



Praise for Violet and Boy's first adventure

A PLACE CALLED PERFECT

*Winner of the Crimefest Book Awards
Best Crime Novel for Children (8-12)*



*Shortlisted for the Waterstones Children's Book Prize
and the Bord Gáis Irish Book Awards*

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Sunday Express*

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and tells a gripping story..."
The Scotsman*

*"A creepy adventure story full of twists and turns that
will hook you in from the start and keep you guessing
into the final pages."
Scoop magazine*



To Dad, for everything

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THE TROUBLE WITH PERFECT



HELENA DUGGAN





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A HISTORY OF PERFECT

IN CASE YOU'VE FORGOTTEN

1.



DR EUGENE BROWN
ARRIVES IN PERFECT
WITH VIOLET.

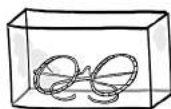
2.



THE ARCHER
BROTHERS
ARE HIDING
A BIG SECRET.

3.

VIOLET RECEIVES
A PAIR OF ROUND-
RIMMED GLASSES THAT
REVEAL BOY AND
NO-MAN'S-LAND.



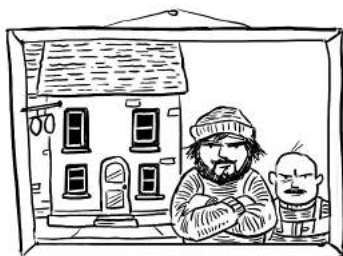
4.

BOY AND OTHER ORPHANS IN
NO-MAN'S-LAND HELP VIOLET
UNCOVER WHAT'S GOING ON.



5.

THE ARCHER BROTHERS USE TEA
AND THEIR GLASSES TO CONTROL
THE PEOPLE OF PERFECT.



6.

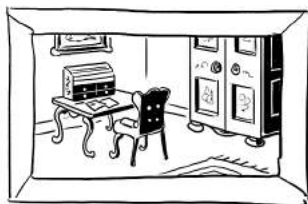
THE WATCHERS WORK FOR
THE ARCHER BROTHERS,
GUARDING PERFECT AND
STEALING IMAGINATIONS.

7.
IMAGINATIONS
ARE STORED
IN JARS AND
HIDDEN AWAY IN
THE ARCHERS'
EMPORIUM.



8.
VIOLET DISCOVERS THE GHOST ESTATE
WHERE THE ARCHER BROTHERS GROW
THEIR EYE PLANTS.

9.
BOY'S MAM, MACULA ARCHER,
IS A PRISONER IN A ROOM
IN THE GHOST ESTATE.



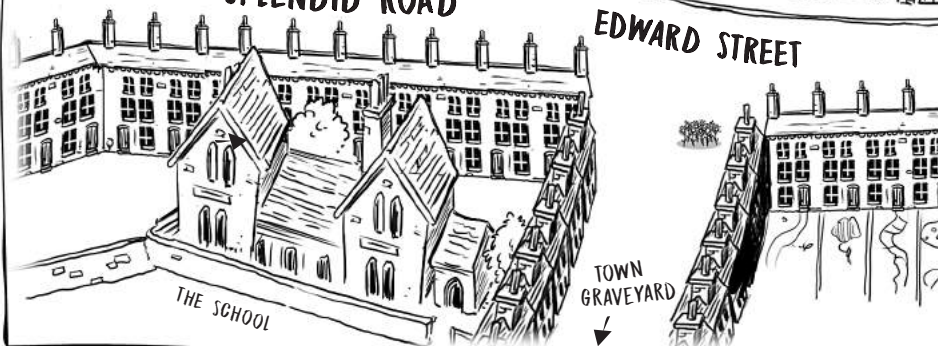
10.
WILLIAM ARCHER DEVELOPS THE
REIMAGINATOR — A MACHINE TO GIVE
PEOPLE BACK THEIR IMAGINATIONS.



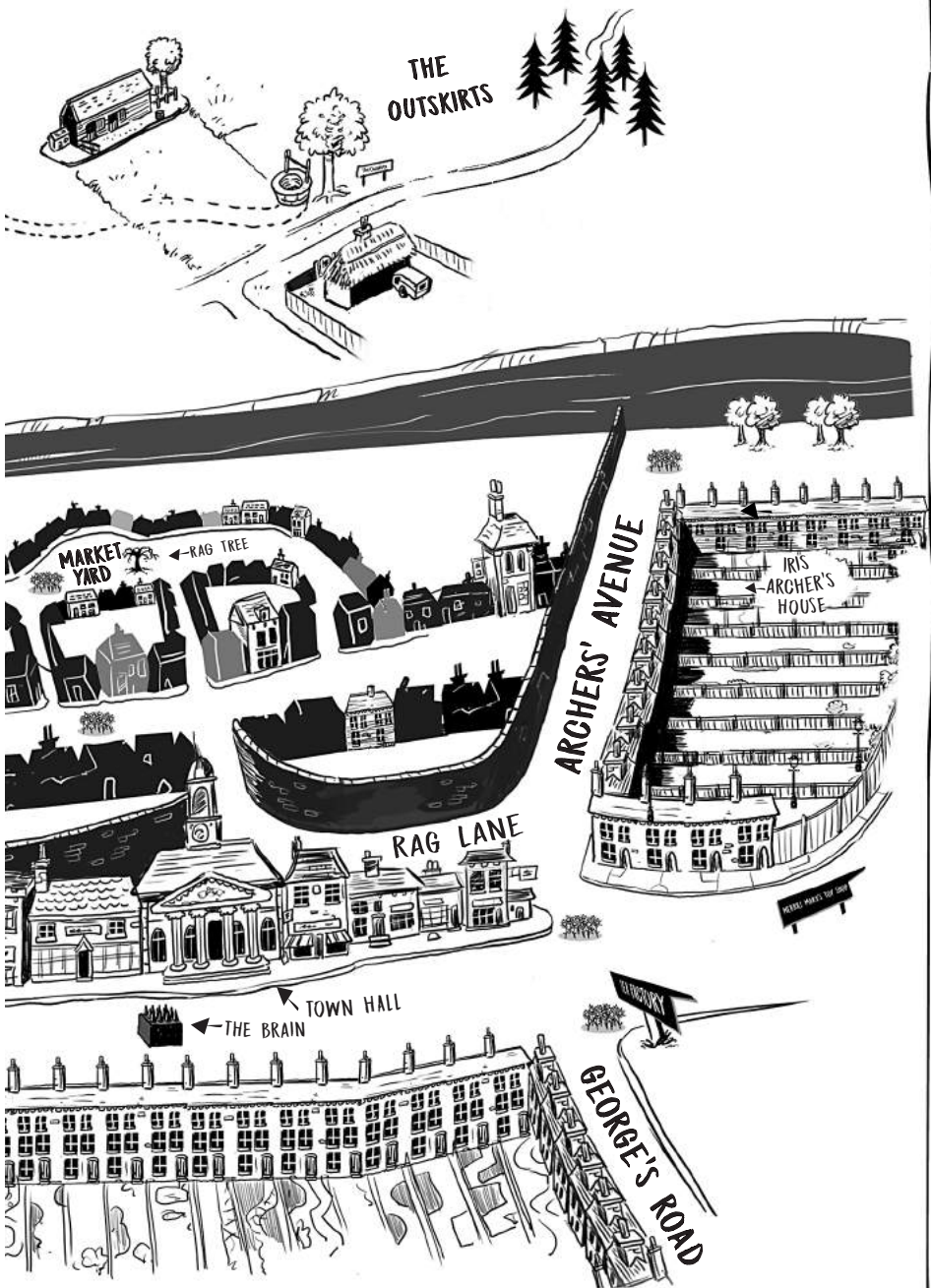
11.
PERFECTIONISTS AND
NO-MAN'S-LANDERS UNITE TO
DEFEAT THE ARCHER BROTHERS
AND THE WATCHERS.



12.
THE GATE BETWEEN PERFECT AND
NO-MAN'S-LAND IS KNOCKED DOWN.
≡ WELCOME TO TOWN! ≡
AND SO OUR STORY BEGINS...



THE
OUTSKIRTS





CHAPTER 1

HOME



“I feel like we’re spying on everyone, Boy,” Violet said, as she took in the masses of tiny TV screens in front of her. She was sitting inside the Brain.

The Brain was William Archer’s newest invention. Well, it wasn’t that new, it had been around since just after Perfect fell, which was nearly a year ago. It looked like a black box from the outside and was around the same size as a garden shed. The Brain had black shutters on the sides, that could be lifted up to give easy access to the cramped space inside, for repairs. Hundreds of small black and red cone-shapes covered the flat roof.

It was situated just off the steps of the Town Hall, on Edward Street. The Town Hall was the centre of Town,

William said, and so this was the best place for the Brain to receive signals from all the eye-plant beds.

Since Perfect had fallen, William Archer had planted numerous beds of eye plants on the streets around Town. They acted as lookouts. "A Town security system," William said, when he first proposed the idea. The eye plants were living eyes and sent signals of what they saw back to the Brain, which converted those signals to pictures.

Boy looked at the screens too. "Maybe that's because we *are* spying, Violet," he joked.

"You know what I mean!"

"What are we really going to see in Town? Nobody ever does anything exciting around here – well, nothing they wouldn't want us to see, anyway. Though maybe you're right, Violet...I mean, we might see Mrs Moody putting out her washing, or what if we see Mr Bloom plucking his weeds!" Boy mocked. "Anyway, the eye plants spy on people all the time and you're fine with that!"

"Yeah, but they're doing it for a good reason – they're looking out for Edward, in case he ever comes back."

"And we're doing this to fix the eye plants. They won't be able to look out for Edward if they're broken, will they?"

"What's wrong with them anyway?"

"Well, Dad says they're acting up a bit. He's fixed the

rods and cones on the roof, and wants to see if that has worked. The electromagnetic sig—”

“Boy, I haven’t a clue what any of that stuff means. Just say it in plain English!”

“I forgot you’re not half as intelligent as me,” he teased.

“Whatever. If it makes you feel better, you can tell yourself that,” Violet said impatiently. “So what does your dad want us to do?”

“We’ve to look at the screens and check they’re all working. Make sure none of them are blank or blinking on and off.”

Violet jumped from her chair and began to walk around. Inside the Brain were lots of tiny TV screens, all clustered in the centre of the space like a giant spider’s eyes. They were surrounded by a narrow walkway to inspect them from.

“Each screen is connected to an eye plant in one of the flower beds around Town,” Boy continued. “The number on the top corner of the screen will tell you which bed. If you see a screen blinking, write down its number.”

“They all look fine here.” Violet’s stomach churned as she watched Mr Hatchet pick his nose outside his butcher’s shop on one of the tiny TVs. “It’s a bit weird looking at people when they don’t know, isn’t it?”

“Oh, there’s a new train in Merrill’s toyshop window,”

Boy said excitedly, moving closer to the screen in front of him.

“Why do boys love boring things like trains?” Violet sighed, shaking her head.

“Why do girls love boring things like...talking?” Boy smirked.

“Any problems?” William Archer asked, poking his bearded face round the main door of the Brain.

“No, Dad,” Boy replied. “Maybe the adjustments you made worked.”

“Wouldn’t that be great?” William smiled, ruffling his son’s unruly hair. “It’d get Vincent Crooked off my back, anyway.”

“Is the Committee meeting finished, then?” Violet asked.

“Yes, your dad is on the way, Violet. He was just having a word with Vincent.”

“What happened this time?” she asked.

Her dad and Mr Crooked were always “having words”, and most of the words weren’t nice, her mam said. Her dad called it “a difference of opinion”, but Violet knew that meant he just didn’t like the man. She kind of agreed with her dad, though. If Mr Crooked was anything like his son Conor, then she wouldn’t like him either.

“Nothing, Violet,” William replied. “Vincent was just questioning how secure the eye plants are, after the

recent problems. Your dad was trying to persuade him that everything is fine." He smiled.

"Right, Violet, are you ready?" Her dad stepped into the doorway, looking red-faced.

"Did you convince Vincent?" William asked.

"No," Eugene replied, "but I had fun trying. I don't know what it is about that man, but I just can't warm to him. He was saying something about robberies and how if the eyes weren't working properly, we wouldn't be safe in Town."

"Robberies in Town?" William laughed. "I wonder what he'll come up with next!"

"Anyway," Eugene said, stepping back out onto Edward Street, "it's Sunday night, time for your bed, Violet. Your mother will be wondering where we've gone to."

"But, Dad, can't I stay a bit longer?" Violet pleaded, looking at Boy.

"No, it's school tomorrow. Mrs Moody won't be happy if you fall asleep in class."

"Mrs Moody is never happy anyway, Dad!"

"Come on, Violet," Eugene said, squeezing her shoulders affectionately.

Violet sighed and said goodbye to William and Boy, then walked with her dad through the quiet streets of Town.

On the nights her mam went to cooking classes, Violet's dad brought her to Committee meetings. The

Committee was formed after Perfect fell, as a way to rule Town. It was made up of ten people. Her dad called it a demoncrosity or demoncr-something. Anyway, it just meant all decisions in Town were voted on, so everything was fair.

The meetings were boring and – unlike tonight when she helped with the Brain – normally Violet would have to sit through two hours of adults talking. The walk home with her dad always made up for it, though.

The skies in Town were usually clear, and Eugene Brown would point to the stars and ask her to name them. They'd done it so many times now that Violet knew them all by heart. Sometimes she forgot one on purpose, because Mam said her dad loved to show off all the stuff he knew about science.

"There's the Plough," Eugene said, pointing, as they neared their house.

She was following his finger, when all of a sudden something flew out of the bushes in front of her. Violet jumped, almost landing on her father's foot.

"It's okay, pet," he soothed, looking skywards. "It's only a bird. Strange it's out at this time of night."

Violet steadied her breath as they walked up their gravel drive.

"Do you think Town would be safe if the eye plants really stopped working, Dad?"

“Pet, Town is one of the safest places I’ve ever been. Perhaps one of the safest places in the world. We don’t need the eyes, but they’re William’s indulgence. I think he wants to turn something bad into something good.”

“But what about Edward Archer? What if he comes back and tries to steal everyone’s imaginations again?”

“He’s not coming back, pet. That man’s long gone from here.”

Eugene Brown opened the front door, flooding the yard with light as he walked into their house. Violet stopped on the steps for a moment, looking out at the clear dark night.

She used to hate this place, when it was called Perfect and everyone was controlled by the Archer brothers. But now, Town really did feel like home.