



“CONGRATULATIONS, SCHOLARSHIP GIRL. YOU JUST GOT YOURSELF EXPELLED.”

An accident at school and bullying classmates in *Ante's Inferno* by Griselda Heppel result in Ante, her enemy Florence and a strange boy called Gil making their way through the Underworld together...

Stunned, Ante lay where she had fallen. Something terrible had happened. The hand rail had given way and Florence – no. That horrible thud, that couldn't have been her, it couldn't... But the silence all around bore its own clear, inescapable message. If Florence was safe she'd be here too, here in this darkness – and so would the strange boy. Wait. How could it be dark? She'd fallen through the organ loft wall; she should be back in the bright light of the landing. But there was no light. It was cold, with a dampness in the air and a smell of earth and stone. She seemed to be in some sort of tunnel, a pale glow in the distance suggesting that it came out somewhere – but where?

Twelve year-old Ante has a problem. It's lunchbreak and Florence's gang are after her. Desperate for a place to hide, she climbs the forbidden staircase to the old organ loft, where 100 years ago a boy tumbled to his death. No one will think of looking for her there... Except Florence. Petrified, Ante watches her enemy approach, leaning on the rotten hand-rail. She shouts a warning, but it's too late. There's a crash – and a boy appears from nowhere, just as a door opens in the wall behind them, that takes them to a tunnel to the Underworld. Forced to bury their differences, Ante and Florence accompany the strange boy, Gil, on a journey he should have taken 100 years ago.

“Ever since reading Dante's *Inferno* I've longed for a children's book that would crack its 'inaccessible' image and draw on its riches as a perfect quest story. Finding none, I decided to write it myself. What sparked me off was a tragic incident at the Dragon School in Oxford. In 1910, two 13 year-old boys climbed on to a balcony overlooking the old school hall. One fell and died later that evening. His sad death on the eve of the First World War struck me as especially poignant: if he'd lived, what were the chances of him – or many of his friends – being alive by 1918? That gave me my inspiration for Gil,” says Griselda, behind her motivation to write *Ante's Inferno*.

'A really clever idea.... I see it as a movie!' Caroline Lawrence, author of *The Roman Mysteries*.

GRISELDA HEPPEL read English at Cambridge and worked in publishing for a few years before moving to Oxford with her husband to bring up their four children.



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