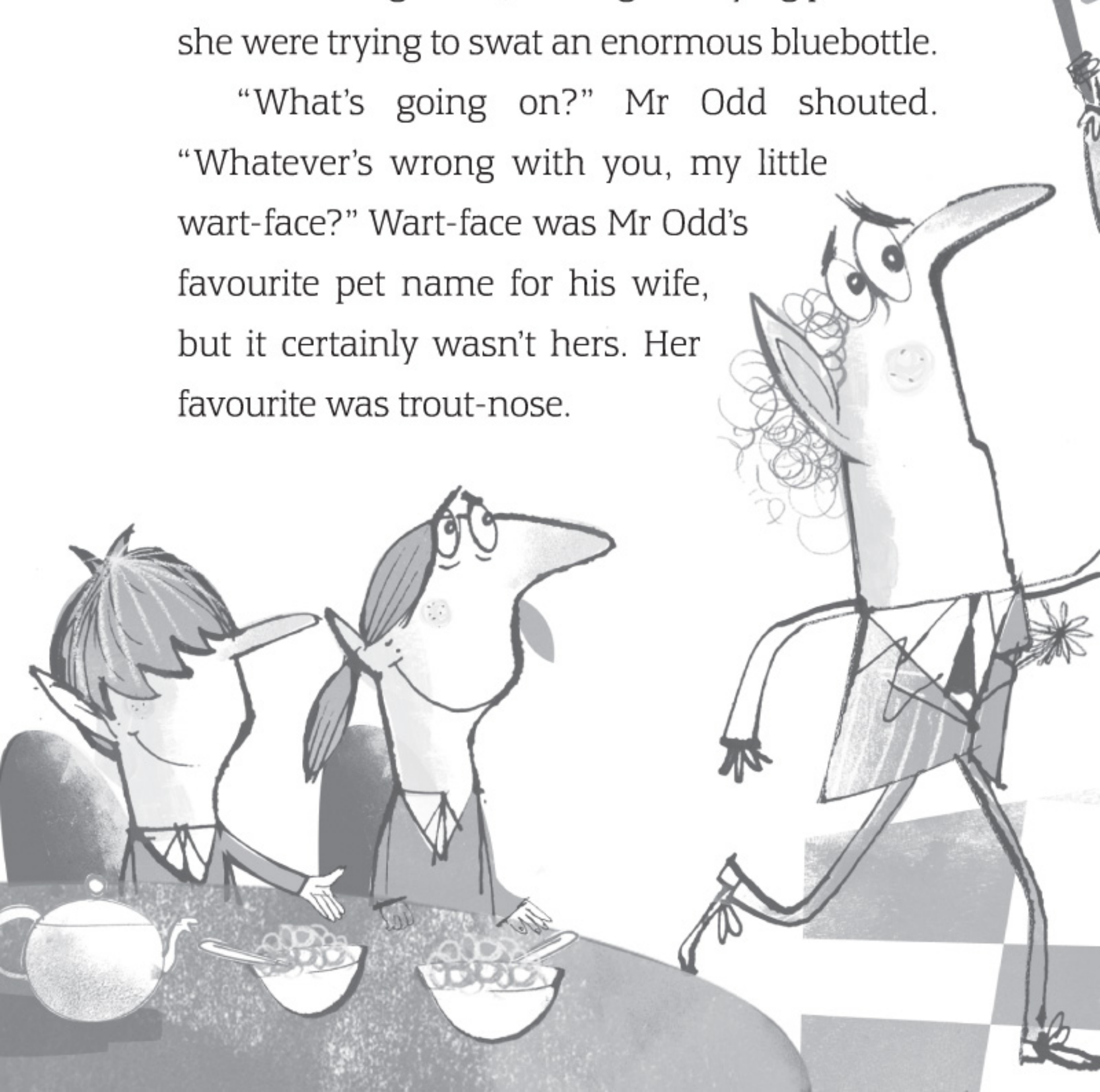


"We just pretended!" screeched Elsie, secretly spooning some soap powder on to Edgar's cereal.

"Well, I'm very proud of you both!" said Mr Odd.

At that moment, there was a tremendous scream from the kitchen. Mrs Odd came running into the dining room, waving her frying pan as if she were trying to swat an enormous bluebottle.

"What's going on?" Mr Odd shouted. "Whatever's wrong with you, my little wart-face?" Wart-face was Mr Odd's favourite pet name for his wife, but it certainly wasn't hers. Her favourite was trout-nose.



"CROCODILES!" shrieked Mrs Odd, leaping on to a chair. "CROCODILES IN THE KITCHEN!"

"Crocodiles?" Mr Odd repeated. "Are you sure?"

"Come and see!" cried Mrs Odd, hitching her dress above her knees.

Mr Odd went into the kitchen and, sure enough, there were two small and very greasy baby crocodiles waddling around on the floor, snapping their jaws as they chewed on fallen scraps of bacon.

"It was us, Mum," Elsie guffawed.

"We swapped the normal eggs for some crocodile eggs we've been saving!" Edgar sniggered.



Mrs Odd looked at her children. Her expression changed from one of horror and surprise to one of deepest joy.

"Oh, my wonderful little bags of weasel guts! I'm so *proud* of you, thinking up that marvellous prank all by yourselves. That's *two* already this morning, and we haven't even finished breakfast! My Mini Mischief-Makers will be Professional Pranksters before I know it!"

Edgar glowed with pride as Elsie continued her cackling. Just then, Mr Odd gave a pained yell and stumbled out of the kitchen, his hands flailing around like an angry windmill. The two baby crocodiles had clamped their tiny jaws on to both of his forefingers.

Mrs Odd and the twins burst out laughing. Tears were streaming down their faces when, all of a sudden, there came a loud CRACK. A second later, Edgar and Elsie found themselves flat on the floor, covered by the contents of the table. Their chairs lay in pieces around them.



"And that's what *we* were doing when *you* went to bed!" cackled Mr Odd, holding up a rusty old saw with one crocodiley hand and pointing a crocodiley finger at them with the other. "Sawing through the legs of your chairs!"

"You did well this morning, kiddly-winkers," said Mrs Odd, patting Edgar and Elsie on their heads. "But you've got to get up pretty early to beat your ma and pa when it comes to prankery!"

"No way!" said Elsie, milk, cereal and soap powder dripping down her snot-green jumper as she got to her feet. "Crocodile eggs beat broken chairs any day of the week!"

"Rubbish!" said Mr Odd. "Look at the mess me and your mother have made! That wins out over little snappers like these." He waggled the crocodiles in the twins' faces.

"You just wait, Dad," said Edgar, wiping porridge off his face. "Elsie and me have been saving up our best pranks for school today."

"I bet it won't beat the pranks I'm gonna pull on those rich folk that've just moved into Snootypants Manor," said Mr Odd.

"Or my pranks on all the folksters rushing to and fro along the high street," said Mrs Odd.

The whole family started arguing and didn't stop for a very long time. Bob groaned to himself and, despite the cold, thought about sleeping outside. He got up and slipped out unnoticed. In all the daily commotion that mealtimes with the Odds brought, no one ever remembered to walk or feed the dog.

