

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE ATTIC

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For my two boys, Harrison and Oliver.

There's Something in the Attic

Chapter 1.

“There’s nothing wrong with the house,” said the estate agent. His greasy hair was slicked back and drenched in gel. It appeared as if he had swum to the house showing. The thin moustache under his nose looked like it had been drawn on by felt-tip pen, and his grey suit was baggy and creased. Beneath the suit jacket, his unbuttoned white shirt exposed his hairy chest and a substantial gold chain adorning his neck.

“Why’s the owner selling?” questioned Dad.

“I can’t stress this enough. There is nothing wrong with the house. The current owner just wants to sell it because he’s never going to live in it. No one’s lived in it for about a hundred years. He inherited it. It’s been in his family for centuries.”

“What do you think, kids?” asked Dad, turning to look at his two boys.

“I think it’s the greatest house I have ever seen,” said Oliver.

“I think it looks spooky, and it smells of burnt toast,” said Harrison.



The house did look spooky. There was no arguing with Harrison's remark, apart from the smell of burnt toast. Dad didn't think that was right.

They were viewing a lonely Tudor house surrounded by empty fields and space. The world had changed a lot since the house was built but you wouldn't know it by looking at it. The house and its surroundings remained frozen in time.

The estate agent had already shown them around, and it felt like they had gone back a few hundred years. Inside was dark and full of shadows and dust. The house had four bedrooms and an attic, but the estate agent didn't show them the attic because he couldn't reach the panel in the ceiling that lead up into that part of the house. Outside of the house needed a lick of paint. It was tired and craved attention. The white walls were yellowing. The black wooden beams that ran up the outside walls had faded to a dull grey, and streaks of dirt covered every window.

Dad and the estate agent were chatting outside the front door. It was a heavy-looking door made from the wood of a strong and hefty tree, possibly oak. It used to be black but, like the wooden beams, had faded to grey.

To the relief of Harrison and Oliver, Dad had finished discussing the house.

“Right. Thanks for showing us around. We’ll be in touch,” said Dad, holding out his hand.

“No problem,” said the estate agent, shaking his hand and giving a rat-like smile. He slipped Dad his business card mid-handshake and slid into his red sports car, revving the engine before releasing the handbrake and speeding down the drive, kicking up pebbles and stones on the way.

Dad, Harrison, and Oliver strolled down the drive to their car. Dad imagined what life would be like living here. He had already made his mind up about the house, but didn’t want to show his cards to his boys just yet. He knew Harrison would need convincing first. Or did he? Maybe there was a plan B? He could buy the house before telling him, then convince him? Dad and Harrison looked back at the house before getting into their car. Oliver was too busy looking at his phone, so he didn’t bother.

“Errr... I think there’s someone in the house,” said Harrison, in a trembly, weak voice.

“Why you say that?” asked Dad, looking at all the windows, trying to see what Harrison was on about.

“I can see a face in the attic window.”

Dad looked up at the window, but no one was there.

“I can’t see anyone,” said Dad.

“You’re probably imagining it,” said Oliver, always happy to offer his opinion. He didn’t even look up from his phone.

Harrison squinted at the window but could no longer see the face.

“I definitely saw someone,” said Harrison, but it fell on deaf ears. Dad thought it was typical Harrison, trying to find something wrong with it.

They all got into Dad’s car. It was yellow and nearly as old as the three of them put together. He turned the key and the struggling engine jumped and shook. The car gave out a tired groan before it rolled away from their future house. Harrison glanced back at the attic window again before it was out of sight.

“The person is in the window again,” he said.

“It’s your imagination, Harrison. The dirty patterns are playing tricks on your brain. There is no one in that house. The man said it’s been empty for a hundred years,” said Dad, but Harrison wasn’t convinced.

Dad didn’t want to hear any more about it, so he turned on the radio and an old song that Harrison wasn’t interested in came on. The sound of a guitar filled the air, and a man whined about someone being their wonderwall.

What’s a wonderwall, anyway? Wondered Harrison.

Harrison leaned over to Oliver and tapped him on the shoulder. Oliver didn't look amused. He was in the middle of watching a video on YouTube. He paused it with a huff and popped out his earphones.

"There was someone in that house. It looked like a boy. About our age," he whispered.

Harrison was fourteen and Oliver thirteen. There were eighteen months between them. For the first few years of their lives, people would ask if they were twins, but not now. Their contrasting looks made people doubt they were actually related. They had grown up so very different from each other.

"I didn't see anyone," replied Oliver.

"You didn't even look. You were too busy on your phone."

Harrison was right. Oliver didn't flinch away from his screen for a single second.

"Yeah, but Dad did, and he didn't see a thing."

"Maybe it was a ghost."

Oliver rolled his eyes. He had paused his video for this?

"There's no such thing as ghosts, Harrison. If there was, they'd be all over the place. We'd be able to see nothing but ghosts. There'd be more ghosts than people. We'd be able to see them everywhere, and that means we could see Mum."

Oliver screwed his earphones back into his ears and pressed play on his video. This was his way of telling Harrison that it was the end of the discussion, and Harrison was fine with that. He no longer wanted to argue his case. It had upset Oliver, and he didn't want to upset him any further. Harrison left him alone for the rest of the journey. He closed his eyes, rested his head on the window, and thought about his mum.

Mum was small and slim, with brown hair and brown eyes. She always wore tight sky-blue jeans and dark blue trainers, the ones with the three white stripes down the side. She was super creative. Every birthday, she would bake a special birthday cake for the boys. One cake she baked was in the shape of a rocket. One was a green army tank. Another time, she made one that looked like a giant beefburger with green lettuce and red tomatoes. It even had a slice of yellow cheese down the middle that was made from marzipan. The last ever cake she baked was a rainbow-coloured llama pinata. The delicate icing looked like coloured tissue. It appeared so lifelike it looked like sweets would've fallen out of it if it had been smashed open.

Harrison tilted his head back, resting it on the headrest, and recalled the time she took him and Oliver 'trick or treating'. She had created all their costumes. She went as a

small, green alien with big ears. It was a character from her and Dad's favourite film, which they had watched a million times. Harrison went as a robot called AWESOM-O made from cardboard boxes, and Oliver went as a ghostbuster. He wore a proton pack on his back, crafted from a cornflake box and the tube from a roll of tinfoil. They looked great, and they knew it. Walking from house to house, it was obvious to see that they had put in more effort than everyone else that was out. Most of the other children were wearing costumes bought from the supermarket. There were a lot of witches and vampires out, and a hand full of werewolves, but the most popular costume was a schoolboy wizard with round glasses.

Mum walked Harrison and Oliver to every decorated house in town. It felt like they were out all night. It was well past their bedtime when they were done, and it was a school night. She sometimes let them stay up past their bedtime on special occasions. 'One late night won't hurt them,' she used to say.

They brought home a tonne of sweets. It was a successful haul of two full bin bags. The boys hardly ate any of the sweets, though. It was mostly Dad that ate them because Dad had a sweet tooth.

Harrison opened his eyes. They were red and the return to light stung them a little. It turned out to be a sad memory

for Harrison because this was the last Halloween he and Oliver spent with their mum. The realisation of never ‘trick or treating’ with her ever again struck him. It was just him, Oliver, and Dad now. The family was going through change, and Harrison hated change.

Chapter 2.

Monday morning was always a mad rush. No one wanted to get out of their warm, cosy bed. Like reluctant caterpillars refusing to leave their cocoons, especially on these cold, dark February mornings that greeted you with frost. When Harrison and Oliver eventually made it downstairs, Dad was serving breakfast in his usual hectic fashion, running around the table in his shirt and tie, and a slice of toast gripped between his teeth.

“C’m on boys. Eat up,” he mumbled through his toast like a bad ventriloquist. The boys collapsed onto the dining room chairs and blew on their Ready-Brek. They knew from experience that their breakfast would be too hot to eat straight away. Dad always nuked it in the microwave for too long. Steam danced out of their bowls as they cooled their breakfast.

Harrison looked over at Oliver and spotted the scar on his chin. It looked like a chunk of skin had been peeled away

to reveal a shiny piece of flesh. He got the scar a couple of years ago, so it had fully healed by now. It was a mark that would stay with him for the rest of his life. It reminded Harrison of their bike treks. Every weekend, and most nights after school when the sun didn't set until late, they went out together. They knew every nook and cranny of town. They knew every street, every park, and every shop. Harrison didn't enjoy going anywhere new. He wasn't much of an adventurer. It was Oliver that loved to explore. Harrison only went with him because he felt like he had to look out for his little bro. Harrison spent most bike rides trying to convince Oliver that they didn't have to go to any unknown places. Oliver had got bored with the usual streets and wanted to explore the woods on the edge of the town. Kitchen Wood was what separated the town from the countryside.

“We can't go to Kitchen Wood,” panicked Harrison. “A group of boys went there and got lost. They never found their way out.”

“What boys?” said Oliver.

“Boys from another school. No one you know. My friend from class said his friend's older brother's group of mates went to Kitchen Wood and were never seen again. It was all in the papers.”

Oliver shook his head, not believing a word of this.

“Nah! That’s not true.”

“It is. You’re just too young to remember.”

“Can you remember it?”

“Well, no, but...”

Oliver didn’t give Harrison a chance to finish what he was saying. He pedalled off.

“Oi, come back,” yelled Harrison.

Oliver didn’t listen, so Harrison put his foot down and took off after him. Oliver was a faster peddler than Harrison and had already disappeared around the corner. By the time Harrison reached the corner, Oliver was out of sight. Harrison knew where he was heading though, so continued to pedal furiously.

In the woods, the trees sheltered the floor from the sun. It felt damp and cool. Wafting branches and wandering midges hung in the air. Dirt tracks, nettles, and protruding roots covered the floor.

“Oliver!” shouted Harrison. There was no sign of him. Tree trunks obstructed his view from every angle. The dirt tracks headed in multiple directions, and Harrison did not know which one Oliver had taken. He guessed straight forward and peddled cautiously while shouting out his brother’s name. The lack of response did nothing for Harrison’s anxiety. He thought of the worst possible scenarios

and couldn't shake them from his mind. He fretted and his throat wobbled when he tried calling out again. All he could do was go deeper into Kitchen Wood. He was about to call out again when he heard a piercing high-pitched scream.

“Oliver!” he yelled.

He couldn't tell which direction the scream was coming from as it was echoing around the trees and the scream wasn't slowing down. It was getting louder, though, so he knew he was heading in the right direction.

The dirt track he was following disappeared down into a dip. He stopped at the top of the drop and saw Oliver at the bottom, laid flat out on top of his mangled bike.

“Oliver!” Harrison shouted again.

He jumped off his bike and ran down to Oliver, putting his hands under Oliver's armpits to help lift him to his feet. Oliver turned and hugged his brother, and Harrison hugged him back for a moment before pushing him to arm's length so he could check out the damage. The first thing he noticed was the amount of blood pouring from his chin. The top half of his t-shirt had turned red. His elbows and knees were so badly grazed, blood and puss seeped out of his raw skin.

“I hit a root and came off,” he blubbered through snot and spit and tears that streamed from his face. Harrison picked up Oliver's bike and rolled it over to him.

“Come on, we need to get you home,” said Harrison.

He put an arm around Oliver for support and walked with him to his own bike. Harrison picked his own bike up and pushed it along with his free hand.

It felt like the longest walk they had ever been on. They eventually got home and Dad put a big plaster on Oliver’s chin. Mum cleaned up his grazes and rubbed in some Sudocrem. It stung, causing Oliver to hiss with pain. He was sore for a couple of weeks. Bath night was particularly painful. His grazes stung when they were touched by water. The pain was unbearable. He eventually got over it and was back on his bike in no time, but it left him with the scar that Harrison was staring at.

“What you looking at, Dino-nerd?” snapped Oliver. He wasn’t a morning person and was irritable when tired.

“Nothing,” replied Harrison. He snapped out of his daydream and went back to blowing on his Ready-Brek.

Dad joined them this morning, which was something he never did. He pulled a chair out to sit, and Harrison and Oliver glimpsed at each other with suspicion. Harrison put a spoonful of his breakfast in his mouth while waiting for Dad to speak.

“So,” he began, “I’ve put an offer in on the house.”

Before Harrison could swallow his mouthful of Ready-Brek and complain, Dad continued.

“It’s too good of an opportunity to miss. This house is too small. There, you will have your own bedrooms. No more sharing a room. No more bunk beds. You’ll have your own space. Plus, there’s a spare bedroom. I could turn it into a study. And it’s cheap.”

Harrison finally swallowed. “Yeah! Because it’s haunted!”

“There’s no such thing as ghosts. And if there was, which there isn’t, I would happily live with one for the price I’m paying for that house.”

Oliver burst out laughing, spraying his breakfast out of his mouth. Harrison was not convinced but chose not to argue.

“I can’t wait to move, Dad,” said Oliver with a big smile on his face. He looked genuinely happy.

“No, me neither. So, let’s hope we get it. Now hurry. You’ve got school.”

Chapter 3.

The boys attended the same school. It was a big comprehensive; the inside decorated with a lot of brown paint. In the last seventy years, there were no changes to its appearance. It was outdated and smelled like a hospital. The

cleaners were often over-enthusiastic with the bleach, so much so that on some mornings, children would complain that the smell was burning the inside of their noses and making their eyes sting.

Harrison was in the year above Oliver, so they were never in the same class and they didn't spend their lunch breaks together either. It was double Science, English Literature and French for Harrison. Oliver had Maths, RE, Geography and PE. Oliver didn't mind Mondays because Maths and PE were his two favourite subjects. Harrison didn't have a favourite day or lesson. School was school. It was... *meh*. He felt like it was taking up too much of his time, time he could spend on things more worthwhile, like making videos for YouTube and playing video games.

Oliver sat on a middle table in RE, facing the front. His teacher was called Mr Christianson, which all the school children found funny, an RE teacher called 'Christianson'? *Hilarious*. Mr Christianson always started the day in his grey suit and tie, then within the first few minutes of lessons, his jacket would be off, his top shirt button would be unbuttoned, and his sleeves would be rolled up. He spiked his hair on top and left it long at the back. This caused the nickname 'Mullet Christianson' from the children, and from some teachers as well. It's what everyone called him behind his back, even

though his real name was Malcolm. He was like most middle-aged male teachers, with a black moustache, yellow teeth and coffee breath. He was somewhere in between dad age and grandad age. Maybe closer to the latter because he had the memory of an old man. He couldn't recall the name of any of his pupils.

Mullet Christianson began to re-cap what he had just taught. The lesson was about life after death.

“So, to summarise. Every belief system has a different theory. Christians believe in heaven and hell. In Judaism, they believe every human has a soul that is returned to God. Islam believe in Jannah and Jahannam, and finally, Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists believe in rebirth, or reincarnation, if you will.”

“What about non-religious people?” shouted out a girl with a ponytail, sitting at the front of the class. It was a girl called Jessica. She always seemed to have a question to shout out.

“Atheists? Well, they can believe in whatever they want. They can believe in a good place for the people that lived good lives, and a bad place for the bad people. They can believe in reincarnation, or purgatory, which is a place between Heaven and Earth. Some people believe our souls stay on Earth and become spirits or ghosts. And some people believe nothing happens, that everything turns black and we

go to sleep and never wake up, and then we become worm food.”

“My brother said he saw a ghost yesterday,” called out Oliver. “In a house, we might be buying. I told him there’s no such thing as ghosts.”

Oliver’s classmates chuckled.

“I also don’t believe in ghosts,” said Mr Christianson, “I’ve never seen one and probably never will. However, science has never disproved the existence of ghosts, and if this is a part of his beliefs, maybe he shouldn’t be mocked. People have the right to believe in whatever they want, without the judgement of others. We are all different. Anyway, this brings us nicely to your assignment. Working in groups, I want you all to create your own afterlife. If you started a new religion, what would your ‘life after death’ be? Go on then, get to it. You have thirty minutes before you have to present what you come up with rest of the class.”

The entire class groaned. None of them enjoyed standing up front to give a presentation. A nervousness spread across the classroom as the children whispered their concerns to one another. The children on Oliver’s desk turned back around to face each other and Oliver spoke first.

“I believe we become angels when we die. We stay on Earth, become angels, and watch over our loved ones. That’s what my mum’ll be doing. And my nan.”

He began to imagine his mum standing behind him, watching him. Then he moved on to remember one time she took him swimming. She took Oliver and Harrison swimming every Friday night after school. Both boys were strong swimmers for their age because Mum took them from a very young age. Before they could even walk or talk.

On this one occasion, when Oliver was on his thirty-somethingth lap, a sudden cramp attacked him in his groin. It was a dull ache that got a hold of him, like a giant’s fist squeezing harder and tighter before spreading to the rest of his leg. The pain grew worse and restricted any movement he tried to make. He panicked. He wasn’t close enough to the edge of the pool and had passed the red line that warned swimmers of the deep end. The water level reached his nostrils, covering his mouth and preventing him from screaming for help. He splashed his arms, hoping it would gain the attention of the lifeguard, hoping it would take him back above the surface. It didn’t. He still sank to the bottom. He held his breath and closed his eyes as he hopped off the floor whenever his foot touched the bottom of the pool,

thinking he'd shoot up like a firework and out of the water, but he fizzled out before his head broke the surface.

Someone must have noticed, he thought as he struggled under the water, but no one was dragging him out of the pool, so he guessed no one had. Where were the lifeguards? Probably flexing in front of the swimmers of the opposite sex. He was desperate for a gasp of air; a thousand different thoughts went through his mind as his face went purple. He sat on the floor of the swimming pool and massaged his leg to get the feeling back into it, but it wasn't working. It was numb and powerless. He pushed up on his one good leg and this time, as he did, his head broke the surface. He could feel the air on his face. As soon as he opened his eyes, he inhaled oxygen, filling his lungs to capacity. When he glanced around, he noticed he was standing in the shallow end. The water only went to his chest. He turned to look at the deep end because he was so sure he was over there.

Somehow, while he was under the water, he had teleported to the shallow end. Possibly through one of those wormholes that they have in space. When he got out and told his mum, she said, "It'll have been Grandma, looking over you like a guardian angel. She'll have rescued you."

Harrison scoffed at this. "More likely, the current dragged you while you were underwater with your eyes

closed. All that wafting of your arms would have moved you,” he said.

Oliver ignored him. He liked the thought of his nan watching over him.

Chapter 4.

Dad picked Harrison and Oliver up from school. It was only a mile away, but Dad liked to drive them home and Harrison liked to be driven. Oliver preferred it when he got to walk home. It was difficult for him to sit still. Harrison and Oliver were sitting in the back of Dad’s car. It was an old rust bucket, but it was cheap and Dad loved a bargain.

‘No point getting an expensive car that does the same job as a cheap one. I only need to get from A to B. All cars do that,’ he always said.

And it was bright yellow.

‘I won’t lose this in the supermarket car park,’ he also always said. He’d say it like standing out was a positive thing. The boys didn’t see it that way, they didn’t like standing out. They didn’t want to be seen in the old banger. Plus, it attracted bugs, especially the Wasps. Even on the coldest mornings of October, a random wasp would sit on the roof just minding its own business, and Harrison was terrified of wasps, so he extra hated Dad’s car.

"We got our bid accepted on the house," announced Dad, smiling through the rear-view mirror.

"Amazing," cheered Oliver.

Harrison made a groaning noise.

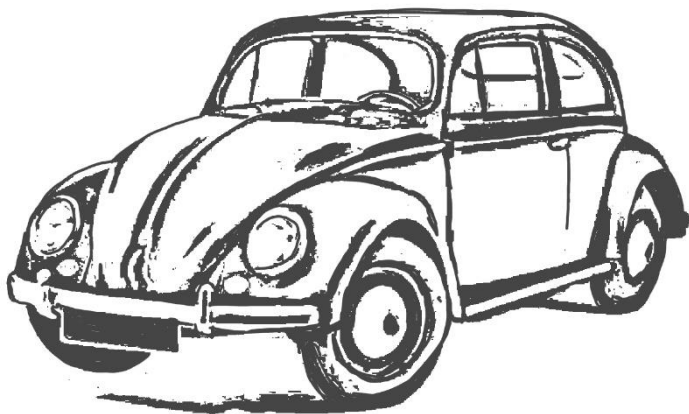
"And as the place is already empty, we can move in whenever we want. I just need to sign the documents tomorrow. Then the key will be ours."

"I can't wait to have my own room," said Oliver.

Harrison made another groaning noise.

"When can we move, Dad?" asked Oliver.

"How about Sunday? We can start packing some stuff up tonight. It will give us six days to get everything ready."
Oliver cheered, but Harrison groaned one more time.



Chapter 5.

Even though it was Pancake Day, the boys opted for Ready-Brek. Since their mum passed away, they hadn't celebrated it. Mum always made it into a big event, mainly because it was the only day Dad would cook, also he could make the most delicious pancakes, being quite the expert. Dad believed they were so good that if he owned a van, he could have become a food vendor and made millions from being a professional pancake maker. He could also make tremendous Yorkshire Puddings. He created them from scratch every week for Sunday lunch and they would come out of the oven

like balloons. Big, round and light. He was so proud of his Yorkshire Puddings that every Sunday, he would show them off to the family before serving them.

Dad liked to put a show on when it was Pancake Day. When the boys would eventually come downstairs for breakfast, Dad would have covered the table with all sorts of toppings. Chocolate spread, syrup, lemon juice, jam, strawberries, bananas, squirty cream, a bowl of sugar, and a jug of gravy for Mum. She preferred a savoury pancake, even at breakfast time.

As the boys watched on, Dad would make the pancake mix, juggling the eggs and pouring milk from above his head. Before adding the flour, he would ask Mum to check it first by smelling it, as he did every year, and even though everyone knew what was coming next, she would proceed to go in for a sniff and Dad would shove the bag into her face, covering it with flour, and making her look like a ghost. The very first time he made pancakes for her, before they had kids, he did it as a practical joke. Now it's a tradition that the boys found hilarious every time.

He'd pour the pancake mix into a hot pan and, once cooked on one side, he'd toss it. He boasted he had never dropped a pancake. Each one would flip through the air and land safely back in the pan. Every pancake came out perfectly

fluffy, apart from the first one of the batch. Every year, the first one always fell to pieces, which Dad would eat. He would joke that pancakes were like children. ‘The first one is always a throwaway,’ which Harrison never found amusing.

Dad would pile up the pancakes on the table, and the boys and Mum would help themselves to whatever topping they wanted. Oliver would choose chocolate spread, slices of banana, and squirty cream. Harrison would have a bit of everything on the same pancake. Everything apart from the gravy, that was just for Mum.

The first Pancake Day after Mum passed away, the boys asked for their normal breakfast. This was because when she died, Dad had to do everything by himself, and one thing Dad couldn’t do was cook. The first week was just take-aways. There were a lot of pizzas and fish and chips that week. Dad knew this couldn’t carry on as he noticed his trousers and shirts were getting tighter. He needed to stop eating fatty takeaways and start with home-cooked meals.

However, the only thing he knew how to make were pancakes, and sandwiches, and soup. After a couple of weeks of pancakes morning, noon and night, the boys got fed up and went off them. They had eaten so many that they never wanted to see a pancake ever again, and that’s why they no longer celebrated Pancake Day. They’ve already eaten enough

pancakes to last them a lifetime. So now they have Ready-Brek, the same as every other day.

Chapter 6.

Saturday had come. The air was crisp and the frost laid thinly on the ground. It was their last day of packing in their two-bedroomed terraced house. By the afternoon, they had piled up boxes high all over the house. There wasn't much left to pack. Clothes, toys, books, computers, and even the television were all boxed up. The only thing left were the beds and the mattresses and the photo albums. They planned to sort them out in the morning, as they would need them for their last night.

They decided on pizza for dinner. Takeaway, of course. No plates or cutlery required. They sat on the floor amongst the boxes, chatting in their little fort. Dad was flicking through the photo albums looking at the last fifteen years of memories, amassed neatly into fifteen photo albums, telling the story of his life in that house. Pages overflowed with photos, each one telling a story, portraying the changes to him and the house. There were photos of adventures and birthdays and Christmases and christenings. Photos of smiles and happiness and Mum. There was a photo of her in front of

Buckingham Palace. It was their first trip away, just the two of them. It was before they had kids, when Dad had hair.

It was a weekend trip to London. They packed a rucksack and caught the train to King's Cross station to spend a couple of nights in a Travelodge there. Using the tube, they visited all the places tourists go. Tower of London, The Natural History Museum, Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, and Buckingham Palace. The trip was to celebrate Mum's new job. She got a job as a teacher and had completed her first week, which was attending a first aid course. The school she got a job at required their teachers to be prepared for any accidents the pupils may encounter, so she had to complete a first aid course before they threw her into a classroom.

After taking the photo of Mum in front of Buckingham Palace, they took the tube to Soho for some shopping. Mum loved a souvenir, especially a fridge magnet. As they left the station, she noticed a huddle of people. There was quite a commotion going on. Peering through the tangle of legs, she could see a man lying on the floor and without explanation, she forced her bag into Dad's hand, yelling "hold this!" then sprinted to the circle of people. She shoved herself into the middle and shouted, "Don't worry, I know CPR," before jumping on the man lying on the floor. She got so excited by the fact she was going to be putting her first aid training into

practice, that she didn't notice who was surrounding the man. A hand grabbed her shoulder and pulled her up. A deep voice spoke.

“Ma’am. This man doesn’t require medical attention. He is being arrested for shoplifting.”

She turned round with a bright red face and saw the owner of the hand. It was a police officer. She was so embarrassed that all she could do was apologise and walk back out of the huddle, passing all the people that she had just shoved out of the way. Dad laughed as he told Harrison and Oliver the story for what felt like the millionth time, but they didn't mind. They loved being told that story.

Chapter 7.

Charles was sitting on an old wooden crate underneath the attic window, wondering if that boy had seen him. Charles was twelve, his feet were bare and his clothes were tattered. He wore a tattered brown flat cap to match his tattered brown waistcoat. His trousers were short and showed his shins. The boy's skin was a dusty grey colour, and he lived alone in the old Tudor house, but that was how he liked it. He didn't want anybody moving in.

It had been nearly a week since that family came looking around and Charles was still worrying about being seen. He could see that the 'For Sale' sign had changed to 'Sold' out front, so he knew that the family would be moving in, he just didn't know when. And when they do eventually move in, will that boy come looking for him? Will he try to get rid of him? Or will they accept him as part of the family? These were the questions that rushed around Charles's head. And this was why he wanted to be left alone. The thought of being around people made him anxious. He never spent much time with family. His dad was always working while his mum stayed at home to cook and clean. Charles didn't go to school, but he was lucky enough to have a tutor come round to homeschool him. He didn't have any friends to play with and he spent his weekends in the field outside the house chasing birds, keeping them away from the planted seeds. He worked as a living scarecrow. It was tiring, especially in the summer. He would get hot and sweaty chasing those pesky birds, and to quench his thirst, he would have a drink of lukewarm beer. His parents gave him a beer to stay hydrated. He didn't like the taste, but beer was the only drink available. No one drank water because water made people ill. Charles only tried it once when he was desperate for a drink and he was severely ill afterwards. It made some people so ill that they died

because four hundred years ago water was full of disease. It was dirty and disgusting and brown, so people drank alcohol, even the children. Charles doesn't drink beer now, though. Charles doesn't drink anything because ghosts don't need to. Ghosts don't get thirsty, or hungry for that matter.

Charles spent his time either looking through the attic window or playing marbles. The last occupants of the house left a bag of marbles. Well, maybe left is not the right word because the children that lived there couldn't find them one morning. They mysteriously went missing one night. Actually, Charles took them and hid them in the attic. For the last one hundred years, he has rolled his marbles up and down the attic floor, trying to get a small marble as close as possible to the largest one. He's an expert at it now, but a hundred years of practice would do that.

Before the marbles, he would float around the house, following the people who lived there, listening to their conversations, and reading their books over their shoulders. No one's ever been able to see him, so no one has ever known that he is amongst them, apart from a cat that could see him. One family had a horrible black cat that used to hiss at him. The owners thought the cat was going blind and was getting scared of its own shadow, but Charles knew this wasn't right. It tried scratching him once when he got too close, but the

paw went straight through him. It didn't seem to faze the cat; it stood its ground and got prepared for a second attack.

Charles just let it because it couldn't hurt him.

There was also a little girl called Mary, who used to think he was her imaginary friend. She used to talk to him and play with him, but it all stopped when Mary could no longer see him when she turned four. Out of the four hundred years of Charles' afterlife, those two years of being Mary's imaginary friend were his favourite. He played with Mary every day. They had tea parties, played hide and seek, and played with Mary's Doll. Then one day she could no longer see him and it was the worst day of Charles' afterlife, and that's why he doesn't want to be around anyone. He doesn't want to be forgotten again. He was so upset that he tried to leave the house for the second time. Charles had tried once before, when he first became a ghost, but had never attempted it again, not until that day. He was so devastated, he no longer wanted to be in that stupid house and no longer wanted to be a stupid ghost. He closed his eyes and pushed through the front door. It was a strange feeling, going through walls and doors. It was like jumping into water and coming out the other side dry. It tickled his insides too, like when you get butterflies in your stomach. After he glided through the front door, he wasn't outside. He was on the other side of the door, but not

at the front of the house. Everything was a bright white. He couldn't tell where the floor ended, or the sky started. He couldn't tell how far away the horizon was because everything was the same shade of white. The only thing there was the front door. He tried running as far away as possible from it, but when he turned around, it was still directly behind him. This attempt to escape went on for hours. He would run and run, but every time he turned around, the front door had followed him. Eventually, he gave up and reluctantly pushed back through the door.

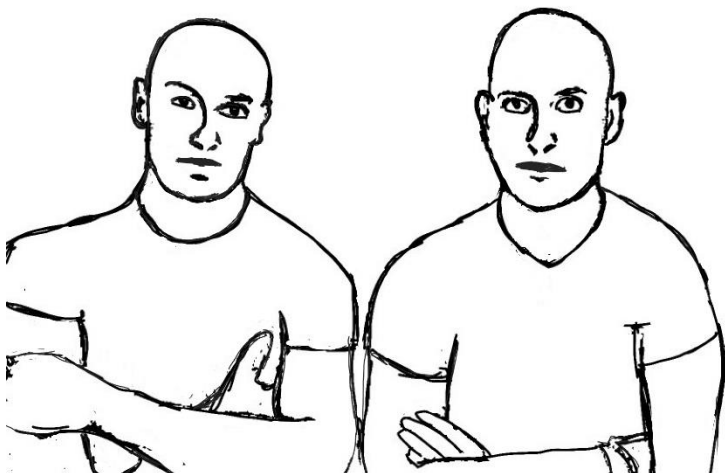
He sat under the attic window on his crate, rolling his marbles along the wooden floor, when the house vibrated gently and a rumbling noise came from outside. Charles stood to look through the window and a lorry with 'Relocation, Relocation, Relocation' written on the side of it had driven up the drive.

They're here, thought Charles.

Two bald men got out of the lorry and opened the rear doors to unload. An old yellow car turned up and parked alongside the lorry. It was the family that had looked around the house last week. They got out of the car and immediately the older boy looked up at the attic window. Charles dived out of view. He froze and stayed as quiet as possible so he could listen to what was happening. He could hear the jangle of

keys, then the front door opening, before a man's voice bellowed

“Home sweet home!”



Charles stood to look out of the window again and saw that the family was now inside. He continued to watch out of the window; he watched the two bald men carry boxes and furniture into the house. This went on for a while, so Charles never left the attic. He didn't want to risk getting spotted by that boy. He planned to wait until the family was asleep before he would investigate.

Charles didn't have to wait too long because the two bald men didn't take any time at all emptying the lorry, though Charles reckoned they could have been quicker. All it

would have taken was a bit less of the old chit chat. They really didn't have to comment on every single item they carried into the house. Charles could hear the two bald men go on about how nice the family's stuff was and how big the TV was and how nice the colours of their bikes were and how some ornaments looked expensive and how they would love a coffee maker like theirs. Charles didn't know what a lot of these things were. He understood 'bike' and possibly 'ornament'. He wasn't a hundred percent. Maybe he'd come across one on his adventure?

Once the bald men had emptied their lorry and driven long into the night, Charles could hear the upheaval of the family unpacking and organising the furniture, turning the house into their home.

Now also wasn't the time to investigate. Charles had to wait some more. Waiting wasn't a problem for Charles. When you've been a ghost for four hundred years, you become quite the expert at waiting around. Time didn't drag for Charles, and he didn't get bored. Charles thought that this was what sheep possibly felt like, standing in the same field, all day, every day, not getting up to much apart from munching on some grass and getting on with it. Maybe sheep and ghosts are more alike than what people know?

Night fell early and so did the family's bedtime. They were exhausted and after dinner, they called it a night. This was when Charles went on his adventure. He had waited patiently for this, wanting to see who had moved into his house. He disappeared through the attic floor, giggled as it tickled his belly, and re-appeared on the landing. There were five doors. One led to a small bedroom. Two led to two medium-sized bedrooms. Another one led to a large bedroom, and the last door led to the bathroom. Charles went into the small bedroom first. There was no bed, just a desk and a chair. On the desk was a slim box on a stand. It was something that looked like a window, but the glass was black. In front of it was half a typewriter. It was just the buttons with all the letters on. Charles noticed there was nowhere to put the paper. It was something he had never seen before.

He floated through the wall to the first medium-sized bedroom next door. There was a bed in this one and the smaller, younger boy was asleep in it. Charles went for a nosey around the room. There were wardrobes with clothes in, drawers full of pants and socks, shelves on the wall with trophies on, and the walls had pictures on them. They were pictures of men in red shirts running after footballs. Charles wasn't overly impressed, so he passed through the wall to the other middle-sized bedroom. The older boy was asleep in

here. Charles recognised him; it was the boy that looked at him. His bedroom was more or less the same as the other one except on these shelves were models made out of little coloured bricks, and the pictures on the walls were of dinosaurs. Still unimpressed, Charles went through to the large bedroom, drifting through the wall again. This room was light and the man was sat up in bed, tapping away at an object on his lap. He came to an abrupt stop and looked up. He stared right at Charles with piercing blue eyes.

Oh, no. He's seen me! thought Charles. He stayed as still as he could. He didn't know what to do next, except for stare back and wait. It felt like a lifetime, but after five or six seconds, the man looked back down and began tapping away with his fingers again. He had only stopped to think. It turned out the man couldn't see him. Charles hovered closer to him to see what he was doing. It was another one of those half typewriters, but this time the buttons were connected to the window, and this window wasn't black. It was a bright white, and the letters he was pressing were appearing on the window. Charles went in for a closer look to have a read and the man suddenly shuddered and made a 'brrr' noise that people make when they're cold. Charles had got too close to him. His presence caused the temperature to drop and the man's bottom lip shivered. Charles decided against getting close to him and

sank through the floor. He was now downstairs in the kitchen. It was full of gadgets that Charles had never seen before. The one that stood out was the heavy-looking wardrobe made of metal, making a humming noise. Charles put his head in. Now the temperature dropped for him. His head tingled. It felt like his brain had been smothered in ice cream. This wardrobe didn't have clothes, it had cheese and milk. Nothing of interest to Charles as he never drank or got hungry, so he continued his look around.

Next was the living room. Two long chairs faced another one of those black windows, but this one was massive. Charles noticed this one had a little red light in the bottom right-hand corner he was attracted to for some reason. He felt like it was calling him. The curiosity got too much, so he went for a closer inspection. He stuck out his small, skinny grey finger and poked at the red light. Suddenly, the black glass turned into an explosion of colour and a man appeared behind the glass. He was standing in front of a map that was covered in clouds, and he was talking.

“So, not a very nice day tomorrow. Very dull and plenty of showers, so don't forget your umbrella. And that's the weather.”

Charles didn't know what to do. More people appeared in the box and they wouldn't shut up. He began to panic and

whooshed around in circles when he heard footsteps stomping to the top of the stairs.

“Hello?” said a concerned voice from upstairs. “Is anybody there?”

There was silence for a couple of seconds, then the footsteps got closer. They stomped downstairs.

“Hello?” they said again. It was the boy’s dad.

Charles, as quick as a flash, hid behind one of the long chairs. He forgot that the man couldn’t see him, but he was in too much of a panic to think rationally.

The man flipped a switch on the wall and a light came on. He stood at the doorway and scanned the room. Nothing should be out of place because Charles didn’t touch anything, apart from the window box that was now full of noisy people. The man picked up a small box covered in numbered buttons from the arm of one of the long chairs and pressed the red button. The window box thing went back to black, getting rid of the people and their noise. Charles remained behind the chair and peeked over. He was still not risking getting seen and watched the man try to open the front door. The man wiggled the handle and gave two firm tugs. It was locked shut, and the man seemed satisfied by this, so he switched the lights back off and headed upstairs.

When the coast was clear, Charles got out from behind the chair and decided that was enough adventure for him for today. It was a close call, and even if the man couldn't see him, the shock of the window box unexpectedly blaring out had unsettled him, so he floated up through a couple of ceilings and back to the attic.

Chapter 8.

The alarm clock went off for the fourth time that morning. Dad groaned and rolled out of bed, slamming the *off* button on the alarm instead of *snooze*. Getting up to dark, chilly mornings was not getting easier. He yawned and stretched as he walked out of his bedroom and down the landing to Harrison's bedroom. When he peeked his head around the door to wake Harrison up, he saw Harrison was already awake, sitting up in bed, looking at the ceiling. Dad was about to speak, but Harrison put up a finger to shush him and held it there because he wanted silence.

"There's something in the attic," he whispered.

"Oh no, not this aga...", Dad began, but Harrison shushed him.

"Listen," he said, "it's been going on for over an hour."

"What has?"

"Just listen!" demanded Harrison.

They listened, and eventually, a noise came from the attic. It sounded like something scratching along the floor, or something being dragged or rolled or scraped. It started near the wall at the front of the house, where the attic window was, and then the sound travelled along the entire length of the ceiling to the back of the house. Then it happened again. It started at the front of the house and scraped along the floor to the back. Then it happened a third time.

“Sounds like mice,” said Dad.

“But they’re not running back. The sound starts at the front and finishes at the other side of the attic. Something’s up there,” said Harrison.

“There’s no one up there, Harrison,” argued Dad.

“How do you know? Have you been up?”

“Well, no, but, look. I’ll check it out.”

“Now?”

“What do you mean now? I can’t do it now. I want to do breakfast. And I haven’t got the stepladder. And I’m still in my pyjamas.”

“You’re just making excuses.”

“Fine. Let me get the stuff.”

Dad marched out of Harrison’s bedroom and trudged downstairs. Harrison rolled out of bed and waited on the landing underneath the panel in the ceiling. Oliver wandered

out of the bedroom with his hair messy and stuck up in bedhead tufts. “What’s happening?” he asked.

“There are noises coming from the attic. Dad’s going up to look,” said Harrison.

“What kind of noises?”

“Scraping noises.”

“Probably mice.”

Before Harrison could argue, Dad reappeared with a stepladder.

“Okay, move it, you two!” he ordered. He opened the step ladder and lined it up underneath the panel. After climbing the first step, he took a moment to check his centre of gravity. He was fine, so he moved to the top step with a slight wobble. When he was happy that he had his balance, he pushed the panel up and slid it to one side. Before Dad could poke his head up into the attic, a marble rolled out. It dropped through the hole and fell to the landing floor with a *donk*. Dad, Harrison, and Oliver stared at the marble as it rolled away from them. Then they all looked up at the hole in the ceiling, where the marble appeared from, and then at it each other, with quizzical looks on their faces.

“I told you someone was up there, and they’re playing with marbles,” said Harrison.

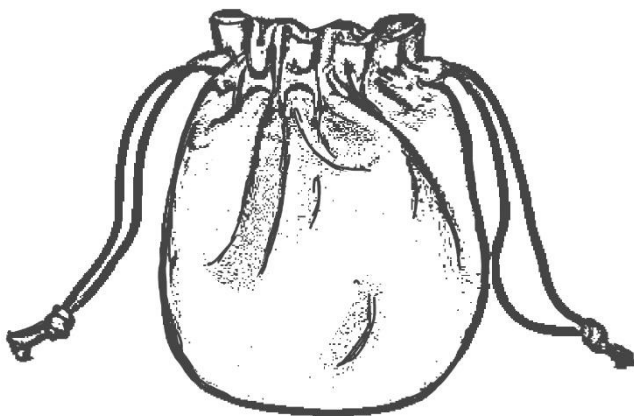
“Just wait there,” said Dad, and he pulled himself up into the attic. It was dusty. There was just enough light coming through from the window for Dad to see. Everything was grey from the dust particles floating around the room. There was nothing else apart from a wooden crate box that was upside down on the floor, just under the window. Dad looked around, but no one was up there. He checked the dark corners. No one. He looked out of the window and could see his yellow banger parked out front. There was a layer of frost on the windscreen that he knew he would have to scrape off before driving anywhere. He looked back at the crate and noticed something next to it. A little bag, like an old-fashioned purse, or a pouch, with drawstrings. Before even opening it, he picked it up and knew exactly what was inside. He could hear the contents make an unmistakable dink noise as they clashed and bounced and clattered together. He put the bag in his pocket and climbed out of the attic.

“Well?” asked Harrison impatiently.

“Nothing up there,” said Dad.

“Nothing?” questioned Harrison. He couldn’t quite work out how there could be nothing up there. He heard something, he was sure of it.

“Nothing apart from this bag of marbles.”



Dad pulled the bag out of his pocket and held it out in front of him. It was red and made from fuzzy felt material.

“But who was playing with them?” asked Harrison.

“No one,” said Dad.

“The mice!” said Oliver.

Harrison shook his head, not impressed, but before he could protest, Dad spoke.

“Right, come on. We need to get ready. It’s school soon,” and he ushered Harrison and Oliver downstairs for breakfast.

“But...” began Harrison.

“But nothing. Let’s just get ready and we’ll discuss this later.”

Chapter 9.

The front door slammed shut and the rumbling sound of an engine disappeared into the beyond. Charles watched the yellow vehicle fade away and clenched his hands into fists. He was fuming. His face twisted into a pained look, resembling a dog that had just eaten a lemon.

“He came up here, into my room, and took my marbles!”

Charles was seriously unimpressed. He dropped through the floor and flew in and out of all the rooms, looking for his marbles.

“Where are they? Where are they?” he muttered to himself as he swooshed downstairs. “They have to be here somewhere!”

He floated into the dining room and there he spotted the red bag in amongst a bowl of apples and oranges that lived on the table. He whipped the bag out of the bowl and a couple of oranges followed, jumping out of the bowl and rolling across the floor. Charles shrugged his shoulders at the floored fruit because he didn’t care. It wasn’t his fruit.

He stormed up the stairs, having to go the long way round because he couldn't go through the ceiling while carrying the marbles. Solid objects don't pass through walls, floors or ceilings. On his way, he detoured through all the bedrooms, wanting to take something of theirs as revenge. He went into the younger boy's bedroom first and looked at all the trophies on the shelf. They all had statues of little gold men pretending to kick a ball, stuck on top of them. Not very interesting and the boy probably wouldn't even notice one going missing. Charles looked over to the bed, and sitting on the pillow was a cuddly toy that looked a bit like a teddy bear, but a funny-looking teddy bear. It had big, black eyes, green skin, big pointy ears, and a brown robe wrapped around its body.

"I'll take this," Charles said to himself as he grabbed the toy by the arm before going next door to the bigger boy's room. There were some models made of colourful bricks on his shelves, but Charles didn't know what they were models of, so they weren't interesting enough for him to take, so he moved on.

"What else is there?"

On the boy's desk was a cube with different coloured squares on each side. It could twist and turn and mix the colours up.

I don't know what this is, but I reckon it's valuable, he thought as he picked it up. While he was grabbing it, he heard the jangle of keys entering the front door lock. He looked out of the window and saw that the yellow vehicle was on the drive. Charles was so caught up looking at stuff, he missed the sound of the car's engine rumbling up the drive. He rushed out of the bedroom with his marbles in one hand, the cube in the other, and the cuddly toy under an arm. He shoved up the panel, because he couldn't fly through it, and pushed it to one side out of the way, leaving it open to fly back up into the attic. After dropping the toys, he tried to slide the panel back over the hole, but he couldn't. With every attempt he made to move the panel, his hand passed through it as if it was made of fresh air. He couldn't move the panel, meaning he couldn't shut the attic back up.

Chapter 10.

Dad shut the front door behind him as he stepped into the house. He wiped his feet before slipping his shoes off and headed to the dining room with his keys in hand, ready to chuck them into the fruit bowl. He stopped mid-swing and gave a puzzled look at two oranges that seemed to have gone on some mini adventure to the dining room floor. Surely, he would have noticed these out-of-place oranges when he got

his keys to leave that morning? Did the kids accidentally pull them out when grabbing an apple to take to school? He would like to think they would have picked them up and put them back.

Dad bent down and seized both oranges in one big hand. He must have pulled them out when he got his keys that morning. There was no other explanation. He put them back into the bowl where they belonged, with his keys, and strolled upstairs to his study. But again, he came to an abrupt stop. The panel in the ceiling was not over the hole. He was sure he covered it back up when he climbed out of the attic. Why was it uncovered? Was he going mad? Was he losing his marbles? *Marbles?* he thought. Were they in the fruit bowl? He dashed downstairs to the dining room, remembering the red bag of marbles in amongst apples and oranges. But the bag wasn't there, not anymore. He spun on the spot, looking, scanning, searching the dining room to see if anything else had moved or was missing.

"Hello?" he called out, hoping no one answered, and no one did. Opening a drawer in the kitchen, he took out a torch, and then he grabbed his step ladder and went back upstairs, tiptoeing this time, just in case someone was in the house.

He didn't want them to know what he was up to, so he crept down the landing, avoiding the creaky floorboards, until

he was beneath the attic entrance. Taking care to prevent any squeaking, he unfolded the step ladder slowly and positioned it gently below the hole. He carefully climbed it to not make a sound, deadly silent like a ninja. All he could hear was the beat of his heart and the humming noise of his blood circling in his head. He took a deep breath in anticipation and poked his head into the attic. It was dark at first, but as his eyes adjusted; they met with a shadow in the room's corner and his heart stopped. The figure was someone small, and they were keeping perfectly still, like they didn't want to be seen. Dad switched on the torch and shined the light directly in their face.

“Yoda?”

It was Oliver's cuddly toy, sitting on the crate in its brown robe. Dad heaved himself up into the attic and took a closer look. He could see the green skin and pointy ears. It was Yoda alright. What was he doing up here? Then, next to the crate, were Harrison's Rubik's Cube and the red bag of marbles.

“What on Earth?” said Dad out loud to himself as he picked them all up. He tried to think back to that morning. Did the kids have enough time to get into the attic and place all these things up there? Were they playing a trick on him, or was someone living in the attic? If there was, then where were

they? He left the attic, slid the panel back and returned the stepladder and the torch downstairs. Then he sat the bag of marbles, the cuddly Yoda, and the Rubik's Cube on the dining room table for later because he had some questions for Harrison and Oliver.

Chapter 11.

Dad unlocked the front door. He didn't mention what he had found in the attic to the boys on the drive home from school. He thought he'd leave the items out on the dining room table for them to find. To show them he didn't fall for their trick, because the more he thought about it, the more he knew for certain it was them. It had to be. There was no one else in the house. It was their little trick. He didn't know how they managed it, but they did it. They definitely did it!

"Shoes off, and put your bags on the dining room table," he said to the boys. They grunted to acknowledge his instruction, kicked off their shoes, and went into the dining room.

"See anything interesting in there?" Dad yelled to them. Harrison and Oliver looked around.

"No!" they shouted back.

"Are you sure? I left a little surprise out."

There was silence while Harrison and Oliver hunted for their ‘surprise’.

“Still no,” shouted Oliver.

“How about the Rubik’s Cube and Yoda?”

“What? Why would they be out?” said Oliver.

“Because, you know!” Dad walked into the dining room. “Because.... Hold up!”

Yoda and the Rubik’s cube were not on the dining room table where he had left them.

“Where’s Yoda and the Rubik’s Cube?” asked Dad with a shocked look on his face.

“Probably in our bedrooms,” said Harrison.

“No, no, I left them there.” He pointed to the space on the table where they were not.

“Why would you do that?” asked Harrison.

“Because I found them in the attic, where you hid them, along with the bag of marbles. Hold up! Who put the marbles back in the fruit bowl?”

“You did, this morning. They’ve always been there,” said Oliver.

“No, they were back in the attic and I brought them back down and put them right here.” He tapped on the edge of the dining room table with a stiff finger.

“Dad, this is the worst trick ever!” said Oliver.

“It’s not a trick. Wait, if the marbles are there... check your rooms.”

“What for?” asked Harrison.

“Oh, don’t bother. I’ll do it myself.”

Dad leapt up the stairs and went into Oliver’s room first. Sat on the pillow of Oliver’s bed like nothing had happened was Yoda, looking like he always did. Dad ran into Harrison’s room next door, and on his desk was the Rubik’s Cube. He stormed back downstairs.

“How did you do that?”

Harrison gave Oliver a look of genuine confusion.

“Do what?” said Oliver.

“Sneak Yoda and the Rubik’s cube back upstairs?”

“We don’t know what you’re on about, Dad,” said Harrison.

“Someone took your Rubik’s Cube, but now it’s been put back.”

“Oh,” said Harrison.

“Did they solve it?” asked Oliver.

“No, *they* didn’t solve it, Oliver! I don’t know what’s going on. Maybe *I am* losing my marbles.”

Oliver took the red bag out of the fruit bowl and held it up in front of him.

“Would you like to borrow these?”

Chapter 12.

Charles sniggered to himself. *Living with this family might not be all bad*, he thought. He'd not had that much fun since Mary. He thought that moving everything back to its original place, so the man would think he was going crazy, was a brilliant idea. Charles was really pleased with himself, but he knew he had to be careful if he was going to continue to move things around. He didn't want to get caught. And also, he nearly got into that spot of bother when he couldn't move the attic panel when the man came back home. He couldn't understand why. Did being around the living take that ability away? Or was it the panic of getting caught? Or the pressure of moving the panel back before the man got upstairs? He just wasn't able to move it, and he wasn't sure why.

He couldn't remember a time when he couldn't move things, apart from his first few years as a ghost. It took quite a while to learn, but since then he's not had any trouble. Had he tried moving stuff in front of the living before? There was that one time at the beginning that didn't end well and he told himself he wouldn't do it again. That was hundreds of years ago, though. He tried to think back to his time with Mary. He must have picked up things and moved stuff in front of her,

but Mary could see him. They were friends. That was different. He considered moving something in front of the man, like a chair, just when he's about to sit. He could pull it out and watch the man fall to the floor. Charles laughed at the image of the man landing on his bum. Yes, living with this family was going to be fun.

Chapter 13.

Dad was lying in his big cold bed, shivering under his quilt. He had forgotten to make a hot water bottle before coming up. It was a pink fluffy one that used to belong to the boy's mum, but Dad now used it on wintry nights. He was unsure how he forgot with it being such a cold night, but after today, maybe he was just becoming a forgetful old man. He was sure he found Oliver's toy Yoda and Harrison's Rubik's Cube in the attic, along with the marbles. And he was sure he put them on the dining room table before picking the boys up from school. But if he did, how did everything get put back to their original spots? There is no way he imagined all this. Was it a ghost? The one that Harrison claims he saw in the attic?

Harrison and Oliver were asleep. They were good at taking themselves to bed, now past the age of being read a bedtime story. Their Mum used to read to them to help them get to sleep. Dad remembered one night when Harrison was

two and a half and Oliver was one. They shared a bedroom, and Harrison was a good talker for his age. His favourite book was *We're going on a bear hunt*. He liked it so much, Mum read it to him every night, acting it out, being all over theatrical. After one particular rendition, when Mum was saying goodnight and giving kisses out, Harrison said, "When you go, I see people." Well, this terrified Mum. It gave her goosebumps. The hairs on her arms stood on ends and shivers went down her spine. She was scared of ghosts. Dad thought this was a silly thing to be scared off because 'there's no such thing as ghosts,' he would say. Dad admitted that when Mum told him this, he got chills, but after a little think he worked out that Harrison was talking about dreams. When he was left at night to go to sleep, he saw people in his dreams. He didn't literally see people. He didn't see ghosts. What he was trying to explain was that he had dreams.

Every so often, this story would come up and Mum and Dad would laugh about it. But now? After today? Dad wasn't sure. Did Harrison try to explain dreams, or was he talking about seeing ghosts? Dad got goosebumps thinking about it. An icy shiver went through his body. How he wished he had his hot water bottle. He wasn't going downstairs to make it now though. No, not this late. He was too scared. If the boys' mum could see him now, she'd be laughing. *I thought you*

didn't believe in ghosts? he could hear her saying. *Well, after today, maybe I do,* he thought.

Chapter 14.

The man started to snore. Charles had been standing in the bedroom's corner watching, waiting for the man to fall to sleep. He wanted to crack on with moving some more stuff around the house.

Charles didn't sleep at night. Ever since he became a ghost, he's never fallen to sleep. It seems ghosts don't get tired.

The first thing he wanted to do was try to move something while close to a living person. And even though the man was asleep, trying to move things while he slept seemed like a good experiment to start with. Charles glided to the man's bedside table and grabbed the lamp, lifting it no problem. Charles could do it. He had picked up the lamp. Though he wasn't being watched by anyone, he could still lift it while in the same room as the man, which was a positive. Charles put the lamp back down and looked to see what else he could move. He pulled the plug for the alarm clock out of

the wall and the digital numbers dimmed, turning the room a little darker.

What else? he thought.

He left the man's bedroom to look for other things he could mess with. Straight away, he saw the shoes at the bottom of the stairs. He could hide them. Charles gathered them up and carried them into the kitchen.

That looks like a good place, he thought and shoved them all through a little round hole.

"Now what?"

He was getting cocky now. He turned the kitchen light on.

"I know!"

Charles opened the cutlery drawer and posted all the knives, forks and spoons through the round hole, thinking he had found the perfect spot to hide stuff.

"What else can I put in here?"

He went to look in the dining room and saw the apples and oranges piled up. He was just about to gather up all the fruit to throw into the round hole, but in amongst the green and orange, he saw his red bag of marbles.

"I'll be having them back!" he said as he snatched the bag from the fruit bowl.

Finding his marbles caused Charles to change his plans for the night. He no longer wanted to hide things, he wanted to play with his marbles instead, so he went back to the attic, switching all the lights on, on his way. Pushing the panel to one side, he floated up and slid the panel back into its place. He sat on his crate with a smile on his pale face and rolled his marbles until morning.

Chapter 15.

The morning light crept through the crack in the curtains and fell onto Dad's face. He opened his eyes and, for a moment, was unsure where he was. After a few seconds and a few blinks, he came around and remembered. He was in his bed, in his bedroom, in his new old house. He turned over towards the bedside table to check the time, but the alarm clock was blank.

Strange, he thought. So he looked at his mobile phone instead.

“Whaaaatt?”

He jumped out of bed. It was 08:30. He only had thirty minutes to get the boys fed, washed, dressed, and to school.

“HARRISON! OLIVER! he yelled, running out of the bedroom and noticing that the landing light was on.

The boys must be up already, he thought and yelled their names again.

“HARRISON! OLIVER! YOU UP?”

“What?”

There was a mumble from Harrison’s bedroom, so Dad barged in.

“Come on, we’re late!”

Harrison squinted from the light burning the inside of his eyes. He was confused, so it took him a moment to realise that Dad was talking about school. He leapt out of bed and ran downstairs, banging on Oliver’s door on the way past.

“Get up! School!” he shouted.

Oliver shuffled out of his bedroom while rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. Harrison rushed to the kitchen to make breakfast. He grabbed a bowl and filled it with Coco Pops, pouring cold milk over the cereal with too much urgency. The milk splashed onto the counter while the Coco Pops crackedled as they do. Harrison didn’t put the milk back into the fridge. He didn’t think he had enough time. He went straight over to the cutlery drawer for a spoon, but it was empty? There were no spoons, knives, or forks. There was nothing. Not even a crumb.

“Dad? Where’s all the spoons?” he yelled.

He looked in the sink, and then in the other drawers, but he couldn't see any.

“Dad!” he yelled again.

Oliver dawdled through the door and flopped down onto one of the chairs.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

“There are no spoons, or knives, or forks, for that matter. The drawer’s empty.”

It was too early for this kind of nonsense for Oliver, so he just raised his eyebrows and shrugged before closing his eyes in an attempt to fit in a one-minute nap at the dining room table.

Dad raced through the door. “Why are all the lights on? It’s like Blackpool Illuminations in here.”

“They were already on. Anyway, where’s all the spoons?” said Harrison.

“What? The spoons? They’re in the drawer where they normally live.”

Harrison slid the drawer open and showed Dad the emptiness of the drawer. Dad had to take two looks.

“Eh?”

He looked at Harrison and Harrison shrugged.

“Is this some kind of joke? We really don’t have time for this. Have one of you hidden them?”

“No. Why would I hide them? I need them to eat with,” said Harrison.

Both Harrison and Dad looked at Oliver. Oliver opened his eyes and saw he was getting stared at.

“Don’t look at me!” he said.

“Well, one of you has obviously hidden them, so neither of you can have breakfast now. Go upstairs and get changed. We need to set off for school.”

All three of them went upstairs to get changed out of their pyjamas. Once dressed, they all headed back downstairs, with Harrison leading the way from the front. He put the brakes on when he reached the bottom step. “Where are all the shoes?” he said, turning to look at Oliver and Dad.

“We haven’t got time for this. Please get them and put them on,” said Dad, his voice getting louder as he lost his patience.

The boys stood frozen with blank expressions on their faces.

“But we don’t know where they are,” said Harrison.

“No, we’ve been in bed,” said Oliver.

Dad frowned while he thought about this, trying to work out how they’ve hidden all the shoes and all the cutlery.

“Maybe one of us sleepwalked,” suggested Oliver.

Dad was not having any of this theory. It was too farfetched and his lack of patience was showing in his frown lines.

“Whatever. We will come back to that later. First, we need to find them, so if one of you knows where they are, please go get them,” said Dad.

Neither moved a muscle. They both just stood there. They didn’t know where to look.

“Just look anywhere,” said Dad.

They ran off in different directions. Dad opened the front door and looked outside. Oliver ran upstairs. Harrison went to the back door. On his way through the kitchen, something glistened that caught his eye. A little light reflecting from the washing machine. Through the little glass door, it looked like it was full. Maybe Dad put a load on before bed. None of its lights were on, though, so it didn’t look like it had been used recently. He opened the door and couldn’t believe what he saw. Spoons, forks, knives and shoes piled up inside.

“Dad!” yelled Harrison. “Come here!”

Dad went into the kitchen and Harrison pointed inside the washing machine, and what he saw made his jaw drop.

“What on Earth is going on?”

He pulled all the items out and threw the cutlery into the sink and the shoes onto the floor.

“Get them on!” said Dad, pointing to the shoes. “We’ll talk about this later.”

“But Dad, I don’t know how they got in there,” said Harrison.

“Okay, but we’ll discuss this tonight. Just get your shoes on. We have to go.”

Chapter 16.

Charles laughed when he heard the family shouting and being all confused, not knowing where their things were. He found it a lot of fun and he couldn’t wait until he could do it again.

Maybe I could hide their pants tonight? he thought before laughing again. It made him think of Mary. That was the last time he had laughed like that. He remembered back to the last time they played together. It was a pretend tea party. She sat on the floor with her doll next to her and Charles opposite. The doll was her only toy, and it was called Anne. She didn’t have a tea set; she had to imagine pouring the tea from an imaginary teapot into an imaginary teacup. Charles used to pretend he was drinking the tea, holding his pinkie in the air and acting like it was too hot. He would pretend it was

scalding the inside of his throat by holding his neck and rolling on the floor. Then Mary would roll on the floor with him, but she would roll around in hysterics. This was Charles's cue to stop rolling, not because his performance was over. It was his cue to stick out his tongue and waft at his mouth to pretend he was cooling it down.

"Be careful, James," she would say. She didn't know his name, so she opted to call him James because she liked that name. Her Grandad was called James. She couldn't hear Charles when he spoke, she could only see him. It never affected their friendship. She would talk and he would listen.

At night, Charles used to lie on the floor next to her bed and fake being asleep. Once she was in a slumber, he'd just stare at the ceiling all night, waiting for her to wake up. He'd pass the time by thinking about the games they could play together. However, the morning after the last time they ever played together, Mary woke up and looked over the side of the bed. "James?" she whispered. Charles sat up with his usual morning smile and wave.

"James?" she said again, while still looking at the floor where he always was. Charles thought it was just another game they were playing and laughed, but then he realised he could hear worry in her voice.

"Where are you, James?"

She got out of bed to look under it, just in case he had been blown under or something. She couldn't see him. He waved both his arms right in front of her face, but she looked straight past him, unaware he was there. Then she ran through his body, which tickled Charles as normal, but he didn't laugh.

Mary must have felt nothing as she passed through him because she didn't stop, or even slightly hesitate. She raced to the window to look behind the curtains. It was one of Charles's favourite 'Hide and Seek' spots, but he wasn't there. Mary thought about some of his other favourite hiding places. *In the laundry basket*, she thought. She hurried to the bathroom but again, he wasn't there. *The wardrobe*. She went back into her bedroom and looked inside the wardrobe. He wasn't there, because he was standing right behind her, watching, and she didn't know. She couldn't see him and he couldn't tell her. If ghosts could shed tears, he would have cried. He felt like crying. He even tried to cry, but no tears came.

Mary, looking for Charles, went on for a couple more days. She would wake up in the morning and the first thing she did was look to see if Charles was laid on his spot on the floor. He was there, but she didn't know that. She could no longer see him. She looked under her bed, behind the curtains,

in the wardrobe, and never found him. Eventually, she just stopped looking and got on with life. She assumed he had left. Mary would have tea parties with just Anne while poor Charles watched on, feeling lonely inside. It broke his heart. He went back to the attic and disappeared from her life. She eventually forgot about him, but he never forgot. After that, Charles didn't want to be around the living anymore. He didn't want to feel the pain of losing someone again and remained mostly in the attic since that day. He rarely left and Mary grew up and had children. Two boys, in fact. They all lived in that house because Mary inherited it from her parents. Her two boys couldn't see Charles, so they never played with him. What they liked to do was to play marbles until the bag of marbles mysteriously disappeared one night.

Charles heard a rumbling noise outside and looked through the window. It was the yellow vehicle coming up the drive. The man was back, and he was alone. Charles watched the man get out of the car and fumble around with his keys before opening the front door. Charles dropped through the floorboards, through the bedrooms, and into the hallway. The man was there, closing the front door behind him and taking off his shoes. Charles was only inches away from him, and the man didn't flinch, but he shivered. It was obvious the man could not see or feel Charles floating in front of him.

“Hello?” said Charles.

The man didn’t bat an eyelid, proving the man couldn’t hear Charles either, so Charles followed him. The man went into the kitchen first and opened the fridge. He studied the contents before picking up a carton of orange juice and taking a swig straight out of it. The man put the carton back and closed the fridge door. He was oblivious to Charles hovering around the kitchen door. The man turned and walked out of the kitchen, walking straight through Charles’s body before Charles could get out of the way. His belly tickled, and the man shivered again.

They headed upstairs and into the spare room. The man pulled out the chair to sit down at the desk.

This is my chance, thought Charles, and he shot forward to grab the chair in an attempt to whip it out from underneath the man while he was mid-sitting, but Charles went through the chair. He tried again and again, but his hands kept passing through. He couldn’t touch it. The problem was happening again, and the man sat down successfully. He dragged the chair forward to tuck himself in and then pressed a few buttons on the black window that was sitting on the desk. It lit up, but Charles wasn’t interested. All he wanted to do was try to move things. He tried pushing the man off the chair, but he couldn’t. He tried to knock everything that was on the desk

onto the floor with one large swoop of his arm. Again, it didn't work. He tried slamming the door, but to no avail. Charles was distraught. He was just passing through everything he tried to grab or push. Why couldn't he do it anymore? Why couldn't he touch things? He jumped up through the ceiling and went back to the attic to grab his bag of marbles, but his hand went straight through. He tried again but still no, so he gave up.

His anger calmed after a while, but it turned into sadness, then worry burrowed into his head and asked questions. What if he couldn't play marbles ever again? What if this was it? What if his ability to touch and hold things was gone forever? Charles needed help, but from who? Who could he go to for help? *The boy*? he thought. The boy had looked at him. The boy could see Charles, or so he believed. Maybe he could help somehow.

Chapter 17.

Charles was worried he could never play with his marbles again. It felt like those early days of being a ghost when he was brand new to it. Those first few years were surreal. He wandered around the house like a literal lost soul. He followed his parents and watched them try to live their

lives. At night when they slept, he floated by the window and watched the stars. He never got bored, he just existed, and not existed simultaneously. Time continued to pass, but it was irrelevant. He didn't follow it like the living, though he could feel it, like he could feel emotions. He could feel happy and anxious and sad, even though he couldn't cry and he felt all these emotions all at once when his parents had a baby. They called him Henry. Charles enjoyed watching his little brother grow up. Even though Henry would never know he had an older brother, it still made Charles happy.

He watched his parents age and their passing made him sad. After their death, Henry took over the house and married a girl and had a family. Now Charles was an uncle, and he got to watch his niece grow up. She was called Alice and was also oblivious to Charles. She would never know that she had an uncle that would watch her grow up.

Alice took over the house and had her own family. She had a boy called James. Charles continued to watch and follow people through the day, and watch the stars at night. He did the same old stuff, just with different people. It only changed when James came along. James brought new emotions to Charles because James had a wooden cup and ball. He'd never seen anything like this before. James would throw the ball up and try to catch it in the cup. He would miss

every time, sometimes he was close, the ball would bounce off the rim of the cup. It would never bounce in, though, always out. This would frustrate Charles. All he could do was watch on as James failed again and again. It looked easy to Charles. If only he could have a go, he reckoned he could do it first try. And that was when Charles noticed a sensation in his mouth. He was gritting his teeth and grinding them together, and he could feel it. That was the first time since his death he felt something physical. And if he could feel that, could he touch other stuff? Stuff like a cup and ball?

The cup and ball wasn't the only toy. James had a spinning top that he hardly ever played with. Charles went to pick it up. As always, his hand went through it. He tried again, and the same happened. If he could feel it a little bit and just move it, that would be something. He decided on a different tack and tried to push the spinning top. It only needed a tiny wobble. A tiny wobble would be a good start, then he could work his way up from there. All he needed was a wobble of some kind. He flicked it, whacked it, poked it, and he went through it every time. Weeks past. His determination didn't break during that time. He non-stopped flicked and pushed and poked, and it never wobbled. He grew more frustrated and sad and defeated on every attempt and he thought he would never do it.

This is impossible, he thought.

Impossible?

The word churned around his head as images of him endlessly chasing birds away from the seeds his dad had sown, only for them to fly to another patch.

“I can’t do it. It’s impossible!” he told his dad.

“There’s no such word as can’t, and nothing is impossible. You can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it. Don’t give up and stay positive,” his dad said.

“Don’t give up and stay positive!” Charles repeated to himself. He flicked the spinning top again. It was only a small thing, so he was sure it wouldn’t be too heavy for him. And he did it. He flicked and flicked and flicked and it moved. It only wobbled slightly, not moving from its spot but it moved from side to side. It rocked a couple of times.

“I did it! I moved it!”

He flicked it again, and it wobbled again. This time was a little more obvious. Still not from its spot, but it wobbled more than before. It wasn’t a fluke. He kept flicking it and every time it wobbled, his confidence grew, and every time his confidence grew, the spinning top wobbled more. The wobble was getting bigger and then, on the next flick, he felt a thwack on his fingernail as the spinning top skidded across the floor. Charles looked at the end of his finger with surprise

as it throbbed. He had done it; he moved it, and he did a couple more times for luck.

Next was grabbing it. He stopped flicking it and tried picking it up. He worked at it constantly for two weeks while his dad's words repeated on him after every failed attempt. There was no way he was giving up, and that persistence paid off because, after two weeks, he did it. It finally happened. He rolled the spinning top into his palm and lifted it. He could hold it there for a few seconds before it fell through his palm onto the floor.

Charles had learnt a new trick and the more he performed it, the stronger he got. He had to show someone, so when Alice was in the same room as him, he showed her. He lifted the spinning top and carried it over to her. Alice was knitting while she was sitting, minding her own business. The movement of the spinning top caught her eye, so she stopped knitting to look up, and there, in front of her, was the spinning top, floating in mid-air. She couldn't see Charles. As far as she knew, the spinning top was floating in front of her for no good reason. Her tongue got caught in her throat. She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. Her husband entered the room and saw the spinning top floating in front of her. The pile of carrots he was carrying in his arms dropped to the floor. For five seconds, he stood in silence, then he yelled.

“Witch! Witch!”

He ran over to Alice and dragged her outside. “Witch! Witch!” he continued to scream. Alice shook her head. It was all she could do. She couldn’t catch enough breath to scream or explain or deny it was her. Charles dropped the spinning top and chased after them.

“She’s not a witch! It was me!” yelled Charles, but no one heard him. Alice and her husband left the house. That night, only her husband returned and Charles never saw Alice again.

A lump stuck in Charles’ throat and his head burned as he remembered what his actions did to Alice. He wondered what the man was doing. Maybe seeing what he was up to would cheer him up? He sank through the floor and glided into the spare room. The man was staring at the glass thing while sitting at a desk and chewing a pen. It didn’t look like the man was up to much; he was just staring straight forward. The glass thing was bright white and totally blank apart from a little line blinking in the top left-hand corner.

This doesn’t look very interesting, thought Charles, but it must have been interesting to the man because he never took his eyes off it. Charles was about to fly back up into the attic when there was a ringing noise.

“Hello?” said the man. “School? Hospital? Which son? The youngest? Of course. I’ll come straight away.”

The man put down the phone, jumped to his feet, and patted at his pockets before dashing downstairs. Charles flew up through the ceiling and into the attic to watch out of the window. The man frantically tried to get into the car. It took him a few attempts to unlock it because he was visibly shaking. He sped off down the drive while Charles watched from the window. He wondered what was going on as the yellow car disappeared from view.

I hope everything is alright, he thought, and he sat on the crate. No sooner as he crouched down, there was a rumbling noise from an engine and it was getting louder and louder.

That was quick, thought Charles, as he rose to look out of the window.



Chapter 18.

Dad sprinted from the car park to A&E. He burst through the doors and ran to reception. “Oliver!” he gasped, panting. He had to lean forward and put his hands on his knees to help get his breath back.

“Excuse me?” said the receptionist. She had bright red lipstick and black glasses and her hair was up in a bun with a pen stuck through it. Dad took some deep breaths before attempting to speak again.

“I’m here to see Oliver Ramis. I’m his dad. He had an accident at school.”

“One moment, please.” She tapped away at the keyboard. “Sorry, no one of that name has been brought in.”

“What? Are you sure? Did you type his name correctly? Please check again.”

She tapped at the keyboard once again.

“Sorry. Still nothing.”

Dad’s head began to spin. He looked around the waiting room to see if he recognised anyone. Everyone was blurry. He couldn’t focus.

“Are you sure the school brought him here?” said the receptionist.

He thought back to the phone call. They didn’t say which hospital, they just said they took his son to the hospital.

“I’ll try calling the school,” said Dad, and he walked out of the hospital to stand outside.

He was unaware of his breath being visible every time he exhaled, not shivering once, even though he had forgotten to put a jumper and coat on in the mad rush. He wasn’t focusing on the weather.

His mobile was in his pocket. He slid it out and called school. It rang twice before a lady answered.

“Hello, Swampton Fitzpatrick Secondary school.”

She had a high-pitched voice and her friendliness sounded forced.

“Oh, hello. It’s Oliver Ramis’s Dad here.”

“Ah, hello. What can I do for you?” said the receptionist.

“Yes. Well, where did you take my son?” he said.

“Sorry? Where did we take him?”

“Yes, I got a phone call saying he had been taken to hospital because of an accident.”

Dad drummed his fingers on his thigh as he waited for a reply.

“Accident? I’m sorry. I don’t know what you are talking about. No one’s had an accident today. Well, not one that required a trip to A&E.”

“So, where’s Oliver?”

“Well, he should be here. Nothing has happened to him as far as I know.”

Dad didn’t understand what was going on. And nor did the receptionist by the sound of her voice.

“But I got a phone call.”

“I’m sorry, Mr Ramis. Not from us, you didn’t. It would have been me and I can assure you, I didn’t call you to tell you that Oliver had been taken to hospital.”

“No, it was a man that called me.”

“Not from here, they didn’t.”

Dad ended the call. He didn’t know what to say about that. Who did he get a phone call from? If it wasn’t from school, then who? Unsure of what was happening, he decided he needed a coffee. Possibly some cake too. He knew a nice coffee shop near the school, so he went there for a drink and waited for school to finish.

Chapter 19.

Dad usually asked the boys questions about their day, but today he didn’t. He was preoccupied with thoughts about the phone call that morning. He didn’t mention it on the drive home because he didn’t want to spook the boys. There was no reason to. It was obviously a practical joke. A poor taste of a joke. Just kids messing around. All kids should have been in

school though, and the caller was a grown-up as far as he could tell. They didn't sound like a child. It was an actual adult. Aren't adults too old to be playing practical jokes?

Harrison and Oliver sat in the back of the car silently. They could tell something was wrong. It was in the air. A pressure was building in the atmosphere, getting ready to erupt. They shrugged at each other with raised eyebrows and opted to remain silent; they didn't want to cause the eruption.

Dad ran the phone call over and over in his head. He hated practical jokes, especially being on the end of them. He remembered when he used to work in an office for an insurance company. It was a proper boring job, and the staff there used to enjoy playing practical jokes on each other. On one occasion, it was his turn. They hid an ornament that he had brought in from home to decorate his desk. He had got it for Christmas and it was made by the loving hands of the boys' mum. It was an owl, crafted from clay and painted blue and white, in the colours of his favourite football team, and he loved it. He kept it next to his monitor so he could look at it while he worked.

One morning on his way to the office, he got a puncture and had to change the wheel to his spare. He did this himself because he thought it would be quicker than waiting for roadside assistance. His dad had shown him how to change a

wheel so this did not intimidate him, and he was right, it was loads quicker than roadside assistance. He was only ten minutes late for work. He probably would have been more than an hour late if he waited for help. When he finally entered the office and sat down at his desk, the ornament wasn't there; it had been hidden. All his work colleagues thought this was funny. He could see them all watching him as he looked through drawers and cupboards, searching for his precious owl. He eventually gave up and sat back at his desk because he didn't have time for games. He had work to get on with.

After his work colleagues felt like they'd tortured him enough, the person who hid it showed him where it was. It was on top of a tall cupboard; the person had to stand on a chair to reach it, but they used one of the spiny office chairs, and it was on wheels. The chair span and rolled and chucked the person off just as they got hold of the owl and flung it up into the air. Everyone held their breath as the owl launched across the office in slow motion. It felt like it was in the air for an eternity. Dad's feet were frozen to the spot and all he could do was watch. It fell to the ground and smashed into a thousand tiny, unrepairable pieces. It annoyed him a lot at the time, but he never realised until later just how much more it would anger him every time he thought about it. He didn't

know the owl was going to become irreplaceable. He took it for granted that he'd be spending the rest of his life with the boys' mum. He thought they'd grow old together, and there'd be plenty of time to re-make pot owls, but he was wrong. It was something that he'd never have back, all because of a stupid prank. Yes, Dad hated pranks.

He parked the yellow banger in front of the house, but something felt different. Something felt out of place. The front door was open. Had he forgotten to lock up when rushed to the hospital?

"Just stay there, boys," he ordered as he stepped out of the car. He cautiously walked over to the front door and poked his head into the house.

"Hello?" he called out and waited for a reply. There was only the sound of the wind blowing through the front door and swirling around the hallway. He crept further into his home and peaked into the living room. His shoulders dropped and the muscles in his legs gave way, having to grasp at the door frame with a clenched fist to stop himself from collapsing to the floor. When he looked into the room, he couldn't comprehend the mess. All the books had been pulled from the bookcase. The lamp lay smashed on the floor, with its broken pieces scattered everywhere. The television was missing.

“What’s happened?” said a tiny voice from behind. It made him jump. Harrison and Oliver were standing at the living room door.

“I thought I told you to stay in the car?”

They ignored him and looked around at the mess.

“We’ve been burgled,” explained Dad.

He continued into the kitchen. All the drawers were open and all the contents were on the floor. Tea towels, oven gloves, knives, forks, spoons. There was a space where the microwave usually was and the coffeemaker. He headed upstairs, and it was the same. All the drawers and wardrobes had been emptied onto the floor, and anything of value had been taken. There was no sign of the burglars, so Dad walked back downstairs to the boys.

“Best call the police,” he said.

Chapter 20.

Charles stood at the attic window and looked out at the dark sky. He felt helpless. All he could do was watch the men ransack the house. He watched them pull books and lamps and ornaments and flowers to the floor as they searched for anything valuable. They walked out with anything they wanted and loaded up their van. He felt sorry for the family, and guilty after moving things around, causing all that

confusion. To do that to them, and then for this to happen? To come home to a house that looked like it had a tornado run through it. He was never going to do anything this horrific to the family. He only wanted some fun. Now he wished he had done none of those things.

Charles could hear the boys sobbing downstairs. “Why did they take the photo albums?” he could hear the oldest boy ask. But there was no answer and Charles didn’t know either. Charles couldn’t understand why they took them or why they laughed about it as they did. It was like a very cruel prank.

“Don’t touch anything,” Charles heard the man say. “I’ll tidy after the police have been.”

A police car pulled up outside and two police officers got out. A short woman and a wide man. The woman police officer knocked on the front door. Charles wanted to get closer to the action, so he dropped through the floor and hovered at the top of the stairs. It was the dad that opened the door and the woman officer spoke.

“Mr Ramis?”

“Yes, that’s me. Thanks for coming,” said the dad. He stepped to one side to let the two officers in.

“I am Inspector Smith,” she said as she walked in, “and this is Constable Jones.” She pointed to the wide man following her in.

“Good evening,” said Constable Jones as he greeted the dad with a nod of his head.

“Do you mind if I have a look around and try to take some prints while you tell Constable Jones what’s been taken?” asked Inspector Smith.

“No, that’s fine.”

The Inspector disappeared into the living room, but Charles could still hear her voice.

“Oh, hello boys. I’m just going to have a look around.”

Constable Jones pulled out a notepad and pen and licked the nib.

“Okay, I’m ready,” he said.

The dad listed the items that were missing.

“The microwave, the telly, the PC, three push bikes, our photo albums.”

“Photo albums?” interrupted the constable.

“Yes, they took all the family photo albums.”

“Hmmm,” he said as he passed judgement on the lowlife that would take personal items that only had sentimental value.

“Do you know anyone that would do this to you?”

The dad shook his head.

“Any enemies? Anyone wanting revenge on you and making it look like a burglary?”

“No, we’ve only recently moved in. We don’t really know anybody,” explained the dad.

“I see,” said the constable. “Please continue listing the stolen items.”

The dad continued with his list.

Inspector Smith’s voice came from the living room. “Would you like to show me your bedrooms?” she said.

“Okay,” said a little voice. It was from one of the boys. Inspector Smith and the two boys stepped out into the hallway and headed upstairs. Charles was too busy listening to the dad and the constable that he didn’t notice people coming upstairs. He was sitting on the top step, staring into space. The eldest boy stopped dead in his tracks on the bottom step and stared at Charles. The boy’s face went white as all the colour drained out of it. Constable Jones stopped with the list and spoke to the boy.

“You okay, Son?”

Charles snapped out of whatever trance he was in, realising the older boy was staring at him.

“Oi, you!” shouted the boy. He barged past his younger brother and the inspector and chased Charles.

“Oh, boy!” said Charles in a panic and shot up like a rocket, disappearing out of sight. He rushed down the landing, then went up through the ceiling, and back into the attic.

There was a racket coming from below him as doors were banged while the boy searched the bedrooms for him.

“Where are you?” the boy yelled.

“Where’s who?” asked the inspector.

“There was someone at the top of the stairs. They ran off,” replied the boy.

“I didn’t see anyone,” said the younger boy.

“Even if you did, you shouldn’t have chased them.

That’s my job,” said the inspector.

“He’ll be in the attic. He’ll be hiding up there.”

“Not this again, Harrison,” said the dad.

“We’d better check this out. Jones?” called the inspector.

Charles could hear the thud of heavy boots coming up the stairs, getting closer and closer, then along the landing until silence. The sound of the clomping boots stopped directly below the panel that led to the attic. The panel began to rise, and it slid to the side. A light from the landing filtered through, creating a glowing beam of light in the middle of the attic. Charles crouched in one of the dark corners and watched. The head of the constable popped up. He had pulled himself up effortlessly. He wasn’t even straining.

“Nothing here, but let me have a closer look,” he said as he pulled himself up even further. His shoulders came

through, then his chest. He adjusted his hands and pushed the rest of his body through. Before grabbing a small torch from his vest pocket, he stood up and dusted himself off. He shone his torch around the room and lit up the dust particles floating around that looked like fairies at a disco. He checked the dark corners of the attic. Charles closed his eyes while the light from the torch landed on his face.

“Nothing up here,” he shouted down before looking over to the crate and seeing a little red bag. He bent down to pick it up and looked inside. It was Charles’s bag of marbles. He put them in his pocket.

“Where’d he go then?” said the older boy.

“You must have imagined it,” said the dad.

The constable jumped down from the attic.

“Nothing up there apart from these,” said the constable as he handed over the red bag of marbles.

“How’d they get back up there?” asked the dad, but no one could answer the question. “Let’s continue with the investigation. If you can show me your room?” said the inspector. Charles heard them move away from the attic entrance. Relief evaporated from Charles as he sat on his crate.

That was too close, he thought, and he remained there for the rest of the evening.

Chapter 21.

It had been a long evening. Dad did his best to clean up what he could before bedtime. He told Harrison and Oliver that they wouldn't be going to school for the rest of the week, so it didn't matter what time they went to bed, and even though it was a late-night, Harrison still couldn't get to sleep. He lay on his back, making shapes out of the patterns in the ceiling, trying not to think of the burglary and trying not to think about the boy he had seen at the top of the stairs.

The digital clock glowed red numbers and displayed it was past midnight. His mouth was dry. It felt like it was full of cotton wool and needed quenching with a glass of water, but he didn't dare go downstairs this late, because he was on his own and it was dark. He also didn't want to shout anyone for help or get out of bed, except he was desperate for water. He was going to have to just do it and go downstairs. He umm-ed and err-ed as worries and nightmares consumed his thoughts, holding him back as always.

Not wanting to be controlled by his anxieties any longer, he fought back. So he cleared his mind and counted to ten. On ten, he slid a leg out of bed and gently placed it on the floor, careful to not make a noise. He did the same with the other leg and then sat up. His eyes had already adjusted as much as they could to the blackness, so he could make out the

shapes of his desk and chair and wardrobe. He tiptoed to the door, imagining he was on thin ice that was on the verge of cracking and giving way to freezing waters.

He avoided the creaky floorboards where he could and pulled open his bedroom door a bit. The landing was lighter than his bedroom because the window at the end of the corridor allowed the moonlight to seep through. Harrison pulled the door a little more, just enough to fit through. It felt like he was taking forever, however; he didn't want the hinges to squeak, so he did everything at snail's pace. Once the door was open, he could see the stairs and made his way over.

He had done nothing this sneaky before. It wasn't like he was doing anything wrong because he wasn't. He wasn't sneaking out of the house or getting up to anything illegal, but that didn't stop him from feeling guilty. Even though all he was doing was fetching a glass of water.

He descended the stairs quietly, disturbing no one, so everything was going well up to that point. Now he was tiptoeing quicker because he was downstairs, and no longer worried about the squeaky floorboards being heard. He entered the living room and could see through into the dining room from where he was standing. The moonlight trickled through the dining-room window and carved out silhouettes in its dim glow. He remained in the living room to gather his

senses because he could smell burnt toast. Was Dad eating toast in the dark? He squinted to help sharpen the silhouettes in the dining room. One shape looked out of place. It was hunched over and moving. Or was it? The shadows of branches were dancing from the wind and were playing tricks with his eyes.

He couldn't hear over his breathing, so he held it to heighten his senses while edging closer to the dining room, shuffling forward little by little. Right foot, then left foot, then right foot, then a squeaky floorboard. He froze, turning into a statue. The silhouette stood up and spun around. It was the boy. The boy he saw at the top of the stairs. The boy he saw through the attic window.

They stared at each other, both like rabbits in headlights, unsure of what to do next. Neither spoke, but the boy's grey face looked worried, so Harrison opened his mouth to talk. He didn't know what he was going to say, but he was going to say something. He just needed his lips to move, but before any sound left Harrison's mouth, the living room light turned on behind him.

“Harrison?”

It was Dad. The boy saw this as an opportunity to disappear through the ceiling and took it. Harrison watched

the boy vanish right in front of his very eyes. Harrison turned around to see if Dad had seen what he had.

“What you doing down here?” said Dad.

Harrison didn’t reply. He stood there, dumbstruck, and Dad took a few steps closer.

“Hey. Are you okay? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Harrison's face was as white as a sheet. He was shaking. His belly was doing somersaults, and his brain was spinning.

“I just came downstairs to get a glass of water,” he managed to spit out.

“Okay. I couldn’t sleep and I could hear the floorboards creaking, so I came downstairs, thought I’d better check on you.”

“I’m okay, just thirsty.”

Harrison switched the kitchen light on and went to the sink, taking a glass from the drying rack and filling it with tap water. He downed it there while over the sink before putting the empty glass into the bowl. Once satisfied, he left the kitchen and while passing the dining room, something caught his eye on the table. It was the red bag of marbles.

“Come on, Harrison,” said Dad as he nodded his head towards the stairs to encourage him to hurry. Dad turned his

back on Harrison and headed out of the living room. As he did, Harrison swiped the bag of marbles off the table and sneaked them into the pocket of his pyjama shorts before following Dad upstairs to return to bed.

He still wasn't tired. Adrenaline was bursting through his veins and his heart was racing. He cupped the bag of marbles in his hands as he lay on his back and stared up at the attic.

Who are you? he thought.

Chapter 22.

Charles floated aimlessly in the attic, feeling like he should have been out of breath, expecting his heart to race. Instead, his chest felt hollow as normal. His heart did not beat, his lungs did not fill, but his mind still overflowed with worries. Charles still found this strange. It took some time getting used to being a ghost. At first, he was unsure what to do. There was no ghost manual or ghost school or ghost teacher. That would have made the transition easier if there were. He never wanted to be a ghost. He never asked for it. It wasn't planned. It was an accident.

He was a happy child, quite a lucky one, in fact. Few children got an education in his day. A lot of them worked because their families needed the money. They would get jobs

sweeping chimneys and working on farms. Some even assisted in surgeries, holding down patients' legs as doctors amputated because patients weren't put to sleep in them days.

Charles had a tutor come to the house to school him mid-week. On weekends, he worked for his dad as a scarecrow, chasing birds away from the seeds his dad had sowed. He hated weekends, give him a day of learning every time. Chasing birds was tiring and made him hot and sweaty. And sometimes it wasn't birds, once he had to chase a fox away. His dad kept chickens, and they were always getting eaten at night. When his dad would check the chickens in the morning, one would always be missing.

One Saturday afternoon, the fox came during daylight and it didn't seem bothered by Charles running around the field. It trotted confidently towards the chickens without a care in the world, but Charles was having none of it. He forgot about the birds and made a beeline for the fox. He yelled and screamed and flapped his arms at it, which caused the fox to turn and run back to where it came from. The fox wasn't as confident as it thought as it sprinted away, but this wasn't enough for Charles. He wanted it gone and to never come back, so he continued his chase. He screamed louder and flapped his arms more aggressively. The pursuit prolonged into the next field. The fox was heading for the woods, and it

was going to make it because it was too fast for Charles. However, Charles was determined to put it off from coming back, so he ran and ran and tripped and flew and fell and fell a bit more, down a dark hole. He screamed on the way down until there was a splash and he got a mouth full of water. He had tripped down the well that someone had dug a couple of fields from his house. Desperate for help, he screamed, hoping the wind would carry his voice, but he was too far away from everyone. He could only hope that one of his parents would come looking for him. Surely, they would think to look down the well, or was that wishful thinking?

It was dark, tight and wet, and it was only getting darker as the night plunged. He could hear an owl hoot and his stomach rumble, but he didn't hear his name get called once. Were his parents even looking for him?

Hunger and thirst were taking over. He was trying not to think of it because there was no food down the well, only water, and he didn't want the drink that if he could help it.

Clouds passed over as he shivered. He rolled himself up into a ball and hugged his knees. Morning was taking an eternity. He tried to sleep through, but every time he nodded off, he jumped awake. His mind was not letting him sleep, no matter how heavy his eyelids felt. His mouth was parched, like a desert, so he desperately needed a refreshing drink.

Surely, a couple of handfuls of well water wouldn't hurt. He cupped his two hands together and scooped up as much water as he could and poured it down his throat. It was cool and muddy and tasted of earth, but it was exactly what Charles needed. He cupped some more water and slurped it from his hand.

Charles watched the clouds sail through the black sky, and as the clouds passed, the sky gradually changed from black to a midnight blue, and when the midnight blue sky appeared, the birds began to tweet, which meant sunrise was close, and sunrise meant his dad would soon be out in the fields. His dad was always up early to attend to the animals and his crops. Charles knew he would need to muster up enough strength to shout for help when the time came. For now, he waited. While waiting for more blue to appear in the sky, he rested his eyes, no longer able to keep them open. A dream took hold of him, and he saw himself chasing birds across the field. The birds were massive, though. They were big black crows, the size of horses, and they were too many of them. He tried chasing them away, but he was too slow; it felt like he was running through thick treacle. Every time he scared a crow, another two landed elsewhere in the field. It was making his dad angry, who was watching from the edge

of the field and shouting at him. “Charles! Behind you! Get that crow over there! Charles! Charles!...”

“Charles!”

Charles woke up to his dad shouting his name down the well.

“Dad?” he groaned.

“Grab onto this!”

His dad threw down a bucket tied to a rope and Charles wrapped the rope around his arm and gripped it, allowing his dad to pull on the rope and drag Charles out.

Charles rested on a chaise downstairs, but his condition was getting worse. He had a fever and vomited non-stop. He could no longer sit up, as he had become too weak. His parents had to fetch a doctor.

“What we need to do is cut open a vein in his arm and let out some blood,” said the doctor. There wasn’t any medicine, so this was how the doctor tried to cure him. It didn’t work. Charles’s world got darker. His vision closed in on him and his body went limp. He entered those moments between awake and asleep, and just when it went dark, his body jerked him awake. He instantly felt great again, and he jumped off the chaise. Everything looked grey and fuzzy, but apart from that, he felt fine. He turned and saw his mother

sitting next to the chaise, holding a little boy's hand, who looked asleep.

“Who's that?” he asked, but his mother ignored him. “Mother?” but there was still no response, so Charles went to find out for himself. He walked over and bent over the boy. He looked familiar. It took Charles a few seconds to realise he was looking at himself. Charles staggered back. He held out a hand to grab the chair his mother was sitting on and missed. His hand went through it and he continued to stagger back, but he didn't fall, managing to stop staggering and regaining his balance.

Something wasn't right. Holding his hand in front of his face, he studied it. He could see it, but he could also see through it. The sight of it made him dizzy. He went to touch it with his other hand, but it went through. He couldn't feel it. The shock made him want to gasp but he couldn't breathe in because he wasn't breathing; he hadn't noticed at first because he hadn't thought about it, like when he was alive, he never noticed he was breathing because it was normal and he did it automatically, he didn't have to think about breathing, he just breathed. Now it was not breathing that felt right.

Charles didn't know what was happening to him. His mother was ignoring him. He could see a boy that looked like him on the chaise, he could see through himself, and he

wasn't breathing. Maybe his dad could help? He raced to the door, reckoning his dad would be outside; it was where he usually was. Charles pushed at the door but didn't make contact. His hand disappeared into the wood. He tried to gasp again, but nothing happened. He stared at his arm, up to the elbow in the door, while he waggled it around. It was like the door was made of water but dry. He stepped closer and lost more of his arm to the door, so he held his other hand up and pushed through the door with that one. Now both his hands were sunk into the door. He was trying to think how he could open the door to get out, then he realised he didn't need to open the door to get out. If both his hands were already through the door, then he could pass the rest of his body through. He closed his eyes and took two large steps forward. His belly tickled on the way, but it didn't make him laugh. He opened his eyes, and this time remembered that he couldn't gasp when he saw what was outside. It was the bright white. No ground, no sky, no horizon, no dad, no fields, just the great bright white.

After running and running for hours on end, he gave up. He tried pulling open the front door and missed, so he had to pass through it again, which he did with his eyes closed. When he was back inside, his mother was crying and being hugged by his dad. Charles went over to the chaise, but no one

was there now. Where had the boy gone? He shouted for his dad, but his dad did not stop hugging his mum. It was as if his parents couldn't hear him or see him.

"We need to cover all the windows and mirrors," said his mum.

Charles went over to his parents. "Why do we need to do that?" asked Charles. "Has someone died?"

Charles knew that covering the windows and mirrors was a tradition for when someone died, but he didn't know that anyone had died.

"Yes," replied his dad, "I've put Charles on his bed until the funeral."

"I'm here! I'm not on my bed, and whose funeral?" There was a quiver of panic in his voice, but his parents continued to ignore him. In the back of Charles's mind, he knew what was going on, but he was in denial. He didn't want to believe he was a ghost, and he could prove he wasn't a ghost by going to his bedroom and seeing an empty bed, so Charles strolled upstairs to his bedroom door. He waited at first to build up the courage. He knew there wasn't any point pushing at the door because his hand would go straight through it, so he closed his eyes and counted to three. On three, he took two steps forward and felt the tickle in his stomach, so he knew he was on the other side.

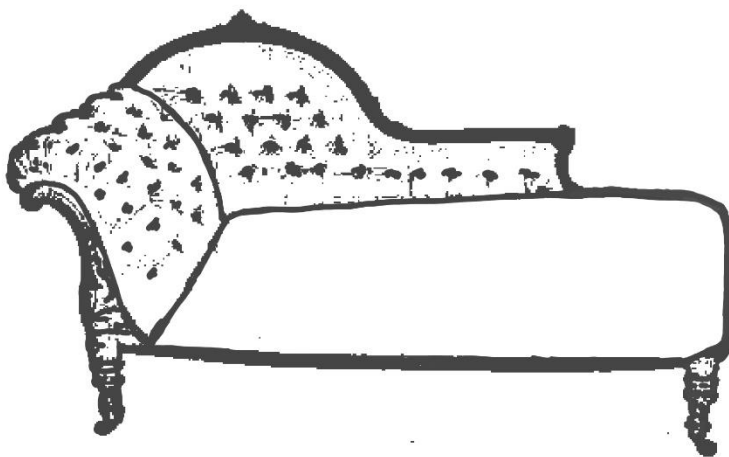
This was it. This was when he was going to confirm he was alive and well and that this was all a misunderstanding. He needed another countdown before he opened his eyes, so he counted down from three.

“Three, Two,…”

He hesitated.

“One!”

He opened his eyes and saw a very pale Charles on the bed, staring at the ceiling. He knew it deep down, it just didn’t feel real. It was strange to look at himself, but he found it peaceful. Neither Charleses were breathing and both were silent. He stood over himself for a few hours.



After a few years of being a ghost, he learned to touch and grab and he saw many people come and go. He watched families grow and the house get passed on to children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Now it was him and this brand-new family. The man and his two boys. The older boy could see him, and he saw him again. However, the boy didn't chase this time. He just stood and stared like he had a million questions, but no voice to ask. Charles only went down to get his marbles back, but he still couldn't pick them up. His hand kept going through the fruit bowl no matter how much he concentrated, and this made him feel useless. He couldn't do anything. He couldn't touch. No one could hear him. He couldn't go outside. However, the older boy had the ability to see him.

Charles had decided, he was going to see the boy because he had nothing to lose. Maybe they could be friends. Maybe they could help each other. He didn't know how, but what's the worst that could happen? He'd get banished from their house? How exactly, if he can't leave? That was that then. Charles had made up his mind. He'd linger around the attic until daylight, then go to the boy's room to introduce himself.

Chapter 23.

Harrison woke with his eyes closed. He wasn't ready to start the day just yet. Completely unaware of the time, he only knew he was still tired and could easily fall back asleep. He didn't, though. Since the back of his eyelids had a tint of red instead of being completely black, he could tell it was light, indicating that it must have been mid to late morning.

He'd not had much sleep because it took him a while to drop off. He had a short dreamless sleep, which was rare for Harrison because dreamt often, but not last night. Maybe he didn't have time. It was more of a blink then awake, rather than a long, deep sleep full of dreams and adventure.

The smell of someone burning toast drifted into his room and up his nose, and it stirred up a flashback from last night. When he opened his eyes, his vision was blurry. They were running, so he wiped them with the back of his hand, and that's when he noticed Oliver standing at the bottom of his bed. It made Harrison jump.

"Oliver!" he complained.

He squeezed his eyes shut and gave them a rub before re-opening them. He could see better now that he had rubbed the blurriness away, so he looked back to the bottom of his bed and that's when he realised it wasn't Oliver who was standing there, looking at him. It was the boy from last night.

Harrison gasped and held his breath while he stared at the boy. The boy looked worried, like he didn't want to be there, but there was also a faint smile in the crook of his lip, possibly a look of relief fighting through, but he looked more anxious than happy, maybe even a little scared. Are ghosts a bit like spiders? More afraid of you than you are of them?

Harrison slid back and sat up against his headboard, remaining silent. And so did the boy. Harrison wanted the boy to speak first, so he patiently waited for him to make the first move. The grey lips of the boy mouthed words, but no sound came out. Harrison couldn't hear what the boy was saying, so he tried to read his lips.

“Low mini cheese?” repeated Harrison.

The boy shook his head with a frown. He probably didn't know what ‘low mini cheese’ was because Harrison certainly didn't, but Harrison had an idea. He went to his bookshelf and brought back a book. It was *ABC by Dr Seuss* and every page was a different letter of the alphabet.

“We'll use this. Show me the letters and they'll spell out what you're saying.”

He passed the book to the boy, but it dropped to the floor. It had passed through the boy's hands like they weren't there. Seeing the book pass through the boy gave Harrison goosebumps.

“OK, not to worry. I’ll turn the pages and you point at the letters.”

Harrison picked the book up and flicked through the pages.

“C-H-A-R-L-E-S. Your name is Charles?”

The boy nodded.

“I’m Harrison.”

Charles smiled and gave a little shy wave.

“Where did you come from?”

Charles pointed up.

“Heaven?”

Charles shook his head and pointed up again, with more force this time.

“The attic?”

Charles nodded.

“Are these your marbles?”

Harrison pulled the bag out of his pocket and held them up for Charles to see. Charles nodded again.

“Why didn’t you take them back?”

Charles spelt out his answer. It took a while.

“You can no longer move things and don’t know why? Is it since we’ve been here?”

The boy nodded and Harrison thought about this.

“Maybe it’s knowing that I could see you. Maybe it’s like when I have to go to the toilet in school, when somebody else is in the toilets, I can’t go.”

The boy frowned at this, then laughed silently with a shrug of his arms.

“My dad says it’s called having a shy bladder. You might be a shy ghost.”

Charles looked like he was pondering this theory when the bedroom door burst open. It was Oliver.

“Who you talking to, Dino-nerd?”

Harrison and Charles shared a look. Harrison looked like he had a secret he didn’t want to share, but told Oliver, anyway.

“I’m speaking to Charles. Charles, this is my brother, Oliver.”

“Who’s Charles? Who’re you even looking at?”

“You can’t see him?”

“See who?”

“Charles!” and he pointed at where Charles was standing, but there was nobody there through the eyes of Oliver. Oliver frowned.

“I think only I can see him. He’s the boy that lives in our attic.

“No, Harri...”

but Harrison interrupted.

“I can prove it. I know how I can prove it.”

He stood in between Oliver and Charles, put his back to Oliver, and faced Charles.

“Hold up as many fingers as you want. Charles will copy you, and I’ll be able to tell you.”

Oliver looked around first to make sure Harrison couldn’t see his reflection in the mirror or window. He couldn’t, so he was good to go. Oliver held up four fingers first, and Charles did the same.

“Four,” said Harrison.

Oliver changed to seven fingers and Charles copied.

“Seven.”

Oliver looked around again. He was sure Harrison was cheating somehow.

“Eight, three, nine, two, none. Now you’re sticking your tongue out, scratching your head. Holding up four fingers, but two on each hand.”

“How are you doing this?” Oliver asked in disbelief. He was so sure it was a trick done with mirrors somehow.

“Charles is real,” said Harrison. “He can see what’s going on.”

“Ask him who robbed us then.”

Why didn't Harrison think of this? He didn't want to admit it, but this was a good idea. He turned to Charles and asked him if he knew, and Charles nodded. Harrison picked up the *ABC* book and Charles spelt it out.

“Relocation Relocation Relocation?”

Charles nodded, and Harrison looked at Oliver. The hairs on their arms stood on end while they gawped at each other.

“The moving company robbed us? We have to tell Dad,” said Harrison.

“Tell him what? That the ghost in the attic has told us who robbed us. No one is going to believe that,” pointed out Oliver.

“Then what shall we do?” said Harrison.

“I don't know just yet. Give me a minute.”

Chapter 24.

Charles hovered around the bedroom, watching Harrison and Oliver plan their next move. He was thinking about Harrison's theory of no longer being able to touch things because he was shy or nervous about being seen. He thought back to when the problem started. It was when their dad came home and he couldn't move the panel over the attic. He moved the toys and marbles okay, but when he was close

to being caught, he couldn't move the panel, so maybe Harrison had a point. He thought back again to when he used to play with Mary. Those afternoons pretending to drink tea and eat cake. Did he have a problem? Not that he could remember, but on reflection, he couldn't remember having to move anything in front of Mary. There was no need to. He vowed to never to move stuff in front of the living since that first time he did. Maybe that was why he never moved stuff in front of Mary. He was worried she would be accused of being a witch and get taken away like Alice. He wasn't worried about that anymore, so maybe now that Harrison and Oliver knew about him, he wouldn't be nervous? Maybe later he could get his marbles and try? For now, he wanted to find out Harrison and Oliver's plan to catch the robbers.

Chapter 25.

Coming up with a plan took longer than expected. Oliver came up with a few ideas that involved Charles. but after a lot of spelling out, it became apparent that the ideas were futile. Like finding out where the robbers lived and sending Charles round to scare them. Charles explained he couldn't leave the house, and the robbers couldn't see him. All the other ideas required a grown-up, but who was going to believe them?

“I’ve got it!” said Harrison. “Mad Aunty Mel!”

Oliver didn’t take long to think about it and nodded in agreement. “What are we waiting for?”

They jumped up and rushed to their wardrobes to change into something more appropriate than pyjamas, though their aunt probably wouldn’t care if they turned up in pyjamas. It was likely that she’d be wearing something similar. The boys persuaded Dad to drive them. They would have biked it, but with their bikes getting stolen, Dad agreed to give them a lift.

They’d not seen their Aunt Mel since the move, and that was one of the reasons for moving to the countryside, to be closer to family. Dad could not say no to them, and neither could Aunt Mel. She was more than happy to have the boys go round, so Dad drove them there in the yellow banger and dropped them off outside her house.

Aunt Mel was standing at the window making big two-handed waves as they walked up the flowery footpath to her front door. She greeted them in a unicorn hoodie with the hood up and big furry bunny slippers. She put her hands on her hips and puffed out her chest.

“Unicorn Girl is here to save the day,” she sang. Harrison and Oliver felt a bit embarrassed. They just wanted

to get inside before they were seen and hoped she didn't take them out dressed like that.

"Come in, come in," she ordered as she ushered them inside. "Take your shoes and coat off, then follow me to the shire. This way. NEIGHHHH!"

She pointed to the living room and skipped off while holding an invisible rein in front of her and neighing like a horse. Mad Aunty Mel was very much a horse person. She used to own one until one day she fell off it and landed on her head. The injuries could have been much worse if it wasn't for her helmet. Harrison and Oliver followed her, but they walked normally. They didn't want to pretend they were riding horses, too.

The room was old-fashioned, and smelled sweet, like how you imagine rainbows and unicorns to smell. Everything in the room was made of dark wood or red velour. There were horse pictures on the walls and horse ornaments on the shelves. A lot of the paintings were done by Aunt Mel. She was good at art, but she only ever painted horses.

Also scattered around the house were crystals. A lot of crystals in all shapes and sizes and colours. 'They give off a positive energy,' she told them.

"Come on. Sit down. What do you want to do today?" she asked.

“We know who robbed our house!” Oliver blurted out.

Aunt Mel’s smile vanished from her face and she took down her unicorn hood.

“Yeah, but we can’t tell anyone that we know, or how we know,” said Harrison.

“Because no one would believe us,” explained Oliver.

“Okay.” Aunt Mel had to take a second to process this before she continued. “Let’s go get a plate of the good biscuits and then we’ll talk.”

Chapter 26.

Cadbury’s chocolate biscuits rested delicately on a royal-blue plate, the centre decorated with a sunny beach, brightly painted with shades of yellow and orange. Aunt Mel bought the plate while on holiday in Mexico. She spotted it while she was browsing a street market and she just had to have it. After haggling with the shopkeeper, he accepted Aunt Mel’s offer very quickly. She left the market extremely happy with herself because she’d got herself a lovely, happy-looking plate as a souvenir and got a bargain to boot, but after checking the exchange rate when she got back to the hotel, the plate actually cost £80, and not £8 which she mistakenly thought.

“Let’s start with who robbed you?” said Aunt Mel.

“It was the moving company we used,” said Harrison.
“Relocation Relocation Relocation!”

She pondered this for a moment.

“Makes sense. They know where you live, and what stuff you have. Their fingerprints will be all over the house and your belongings because they’ve touched everything already. I bet the police haven’t found any fingerprints apart from yours and theirs, and theirs will have been dismissed.”

“They could have been wearing gloves,” said Oliver.

“True,” agreed Aunt Mel. “But they didn’t have to, so they probably didn’t. Now explain to me how you know this.”

Harrison was thinking about how to word it without sounding ridiculous, but Oliver blurted it out instead. “There’s a boy that lives in our attic that only Harrison can see. He saw the robbers and their van, and he told Harrison.”

Aunt Mel looked at Harrison.

“You can see ghosts?”

Harrison nodded, “Just this boy.”

“I knew it! When I used to babysit, you used to scare me rotten. You used to play with this imaginary friend, but something didn’t seem right. Things that were out of reach would get moved. When I was out of the room fetching a drink or something, pictures and books would get swapped around, and when I would ask you about them, you used to

blame Robert, or Bobob as you'd call him. Was he an imaginary friend, or was he a ghost? I had my doubts about him being imaginary. How did the pictures move? I didn't do it and you couldn't reach them. Robert wasn't imaginary, he was a ghost. He must have moved everything."

"I don't remember any of this," said Harrison.

"You were only two. You'll have forgotten. Nan had powers, you know? That's probably where you got yours from."

"She could see ghosts?" asked Harrison.

"No. She just knew things, like where I'd been, what I'd done, and what I had got up to, without me telling her. I used to say she was a witch."

"Do you have any powers?" asked Oliver.

"Yes, I have powers."

Harrison and Oliver gasped.

"Really? What can you do?" said Harrison.

"I can read people's thoughts."

"Oh yeah? What am I thinking right now?" said Oliver.

"You're thinking... Aunty Mel is the greatest aunt in the world."

"No, don't be daft. I was thinking about playing football."

“Okay, maybe I can’t read thoughts. So, what you gonna do about these robbers?”

“Well, we were hoping you’d know,” said Harrison.

“Okay. Let me think.”

Chapter 27.

“I don’t think Aunt Mel’s plan is going to work,” said Oliver. He was sitting on Harrison’s bed while Charles hovered by the window, watching the clouds disappear as dust took over the sky. “I think we should take matters into our own hands,” he continued.

“But Aunt Mel is going to call the police,” said Harrison.

“The police won’t do anything because the robbers won’t be doing anything wrong when they turn up. They will go to a house expecting to help with a move, there’ll be no one home, the police will turn up and ask what they’re doing, they’ll say they received a call asking to use their service, this is the address, no one is home, probably a prank, the police will say they got a call advising that a burglary was taking place, they’ll check the van, it will be empty, sorry for wasting your time. The end. And the police will go back to the station,” said Oliver in one long breath.

“Maybe they will find something. Maybe our stuff is still in the van. That was Aunty Mel’s thinking.”

“Maybe, but it’s a small chance. They’ll have it stored somewhere and we need to find it. My plan is to go to their place and have a look.”

“Wait, what?”

“Well, we know when Aunty Mel is booking them for. We’ll go then. When they leave, we’ll go in.”

Harrison had to think about it. He could feel the anxiety spread from the centre of his head to the end of his fingers and toes. Harrison was always someone that did as he was told and never got into trouble, apart from one time when they were walking home from school together.

“Come on,” said Oliver while on the walk. “I know a shortcut.”

“A shortcut?” said Harrison.

“Yeah, I want to get home in time for Spiderman.”

Harrison was confused.

“We always get home in time for Spiderman.”

“Just come on. This way’s quicker.”

Oliver climbed the tall wooden fence that they were walking alongside.

“Wait, that’s someone’s back garden,” said Harrison.

Oliver didn't listen. He had one leg over the top of it before Harrison had finished his sentence.

"It's okay. Everyone will be at work," he said before dropping out of sight.

"Wait, Oliver."

Harrison climbed over the fence and landed in a bed of tulips on the other side. He was standing at the back of someone's garden and could see into their house through the patio and kitchen windows. It looked like no one was home. He jogged through the garden and down the side of the house to the front. It brought him out into a cul-de-sac where new build houses surrounded him and could see the back of Oliver running up the drive of the house opposite.

"Oliver, slow down!" Harrison shouted, but Oliver didn't stop. He didn't even drop the pace. Harrison had to sprint after him to catch him up. He ran up the black path by the side of the house where there was a metal gate, too tall to jump. Luckily, it wasn't locked. It was just on the latch that anyone could lift. Harrison pushed the gate, and it squealed as it swung open.

He was panting as he jogged into the back garden after Oliver. He was out of breath from the chasing but there was no time to rest because Oliver had disappeared behind the fence he had just climbed. Harrison ran to the fence and leapt

onto it, grabbing a plank with his hands and slipping a foot into one of the horizontal gaps. Then he preceded to climb the fence like a ladder.

“Oi!” a man shouted from behind. Harrison turned his head and saw the man. He was about Dad’s age and he was sprinting up the garden towards Harrison, and he didn't look happy.

“Oh, sugar!” Harrison said to himself and he went back to climbing the fence quicker than before. He wasn’t quick enough, though. A hand grabbed his ankle before he could flop over the top to freedom.

“Get down here!” the man was yelling as he yanked on Harrison’s foot. He felt his shoe slipping off, so he flicked his foot straight and let the shoe come off into the man’s hand, leaving Harrison free. He rolled over the top of the fence and landed in a field with only one shoe on. The field belonged to his local park, and Oliver was already halfway across it. There was no point in calling him, so he let him go. Harrison would never catch him, especially with only one shoe on. He still ran home as fast as he could, just in case the man decided to climb over the fence to chase after him.

Harrison limped through the front door and was greeted by Dad. He looked down at Harrison's feet and shook his head in disappointment.

“I’ve just been on the phone with a friend for my book club. He says he has a shoe with your name on it.”

Harrison had forgotten that Mum labelled all his school clothes with stickers that had his name printed on, and with Harrison Ramis not being a common name, it wouldn’t have been difficult for him to be tracked down.

“What on earth were you doing, running through his back garden and jumping his fence?”

Harrison said nothing. He stood there while his face went hot and red. He could feel beads of sweat slide down his back.

“I now have to go to his house to apologise and get your shoe back because you’re gonna need that for school tomorrow. Go to your bedroom and stay up there until tea time. No TV for you tonight. I just don’t know why you didn’t come home with Oliver. He was home before you, so whichever way you decided to come, it wasn’t any quicker. Come home the normal way in the future. I don’t know what came over you, Harrison. It’s just not like you.”

Once the lecture was over, Harrison went to bed and sulked. He didn’t talk to Oliver for a week afterwards.

Apart from that one time, Harrison never got into trouble, always doing what he was told. He brushed his teeth twice a day, ate his vegetables, did his homework, went to bed

at bedtime, and tidied up his toys. Yes, Harrison always did as he was told and tried to stay out of trouble. He was a law-abiding citizen, but then he thought about the photo albums and all the photos of him with his mum. He gritted his teeth and started to grind them. How could someone just take them away from him? How dare they? If he could get them back, should he try? He didn't want to go the rest of his life letting stuff like this happen. He couldn't go through the rest of his life not seeing the photo albums ever again and not seeing his mum.

“I'm in!” said Harrison.

Chapter 28.

Harrison and Oliver's mum only ever wanted her boys to try their best. Whatever they did, it never had to be perfect. It didn't have to be good, just as long as they tried their best. People can't be good at everything, like drawing, for example. Not everyone can draw well. When most people draw a horse, it ends up all out of proportion. The head is too short. The neck is too fat. The legs are too long, and it always looks like it's wearing pointy shoes and trousers.

This wasn't the case for the boy's mum. One thing she was good at was drawing. When she drew a picture, it always

looked exactly what it should. She had a passion for drawing, she would draw every day and she'd encourage her boys to draw too, and even when one of the boy's drawings of a horse ended up looking like two men dressed as a donkey, she would say 'don't worry, just as long you tried your best.'

When the boys started primary school, she took them to the Tate Modern Gallery one school holiday to help inspire them. Her favourite artist was Pablo Picasso, and the Tate Modern Gallery had some of the finest art by some of the most famous artists, Picasso being one of them. She loved his artwork, even though his paintings never looked like the subject. Their eyes were wide apart. Noses were backwards. Necks were bent at ninety degrees. There were a lot of disfigured shapes and various colours smashed on top of each other. Mum was in awe of his work, but Oliver was less than impressed. When they had stopped to admire one of his paintings, Oliver said, "Well, at least he tried his best." This made Mum laugh. The thought of one of the greatest artists to have ever lived, praised for trying their best. At least her words were going in.

Chapter 29.

“Just as long as we try our best,” said Harrison as he was putting on his shoes. Today was the day the moving company was going on their hoax move. Aunt Mel had booked it for today, for in a couple of hours. This gave the boys plenty of time to get to their place of business and wait for them to leave. It was only a couple of miles. Not having their bikes was an inconvenience, but it was a dry, crisp day. The winter sun hung low in the sky, and their breath was visible as soon as they stepped outside. The boys knew where they were going. They had got their business address from the internet and printed off the route.

With little conversation, they walked to the main road. They spoke little because they were too busy focusing on the job at hand, running it through their heads over and over again, and coming up with what-ifs and backup plans.

They wore black attire, including black trainers, black jogging bottoms, black hoodies with the hoods up, and empty black rucksacks resting on their shoulders. As soon as they could, they turned off the main road to take a shortcut through the woods along the river.

“What does Charles look like?” asked Oliver, breaking the silence.

“He’s about your age. Flat cap, waistcoat, shirt. Everything about him is grey. Like the colour has drained away.”

“Aren’t you scared of him?”

Harrison looked up at the clouds and noticed one of them looked like an old woman’s face.

“Er... At first I was, but seeing anybody in your house or bedroom that shouldn’t is scary. I’m not now. Now I know he’s just a boy who’s scared and lonely, and probably bored. I feel sorry for him.”

“Can you see other ghosts? Aunty Mel said you could see one when you were two.”

“Charles is the only one I can see.”

Oliver looked around to see if anyone was nearby.

“How do you know that out of all the people you see, one isn’t a ghost? Walking down the street, minding their own business, you don’t know if anybody else can see them.”

“Charles looks kind of different. Sometimes he’s a little above the floor. Sometimes his feet are a little below the floor, like, in the floor. It’s like he isn’t certain where the floor is exactly because he can’t feel it. And the colour of him. He’s faded of colour. No living person is that grey.”

Oliver tried swallowing the hard lump that appeared in his throat.

“So, you don’t see Mum?”

“No. I don’t see Mum. Only Charles. That is why the photo albums are so important. They are the only things I’m bothered about. I’d give up everything else to get them back.”

“Me too,” agreed Oliver.

They continued their journey with their thoughts.

Chapter 30.

The building looked cold with its metal panels and steel shutter door. There were no windows at the front of the building and green wire fencing wrapped around the perimeter of the building and car park. The only way in was through the car park entrance. No one was around. It was eerily quiet, like time had stood still.

The boys were loitering outside, eyeing up the building and a route in. They put up their hoods and ran into the car park, heading to the side of the building where there was a small gap between the building wall and the green wired fence. Harrison and Oliver crouched down and huddled together, waiting for the all-clear.

“They shouldn’t be too much longer. They need to be setting off soon,” said Harrison, looking at his watch.

As soon as he finished his sentence, the clanking noise of cogs turning and chains jangling began. It made them both jump.

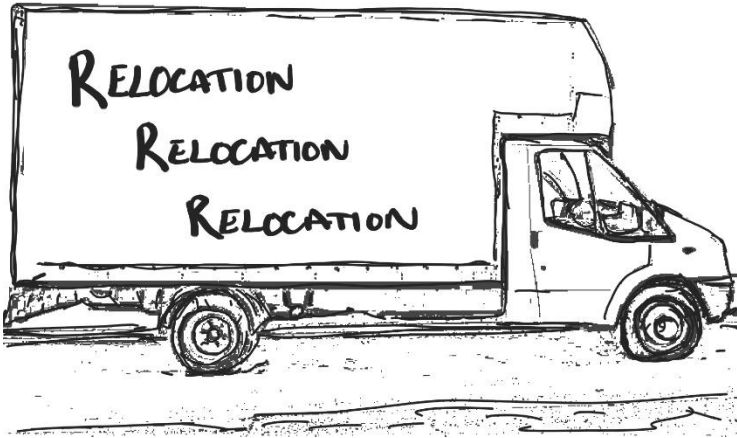
“The doors are opening. Get ready,” whispered Harrison.

They waited for the cogs to stop clanking. It felt like it was taking forever, but eventually they stopped and then there was silence. Not even a bird was tweeting. Harrison lifted a hand to Oliver, showing his palm to let him know to continue waiting. He kept it there as he waited for the right moment. An engine started up and revved a couple of times. The lorry that was used to help them move house, and rob them a week later, rolled out of the building.

“Now!” said Harrison.

They kept low and ran around the corner to the front to sneak in through the opening where the steel shutter doors had just opened. Inside was a lot bigger than what they expected,

but a lot of the space was used to pile up large crates. It was like a Pharaoh's tomb.



“Quick, behind here,” said Oliver. They clambered over one crate and stooped down in the narrow gap between the crate and wall.

The truck stopped and the passenger door opened. The boys could hear footsteps getting closer to them. It sounded like they were back in the building. Harrison and Oliver slowed their breathing to reduce any noise that they were making. They needed to hear what was going on. Where was the person heading? Had the boys been spotted in the truck's mirror as they snuck in behind it? The clanking noise of the cogs started again and the steel shutter door began to cut out

the outside light. The footsteps started again, this time getting further away and the lorry door slammed shut and so did the steel shutter as the sound of the lorry floated off into the distance. Harrison and Oliver pulled themselves up and back over the crates before dusting themselves down.

“Are you hungry?” asked Harrison as he listened to Oliver’s belly growl.

“That’s not me,” said Oliver.

They turned to see what it was and from behind a crate, a rottweiler strolled out. It was showing its teeth and saliva dripped from its mouth. The growling grew. It got louder and snarlier.

“Run!” yelled Oliver.

Harrison jumped onto a crate, while Oliver ran up a metal staircase, two steps at a time like his life depended on it. The dog didn’t give chase. It stayed with Harrison, barking and jumping up. Thankfully, the crate was too tall for it, meaning Harrison’s feet were just about safe. The stairs that Oliver flew up led to a walkway that ran around the edge of the wall. Oliver looked over the railing and could see the entire warehouse floor. Harrison looked up at him and shrugged. He didn’t know what to do.

“How’re we going to get out of this?” said Harrison trying to remain calm.

The dog jumped and barked and drooled.



“Just wait there,” said Oliver.

Harrison frowned. “Well, I was going to go for a pleasant stroll by the river, but an angry dog is trying to eat me.”

“No need for sarcasm,” shouted Oliver as he ran along the walkway to a green door that led to an office. Inside were bookshelves and cupboards and a desk and a spinny office chair and a computer. Blue folders with different years written on them in black marker pen sat on the bookshelves. It was just a typical office. He began searching for something. What

would the dog like? A pencil? A ruler? A book about spreadsheets?

“Bingo!”

On the desk, next to the monitor, was a bright, squishy stress ball. He snatched it and gave it two big squeezes and a couple of bounces.

“I found something!” he shouted and ran to the walkway. The dog was still jumping up at Harrison. Oliver charged down the stairs, trainers banging on every metal step. When he was back on the warehouse floor, he waved the stress ball above his head.

“Here, boy! Get ready to run Harrison.”

Oliver threw the ball, and the dog watched it fly through the air but it didn’t chase it. Without a second thought, the dog shot off towards Oliver and chased him instead.

“No, no! Get the ball. Not me!” he screamed as he turned to sprint. He flew back up the stairs with the rottweiler close behind, snapping at his ankles, making it to the walkway. He then put his head down and ran like a sprinter at the Olympics, bursting into the office and climbing the bookcase behind the door. The dog slid into the office, losing its footing from turning too quick. Its legs were running on the spot as it tried to get a grip on the floor. It spotted Oliver

clinging to the bookcase, but Oliver spotted his chance. He stretched an arm, grabbed the top of the door and leapt off the bookcase, lifting his legs as the door swung him over the dog and back out of the office. He jumped down from the door and closed it, shutting the dog in. His heart was beating fast like a drum roll. He had to take a moment to get his breath back.

“You okay?” bellowed Harrison.

“Yeah!” shouted back Oliver. “I shut the dog up in the office.”

He trotted downstairs, back to the warehouse floor.

“It’s a big warehouse,” said Oliver.

“Yeah. Too big for a removal company. It’s obviously somewhere to keep all the goods they steal.”

“Look, our bikes,” said Oliver excitedly. He pointed to the back wall and there, behind Harrison and some crates, were their bikes leaning on the wall.

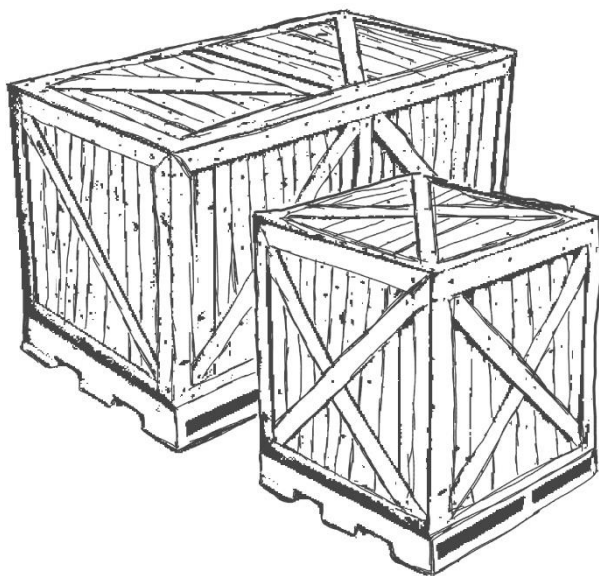
“We need to have a look around, see what else we can find,” said Harrison, noticing how many wooden crates there were to search. “It’s just the photo albums we’re interested in, so just leave everything else.”

“I suppose the best place to start is in the crates closest to our bikes,” said Oliver. He lifted off the top and pushed it to the floor. The crash of the lid’s impact with the floor

echoed around the building and rang inside their ears. Oliver peered inside. There was a coffeemaker, a PlayStation, a DVD player, and a small TV.

“It’s just electronics in here. None of it ours,” said Oliver.

“Right, onto the next crate then.”



They worked their way around the crates, shoving off lids, and inspecting the contents. They found clothes and phones and jewellery and computers and electronics and gadgets. Eventually, Oliver came across a crate full of books

and photos and ornaments and pictures that were drawn by kids, usually found on fridges.

“This looks promising!” Oliver called out, “Come, give me a hand.”

Harrison stopped what he was doing and jogged over. He was about to pull books out of the crate when they heard a lorry pulling up outside the warehouse. Panic struck Oliver and Harrison’s faces. All that Oliver could say was, “Quick!”

Harrison snapped out of his frozen trance and started dragging everything out of the crate as quick as he could.

“Here!” yelled Harrison. He had found the photo albums and piled them up. “Get them in your bag!”

They swung their rucksacks off their backs and onto the floor, but before they even started to fill them, the metal cogs that worked the shutter door clunked and turned. Light crept under the door as it raised.

“Hurry,” whispered Harrison.

They stuffed their bags with the photo albums as the warehouse floor got brighter every second that passed as the shutter door disappeared upwards. After cramming all the photo albums into their rucksacks, they threw them over their shoulders. They were heavy, and Oliver stumbled back from the weight.

“Oi!” yelled a bald man standing at the entrance.

“The bikes!” said Harrison, as he nodded towards their lime green mountain bikes.



The man rushed into the warehouse after them, but Harrison and Oliver were quicker and they jumped onto their bikes before slamming their feet down onto the pedals. They shot off and swerved around the man.

“Stop them!” the bald man yelled.

Another bald man was sitting in the driver’s seat of the lorry. He revved the engine, and the lorry jumped forward. Oliver dodged it and squeezed out of the entrance, but Harrison’s back wheel clipped the front corner of the lorry

and he wobbled. He continued to pedal furiously and somehow kept his balance and got out, panting and out of breath. Thankfully, outside, he didn't stop pedalling and never looked back. He and Oliver had escaped. They cycled out of the car park to safety and Harrison thought that was it. Mission accomplished. Nothing left for them to do but go home, except over the sound of the wind, over the whistling in his ears, over the beating of his heart, Harrison heard one of the bald men yell, "We know where you live!"

Chapter 31.

They barged through the door and dropped their rucksacks to the floor with a mighty thump. They got down on their knees and unzipped the bags to reveal the family photo albums. Harrison slipped one out and laid it carefully onto the woolly grey carpet and Oliver crawled over to look with him. Harrison turned the front cover. The first picture was of their mum with a young Harrison on her knee and an even younger Oliver cradled in her arm. Charles dropped from the ceiling to see what all the commotion was. A tear ran down Harrison's cheek as he looked up to see Charles smiling over his shoulder. He looked happy for Harrison and Oliver,

and he was. He was so happy that they got their photos of their mum back.

The sound of fast feet pounded down the stairs. It was Dad. He raced in and saw all the photo albums.

“Where on earth did you get them?”

“We found them,” said Oliver.

“Found them?” repeated Dad, bemused. “Where?”

Harrison and Oliver glanced at each other while they tried to come up with a reasonable explanation that didn’t involve ghosts or Mad Aunty Mel.

“Well,” began Harrison, eventually. “We thought about how there were no fingerprints or DNA left after the robbery, and how was that possible? But then we realised there are traces of people. Us three and the two removal men. So, we checked out the company and their business address is a warehouse. What does a removal company need a place that big for? They move people’s stuff from one house to another. All they need is a garage or even just a driveway to keep their lorry. So, me and Oliver went to have a look. We found our bikes and the photo albums.”

“Plus, a load of crates full of other people’s stuff!”
battered in Oliver.

“Hold on. Let me get this straight. You broke into someone’s warehouse to have a look around?” said Dad in his serious voice.

“Technically, it wasn’t breaking in. The door was open when we walked in,” explained Oliver. Dad did not look impressed. He was obviously happy they had got back the photo albums, and he was pleased that he now knew who was responsible for the robbery, but there was something not quite sitting right with him. A certain feeling that felt more like anxiety than anger was pulsating through him. It was the thought of his two boys putting themselves in danger. It should have been him.

“We need to call the police,” said Dad. “I’ll tell them I went to the office to speak to them and spotted your bikes in the warehouse. That should sort it.”

“Will they arrest them today?” said Harrison.

“Probably not. They may need a search warrant or an arrest warrant. And when they get arrested, they might get bail. Then there’ll be an investigation. That will probably take a while. Then it will go to court. I don’t really know how it works, but I’m pretty sure it doesn’t happen overnight. But I’ll go call the police now.”

He left the living room to make the call. The colour flushed out of Harrison's face and left him looking nearly as

pale as Charles. All he could hear was ‘I know where you live’ going over and over in his mind.

Chapter 32.

Charles was doing what he did most nights. He was watching the clouds blow past the moon and the stars. He could hear the gentle rustling of leaves as branches shivered in the wind. The distance was too black to make anything out, but he was sure something out there moved. Charles stared and squinted and tried to make out what it was until he realised he could no longer hear the leaves. The sound was being covered up by a low hum. Whatever it was, it was moving, and it was getting bigger and it was getting louder. It was something he had experienced before. He just couldn’t put his finger on it, and then the penny dropped. The lorry! They were back. The lorry was crawling up the drive with the headlights off. Charles dropped into the bedroom below and screamed in Harrison’s face, but there was no response. Harrison was sound asleep. How could he warn Harrison when Harrison couldn’t hear him? He tried slapping Harrison around the face, but his hand went straight through his cheeks. Maybe if he threw some stuff? He grabbed at the lamp at the side of Harrison’s bed, but yet again his hand passed through.

All he could do was hope the noise of the lorry would wake somebody up. He dropped into the hallway to watch the front door. A rattling sound came from the door handle. The gold handle shook, then turned with a click, and the door slowly swung in. Two bald men stood in the doorway. The taller bald man at the front took a long stride into the house, on tiptoes to not make a sound.

Seeing the men sneaking into the house angered Charles. He clenched his fists with rage and screamed as loud as he could. It was a primal scream, a ‘warrior preparing for war’ scream, but no one heard it apart from Charles. He flew forwards with his fists out front and went straight through the first man. However, he felt like he had kicked something. He was sure something touched his foot. It was the landline telephone that hung on the wall at the bottom of the stairs. He had knocked the telephone receiver off with a toe and it fell with a clatter and bounced. The front bald man spun his head around like an owl and glared at the smaller bald man behind him.

“Shhhh!” he hissed.

The smaller bald man threw his arms up in the air and mouthed, “It wasn’t me.”

As he turned back to face forward, the taller bald man crept upstairs. The smaller bald man followed, both as quiet as the night.

Charles screamed again to the point where his lungs would have burst if he were alive. He snatched a coat from the coat rack and lassoed the hood over the smaller bald man's head and dragged him backwards. The man's head jerked back and his legs kicked up off the stairs and into the air. His body soared like a high jumper, but he didn't land on a crash mat. He landed on the cold, hard, wooden hallway floor, smacking the back of his skull on contact. His eyes rolled up into his head and his lids came down like the theatre curtains at the end of the show. He was out cold.

The landing light came on. "Who's there?" yelled a voice from upstairs. It was Dad. He stormed to the top of the stairs and the taller bald man panicked. He was on his own and not so tough now, so he decided to do a runner. The front door was still wide open, ready for a quick escape. He sprinted to the exit.

"Oh, now you don't!" screamed Charles, and he kicked the front door shut. The tall bald man was too close to the exit to stop himself in time and slammed face-first into the closed door. Staggering back, he held his head to stop it from falling off. The dizziness got too much for him and he collapsed on

top of his friend. Dad leapt downstairs and instinctively sat on top of the heap of bald men, foiling any attempt at escape. However, he was unsure what his next move was. He couldn't sit on them forever, and he didn't want to wake the boys and cause any unnecessary worry. Charles could see his predicament as Dad looked around for a solution. Charles looked around too, to see if he could help. The telephone! It was still on the floor. Charles floated to it and swung a leg at it. It made contact, and the phone slid across the floor, smacking Dad on the ankle. Dad looked down to see what it was.

“Ah, the phone,” and he picked it up and dialled the police.

He waited for the police while still sat on the men, and Charles stayed with him, unbeknown to Dad. Dad thought he had saved the day all by himself. He would never know what Charles did that night, and even if he was told, he wouldn't believe it.

Charles waited because he wanted to see the police come and take the bad guys away. There was no sign of Harrison or Oliver. They had slept through the whole disturbance somehow.

How did they sleep through all that? thought Charles. The police turned up a few minutes later and took the men

away with their arms handcuffed behind their backs. Dad locked up the house and switched off the lights before going back to bed. It wasn't long until morning, but Dad decided he deserved a lie in, so switched off his alarm and didn't worry about a lack of sleep. There was too much adrenaline rushing through him to drop off, so he laid awake until sunrise, and then he fell asleep.

Charles headed to the dining room where his bag of marbles was nestled between the apples and oranges. He picked them up and carried them upstairs. Sliding the panel to the attic to one side, he floated up through the hole before shoving the panel back. It had felt like an eternity since he last played with his marbles. He loosened the drawstring and gently pulled open the bag to reveal his marbles. Finally, he had got them back and could play them once again. He rolled the big marble across the floor first. It made a scraping noise as it rolled from one side of the attic to the other. The noise woke Harrison up.

"Eurgh," he groaned. Then he heard the scraping noise of another marble roll above him. It made him smile. *Sounds like he got over his shy 'bladder' then*, thought Harrison before he rolled over and went back to sleep.

The End

