THORN

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ZERO

THERE WAS AN explosion.

A bright light to begin things, and dust and darkness to follow.

And so the universe began.

ONE

THORN WOKE UP.

The room was dark.

She heard a murmur and clinking from downstairs – distant noises that told her it must be morning.

Thorn shook her head and tried to remember what day it was, what classes would be rolling over the horizon to darken her mood.

Thursday, she thought. *I think it's Thursday.* The greyest of all days. The most slippery.

With Friday you knew where you were. The day before freedom, when no one expected anything much to matter, workwise.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday . . . well, you were just

dragging yourself up the hill of the week, slowly getting used to school routine after a couple of days of light and space.

But Thursday. Urgh. The plateau.

It was a day her timetable had decided to fill with double Maths, followed by Geography. Numbers and mud. Mud and numbers. Thorn did not thrill to this prospect.

She looked down at her body lying under the duvet in the dark room and wondered why she was looking down at her body lying under the duvet in the dark room.

Shouldn't she be *in* her body?

Shouldn't she *be* her body?

That was the first clue she had that something had gone sideways.

TWO

THE BEDSIDE CLOCK started flashing and ringing. Thorn's body's arm flung itself out from under the duvet and slammed down on the poor device's head.

"I was only following orders," it said. "*Your* orders."

Thorn's body grunted, yawned, stretched, scratched, blinked and grunted again.

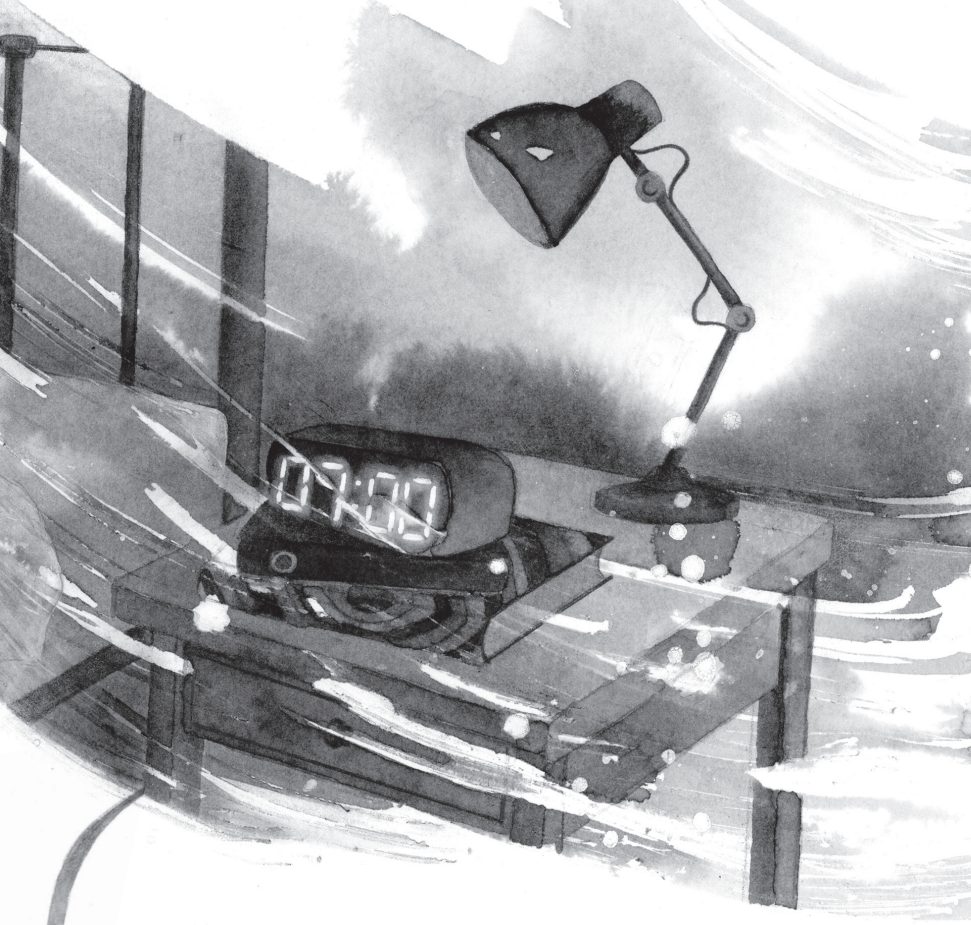
"Oh," said Thorn. "That's odd."

Her body slowly unfolded, pushing the duvet onto the floor, like a bed shedding its skin.

Then it swung its legs round, while still lying down, and let each foot fall, in turn, to the carpet.

Thonk!

Thunk!



"Ow," said the carpet. "You could have warned me."

"I tried," said the alarm clock.

A hand gripped the edge of the mattress, and then another hand.

"Ugh," said Thorn's body, as it pulled itself into a sitting position.

This was not normal. Or rather, Thorn thought, it was exactly normal.

She recognised her getting-out-of-bed routine, step by step, only she usually had her eyes shut and could feel the creases of her pyjamas bunch and pinch under her back as she moved.

She had never watched it from outside before.

She thought she ought to be scared. *I ought to be scared.*

And then she thought, *Who is driving my body?*

And then, *It ought to be me, right?*

For a moment she felt unsure.

Thursdays were like that, but never before had they been like this.

There was a rapid, rising *thud-thud-thud* from outside, as someone came running up the stairs.

The door burst open like a sluice-gate of light, and Thorn's mum said, "Come on, sleepyhead. Get up. Get downstairs. I've put toast on." And then she was gone, into the bathroom, and the sound of the shower started singing.

Thorn said, "Wait, Mum, I think something's wrong," but she was too slow and too far away and her mum was long gone.

Her body, on the other hand, wobbled to its feet, dragged its fingers through its hair and began to swap pyjamas for school uniform.

Thorn turned away, to give her body some privacy, and went out onto the landing.

She moved without moving her legs, for she had no legs, just a sort of focus where her senses gathered, a *here* where she was looking from and hearing at. It was an odd thing, willing herself forwards – thinking and moving in one joint action – but it seemed to work.

She tried knocking on the bathroom door, but she didn't have hands, and the door didn't offer any resistance to her not-hands. She peered through and saw more than she wanted, so, instead, she just followed her body downstairs.