

The Cement Garden – Setting

References to time

The story begins in the „early summer of [Jack’s] fourteenth year“ (9).

“One Saturday morning in June” (17) they start mixing the cement. That day Jack’s father dies.

“During the following year” (20)

“One hot afternoon” (40)

“Since my birthday, two weeks before” (42)

“one weekend” (42)

“mid-July, only a week before the summer holidays began” (43)

“One morning, shortly before the end of term” (44)

“It was late afternoon and still very hot” (48)

“the long summer holiday was about to begin” (49)

“Friday afternoon, the last day of the summer term” (51)

“two weeks before my birthday” (57)

“Towards the end of the next day” (57)

Place

The house

They live in a “house” (9) with a “cellar“ (10).

The cellar is “large and divided into a number of meaningless rooms” (12).

“On either side of us the houses had been cleared and in summer the vacant site grew lush with weeds and their flowers.” (15)

“Our house had once stood in a street full of houses. Now it stood on empty land where stinging nettles were growing round torn corrugated tin. The other houses were knocked down for a motorway they had never built.” (22)

“Our house was old and large. It was built to look a little like a castle, with thick walls, squat windows and crenellations above the front door. Seen from across the road it looked like the face of someone concentrating, trying to remember.” (23)

“There were a lot of flies in the room.” (48-49)

The prefabs near the house

“weeds and long grass [...] abandoned prefabs [...] The building itself had been gutted by fire six months before. [...] the ceiling had collapsed and the floorboards burnt away [...] In the kitchen broken sections of water pipe and electrical fittings clung to the wall, and on the floor was a smashed sink. In all the rooms tall weeds were struggling for the light. [...] in this burned-out place there was no order, everything had gone. [...] smashed-up rooms [...] The wall was crumbling away round the window, and the ceiling had fallen in without quite reaching the ground. [...] i saw the handle of the sledge-hammer in the grass. [...] Grey wood-lice had been living under the massive iron head” (40-41)

see also *The Garden*

The Trunk in the Cellar

“Along one wall was a massive tin chest [...]. Tom wanted to look inside so I lifted the lid for him. It was empty and blackened, so black that in this dusty light we could not see the bottom. Believing he was staring into a deep hole, Tom gripped the edge and shouted into the trunk and waited for his echo.” (12)

Jack’s Dream of the box

“But someone was coming with the box, there was no time and I had to run on. Then we came face to face. The box, wooden and hinged, might once have contained expensive cigars. [...] I knew there was a small creature inside, kept captive against its will and stinking horribly.” (27)

The sledge-hammer

“One hot afternoon I found a sledge-hammer [...] in the garden of one of the abandoned prefabs”. (40)

“It was a good find, [...] I balanced it over my shoulder and carried it home”. (41)

“Later that evening I threw the sledge-hammer down into the cellar.” (44)

“‘He’s smashing [the trunk] up,’ she said at last, ‘he found that sledge-hammer and he’s smashing it up.’” (137)