

TRAGIC TWIG

“If you actually did that, they’d take you away,” said Twig when Miss Troutson had finished thumping out the chords to “One More Step Along the Way I Go”.

“Stick you in a straitjacket and lock you in a rubber room.”

“What *are* you talking about?” asked Hooey.

“That bit in the song where it tells you to ‘leap and sing in all you do’. It’d be absolute chaos.”

“It’s just a song, Twig.”

“Even so. They obviously haven’t thought it through.”

“**Shush!**” hissed Miss Troutson, glaring at them over the piano. “Stop talking!”

“See what I mean?” whispered Twig. *“If I leapt and sang now she’d probably run me over with her piano.”*

“Excuse me,” said Mr Croft, the headteacher, standing at the front of the hall and glaring at a group of infants who were making faces at the row behind. “I am *waiting for quiet.*”

This information had no effect at all on the infants. If anything, it made them more restless. Some stuck pencils up their noses. Others coughed until their eyes watered. Some even hooked their fingers in their mouths, stretching them out into



shapes that, until now, scientists might have thought impossible.

CLASS ONE!

shouted Mr Croft.

“Would you *kindly*
PAY ATTENTION!”

At the sound of his voice
the infants jumped into the
air and landed on the hall floor
with a soft *fluump*. Then they sat
up straight and put their fingers
to their lips, like tiny angels sent
from heaven to demonstrate the
importance of good behaviour.



"I should think so too," said Mr Croft.

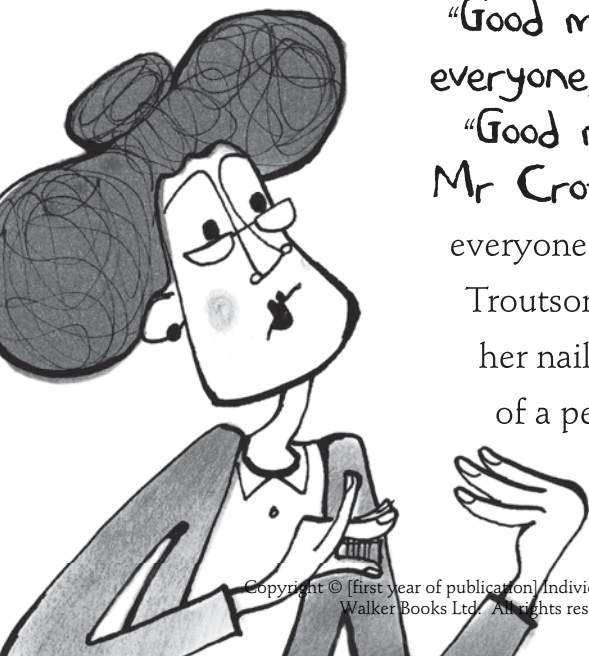
"They're gonna cop it later," whispered Twig as Miss Marshall folded her arms and glared at them. *"She'll bang 'em up in the Home Corner with a bottle of milk and a manky maths book."*

Hooey grinned. *"Is that what happened to you when you ate all the plasticine?"*

"It wasn't my fault," whispered Twig. *"Someone had made a hot dog out of it."* He looked thoughtful for a moment. *"Tasted pretty good actually."*

"Good morning, everyone," said Mr Croft.

"Good morning, Mr Croft," replied everyone except Miss Troutson, who was filing her nails with the edge of a pencil sharpener.



"This morning we are going to see who has been achieving wonderful things," said Mr Croft. "Those people will be awarded a special certificate."

I wanna
speshy stiff-cut,

said Basbo, colouring in his knuckles with a red glitter pen. "Speshy stiff-cut for blappin' 'im inna bloonies."



"Who did he blap in the bloonies?" whispered Twig.

"Timothy Mimsy," hissed Hooey. "He showed Basbo a book on gorillas and asked if he recognized any of his family."

"He should get a certificate for bravery," replied Twig.

Mr Croft opened his folder and ran his finger down the list.

“And the first award goes to Maisy Tinkerton for tidying up the classroom so beautifully at the end of every lesson.”

“Tidying up the classroom?!” exclaimed Ricky Mears. “Well, I blew my nose the other day. Maybe I’ll get one too.”

“Three, four,” said Wayne Burkett, counting on his fingers.

As Maisy Tinkerton got up to collect her certificate,

Basbo whacked

Ricky Mears round the head and sent him squawking into the aisle.

“No stiff-cut for nosey-blow,” he growled. “Stiff-cut for blooney-blap only.”



"Ricky Mears," hissed Miss Troutson, glowering at him over the top of her piano, "get back into line you silly, *silly* boy."

"I always get the blame," said Ricky, rubbing the side of his head. "Snot fair."

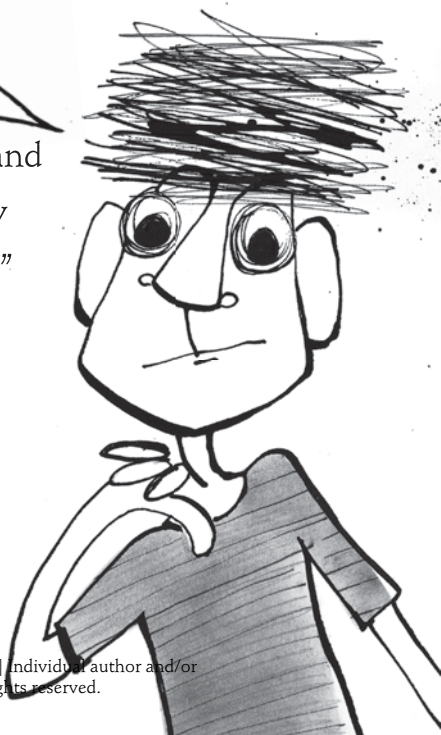
"I'm not going to *that*," said Wayne. "Sounds disgusting."

"I'll tell you what's not fair," said Twig as Sarah-Jane Silverton collected her Worker of the Week Award for the seventeenth time in a row. "Me not getting a certificate."

I never win.

"Stick an 'e' on the end and you always do," said Ricky Mears. "Wine, I mean. Ha!"

"That's the wrong sort of 'wine'," said Samantha. "You mean 'whine' spelt with an 'h'—"



“And the winner of this week’s Spelling Award is ... Samantha Curbitt,” announced Mr Croft.

“Bye, losers,” said Samantha. “I’ve got an award to collect. Or, should I say, **an A-W-A-R-D.**”

“See?” said Twig.
“Everyone but me.”



Twig had a point. Yasmin Boothroyd was averaging several certificates a week. Sarah-Jane Silverton had won so many that her parents had been forced to build an extension to display them all. Even Hooey had somehow managed to win one for “Artistic Expression”. He had been surprised because it was supposed to have been a painting of his grandma, and the

headteacher had congratulated him on his lively interpretation of a cat.

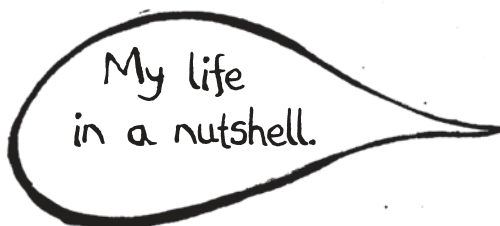
"I haven't got *any* certificates," said Twig as he watched the teaching assistants carry Sarah-Jane's awards out of Assembly. "Not a single one."

"How desperately tragic," said Yasmin, pressing her hand against her forehead.

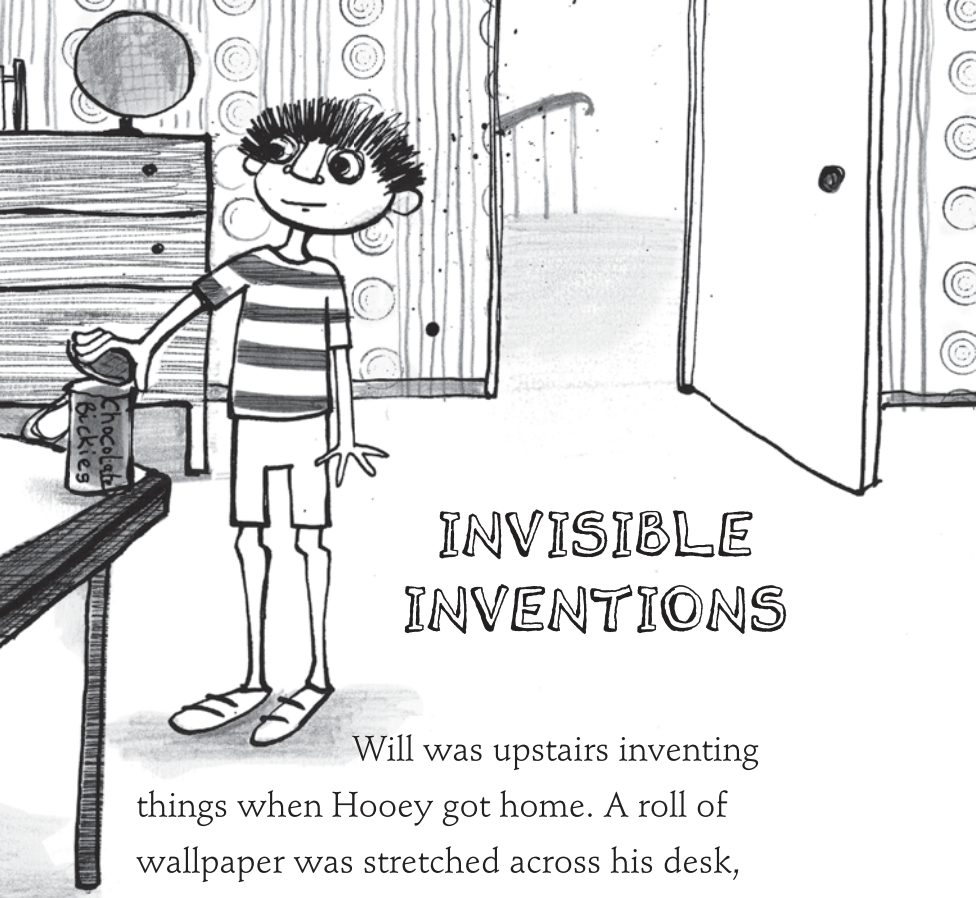
Twig frowned. "What does 'tragic' mean?"

"It refers to a tragedy," said Miss Troutson, "which is a sad, unhappy event. Or in some cases," she added, casting her eye along the line of children, "a whole series of them."

"There you go then," said Twig.







INVISIBLE INVENTIONS

Will was upstairs inventing things when Hooey got home. A roll of wallpaper was stretched across his desk, weighted down with a bottle of cola at one end and a packet of digestives at the other.

“Hungry, Will?” asked Hooey as Will brushed the crumbs from his diagram and helped himself to another biscuit.

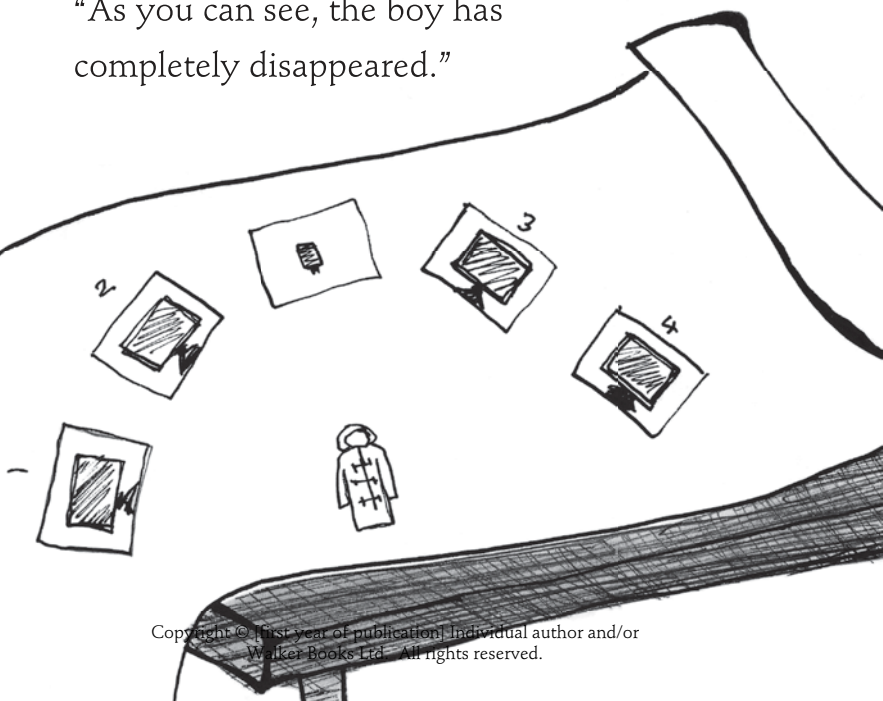
“It’s important to eat the right foods when you’re inventing things,” said Will.

“I thought that was supposed to be fruit and vegetables,” said Hooey.

Will took a swig of cola and burped.
“Fruit and veg is fine for the everyday stuff,” he said, “but inventions need extra fizz.”

Hooey peered over Will’s shoulder and saw that he had drawn a picture of an empty beach. Around the outside, in separate boxes, he had drawn a video camera, some TV screens and a duffel coat.

“It’s an invisibility device,” Will explained.
“As you can see, the boy has completely disappeared.”



“That’s because you haven’t drawn him,” said Hooey.

“Ah, but *why* haven’t I drawn him?”

Hooey thought for a moment. “Couldn’t be bothered?”

Will sighed. “No, Hooey. The reason I haven’t drawn him is that I don’t *need* to draw him. And the reason I don’t need to draw him is because he’s invisible. See?”

“No.”

“Exactly.”

Hooey was confused. “But how did he get to be invisible?”

“Simple,” said Will. “The TV screens are glued to the front of his duffel coat. All he has to do is put the coat on and there you have it: **The Duffel Coat of Invisibility.**”

“Or **The Duffel Coat of When Baboons Attack,**” said Hooey.



"They won't be showing *When Baboons Attack*," said Will. "There's a camera on the back of his coat which films whatever's behind him. If he's standing in front of a forest, the camera films the forest and shows it on the TV screens. If he's standing in front of the sea, as in this case, then it shows pictures of that."

Hooey's brain felt like one of those complicated locks where you need all the different parts to slot into place before you can open the door.

"So people looking at him won't actually see him at all," Will explained.

"All they'll see is the sea,

which will
make him invisible!

said Hooey as the last bit of information clicked into place.



"That's genius, Will! Shall we make it?"

"Slight problem there," said Will. "I had a trial run with Dad's video camera and the TV."

Hooey looked around the room.

"Where *is* the TV?"

"Let's just say some of my ideas are way ahead of the available technology," said Will.

"And we probably won't be watching TV for a while."

"No worries," said Hooey. "I've got loads to do anyway. In fact, I'm definitely going to need your brainpower."

"Best have another digestive then," said Will, offering Hooey the packet.

"What's up?"



“What’s down, more like,” said Hooey.
“It’s Twig...”

“Fallen down a well, has he?” asked Will, reaching for a new pencil. “Tell me how deep it is and I’ll do a few calculations.”

“He hasn’t fallen down any wells,” said Hooey. “I just mean he’s down, as in a bit fed up.”

Will nodded. “Basbo still trying to kill him, then?”

“It’s not just that. He’s fed up because he never gets a certificate in Assembly. On the way home he said, *‘The milkmaid’s lot is better than mine, and her life merrier.’*”

Will raised an eyebrow. “Gone mad, has he?”

“No, that was from some film he watched with his nan. But he’s pretty fed up about the certificates.”

“What does he want one for?” asked Will,

switching on his computer. "Winning Wimbledon? Saving the world? You name it and I'll print it."

"We can't give him one just like that," said Hooey. "He needs to feel he's earned it."

"We'll charge him then. Fifty pence plus expenses."

"I was thinking of finding something he can do well," said Hooey. "Something he could actually win an award for, fair and square."

"We're still talking about Twig, right?"

"Right."

Will picked up the bottle of cola.

"In that case," he said,

we're going
to need plenty
of fizz.

