

The Frighteners

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Also by Pete Johnson
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About the Book

On the back of the picture were two words which jumped right out at me: THE FRIGHTENERS.

When Chloe starts at a new school, she gets off to a really bad start and no-one seems to want to be her friend. Except Aidan. But there's something very odd about Aidan. Everybody seems scared of him, and very scared of the pictures he draws. Chloe can't imagine why - until she picks up one of his pictures and sees a drawing of the Frighteners for the first time.

Now the Frighteners won't leave her alone ...

A gripping tale of friendship, revenge - and an imagination that has the power to make the unreal become real.

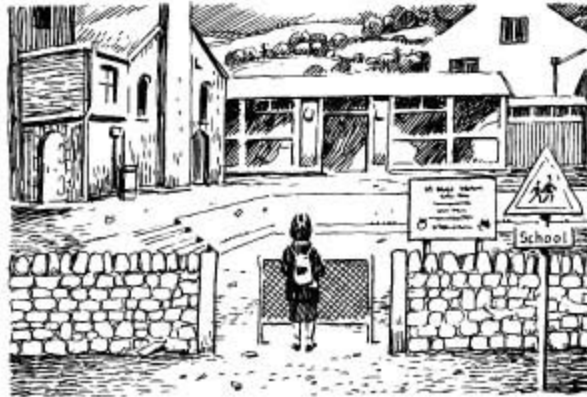
THE FRIGHTENERS



PETE JOHNSON

Illustrated by David Wyatt

CORGI YEARLING BOOKS



Chapter One

IN THE MIDDLE of the night they came for me.

The first time I only heard them. The next night I saw them, too. I looked into the darkness and there they were.

The Frighteners.

Just writing their name sends a cold chill down my spine. I really hope you never meet them.

So what happened to me? If I live to be a hundred and twenty, I'll remember every detail.

It all began on a freezing cold morning at the beginning of October. The air was like ice. I couldn't stop shivering, but not just with the cold. I was walking into a school I'd never even seen before.

I had to wait outside the office for my form-teacher, Mr Karr. The school smelt of cold fish fingers. And I seemed to be standing there for ages. I kept thinking about my friends at my old school. If only I were still there with them. If only!

And then this bearded man in a multi-coloured jersey whooshed up to me. 'Chloe Storr,' he practically shouted. 'Splendid. Follow me.' We bounded down the corridor. 'I believe you come from London,' he said.

'Yes, that's right,' I gasped, struggling to keep up with him.

'Well, you'll find life in a quiet village very different. I'm sure you'll enjoy it though.' He opened a door and all the chatting stopped. Eyes peered at me from every corner of the room.

Mr Karr warbled on about how it wasn't easy being new, especially in the middle of a term, but he knew they'd all make me feel very welcome.

'Do we have a volunteer to look after Chloe?' he asked

I gave one of my really sickly 'Please like me' smiles. But no-one said anything. One girl at the front smiled at me. All the rest just sat there like a bowl of prunes.



'They're a friendly lot really,' said Mr Karr. 'They're just a bit shy with newcomers. Now, where will you sit?'

At my old school we sat round these big tables which was really friendly. Here they were in rows. And there were only two spare places. One was next to a girl with very long blonde hair near the front, the other was beside a boy sitting at the back by the window. He was the only person not gawping at me. He was frowning at his desk.

'You will sit beside Tanya,' said Mr Karr.

The blonde-haired girl sprang up angrily. 'But she can't. Karen will be back soon.'

'Not until next month,' said Mr Karr, firmly. 'Until then Chloe will sit next to you. I know you will look after her. And Alison, as I've had no volunteers, I'm picking you to look after Chloe at breaktime.'

So I scrambled next to Tanya, giving her the biggest smile I could manage. She didn't smile back, just snapped, 'You know you can only sit there until Karen gets back.'

Talk about friendly! I was getting cross now and muttered, 'And who made you Queen of the World?' I'd only said that under my breath but she must have had supersonic hearing, because she gave this angry flounce and ignored me for the rest of the lesson. She just sat there playing with her hair.

I suppose I ought to tell you that she was very pretty and she had the kind of long blonde hair I've always wanted. My hair is a dull, mousey brown colour. I'm quite short too and have what people call an interesting face which means I'm not wildly attractive (although I'm not a dead-ringer for the Elephant Man either).

Tanya started whispering to this boy in front of us, who kept turning round.

Finally he spoke to me. 'Hello, I'm Tom.'

'And I thought I'd become invisible. Hello, Tom.'

He grinned. 'I bet you support one of the London clubs like ... West Ham.'

'Right first time,' I said.

He grinned again. Tanya was clearly furious at having the attention taken away from her. She whispered something I couldn't hear. But Tom didn't say another word to me.



I got out my pencil case. It was one of those fluffy ones made of fake fur which were really cool at my last school. I

opened it. Inside all my friends had written little messages on it for me. I started reading them again and I felt so lonely. I even gave my pencil case a little stroke just as if it were a tiny pet.

I hardly wrote anything, though. I couldn't. They were way ahead of me in maths. So I sat there in a total fog. At the end of the lesson Mr Karr asked me to stay behind. Everyone else had left for morning break, except that boy who sat by himself at the back. He seemed to be drawing something.

Mr Karr tried explaining where I'd gone wrong. I became more confused than ever. In the end he told me not to worry, I'd soon catch up. But I didn't believe that and I don't think he did either.

He took me out to the playground at the front of the school. I stood there watching some of the boys play football. I felt all nervous and shy. Then a girl came up to me. The one who'd smiled at me in the classroom.

'You're Chloe.'

'Yes.'

'I'm Alison.' She spoke very softly.

'Hi Alison.'

'Are you a cockney?' she asked.

That took me by surprise. 'No, I'm not.'

'Oh, you sound just like one.'

I don't, actually. But I didn't argue with her.

There was silence for a moment as we struggled to think what to say next.

'So are you cooked?' she asked suddenly.

I gaped at her. 'I'm sorry.'

'Are you cooked?'

'I don't think so.'

'You must be packed then.'

I couldn't understand a word she was saying. 'No, I don't think I'm that either,' I said at last.

After another deathly pause she whispered, 'See you later then.'

'Bye,' I replied. Then all at once I understood what she'd been asking me. 'Alison, I'm having a cooked meal today, so yes, I'm cooked,' I called. 'Sorry for being so dense.'

But she can't have heard me. Some other people did though and gave me funny looks. I crawled back into school.



A group of girls and Tom were standing by the pegs. Tanya was in the centre of them. She had her back to me. She was sniffing her pencil case and saying in this very affected voice, 'Don't you just love my fluffy pencil case everyone. I can't stop looking at it. Isn't it just the most wonderful one you've ever seen in your whole life?'

The girls around her were in hysterics. I wasn't. But then I was the one she was impersonating. And I hadn't been showing off my pencil case at all. I just liked it. They were being totally unfair.

Suddenly Tom spotted me. Then every face whirled round. And Tanya stopped her impression, her face reddening a little. I never said a word, just slowly walked back to the classroom. That boy at the back was still there. But he didn't even look up when I came in. I sat there seething with hurt and anger.

Then Tanya swept back. A little group, including Tom and Alison, huddled around her. She got out this bag. We weren't allowed to wear trainers to school but she'd

sneaked in her new ones to show everyone. I thought I'd die of excitement.

She waved these trainers about and went on and on about how totally wonderful they were. She was such a show-off. And all the time she spoke she had this smug grin on her face. She was setting my teeth on edge.

Then Alison suddenly asked me, 'What do you think of Tanya's new trainers, Chloe?' She was trying to be friendly, draw me into the conversation. But they belonged to that awful, stuck-up girl who'd just done a very cruel impression of me.

So I blurted out, 'Yes, those trainers were quite fashionable in London about three years ago.'

Immediately I wished I hadn't said that. But it was too late. Tanya's face just froze with shock. Then she turned her back on me as Tom snarled, 'You think you're so great coming from London, don't you?'

He didn't understand. I'd only said that to put Tanya in her place.

And then lessons started again and I made a truly massive mistake. Mr Karr asked me to tell the class about where I'd lived before. So I did. And for the first time that day I enjoyed myself.

I told them all about my old school and how it had a swimming pool and big playing fields (unlike this place) and then I got carried away. Soon I was turning my last school into a palace.



After I'd finished there was silence. Even Mr Karr's smile looked a bit frozen. 'Well,' he said, 'I hope you won't find life here too dull, Chloe.'

And as the atmosphere had become distinctly heavy I replied, all bright and breezy, 'Oh no, this is a really exciting, modern place. I see you've got colour television here now and indoor loos ...' I was only joking. And I'm always saying daft things like that. Ask any of my old friends.

But no-one smiled. There was lots of angry murmuring, though. And Mr Karr said in this very tight voice, 'Right, well I think we'd better get back to our work now.'

After the lesson finished and Mr Karr had rushed off to see a parent, half the class circled around my desk. You can guess who led the jeering. Yes, Tanya.

'I hate big-headed people who look down on everyone else,' she said.

Hark who's talking I thought. But I never said a word. I'd said far, far too much already. I just shrank into myself while the insults rained down on me. Only the boy at the back didn't join in. He was slumped so low in his chair he seemed as if he was about to slide off it.



'If your school was so great, what are you doing here?' demanded Tom.

Before I could reply, this voice said, quietly, 'Leave her alone.'

The boy at the back had got to his feet. He was very small and thin, his clothes seemed to just hang off him. He