

Phantom Fear

Pete Johnson

Random House Children's Books

CONTENTS

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

My Friend's a Werewolf

Dedication

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

The Phantom Thief

Dedication

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Also by Pete Johnson

Copyright

About the Book

Two spine-tingling tales from an award-winning author

The Phantom Thief

A mysterious boy appears as if from nowhere in the school detention room. A warning message is scratched on the blackboard by a phantom hand. Is Alfie in danger ...?

My Friend's a Werewolf

There's something odd about Kelly's new friend Simon - he wears gloves all the time and howls at night. But werewolves only exist in stories ... don't they?

PHANTOM FEAR

Pete Johnson

Corgi Yearling Books

MY FRIEND'S A WEREWOLF

Illustrated by Peter Dennis

This book is dedicated to:
Jan, Linda, Robin, Harry and Adam, Bill Bloomfield and Sue
Gregory



CHAPTER ONE

I THOUGHT WEREWOLVES only existed in stories and late-night films.

Now I know they are real.

It's an incredible story but I am going to tell you everything.

Then maybe you'll believe too.

I remember exactly when my story started. It was on a Saturday afternoon at the beginning of November. I was pretending to be tidying up my room when actually I was sitting on my bed reading a horror story. It was starting to get dark and I was just drawing my curtains when the doorbell rang.

'Answer that, love, will you?' called my mum. 'Your dad's not back yet and I'm on the phone to your nan.'

I thumped down the stairs and opened the door to discover this boy I'd never seen in my life before, smiling shyly at me.

'Hello,' he said.

'Hello,' I replied cautiously.

He had curly black hair, very thick eyebrows and enormous dark green eyes. I guessed he was about

thirteen, two years older than me.

'I've just moved in next door,' he said.

Mr and Mrs Atkins, who live next door in the end house, have gone to Germany for four years, so they've been letting their house out. The family who were there before never even said hello. They were horrible. We were all glad when they left.

'Do you go to the school down the road, Westcliffe High?' he asked.

I nodded.

'That's where I'm going. I'll be in Mrs Paine's class.'

'Same as me,' What made me think he was older than me? He wasn't especially tall. It must have been those little bits of stubble on his chin.

'So what's Mrs Paine like?' he asked.

'When she's in a bad mood she's a nightmare. And when she tells you off she spits right in your face. I want to say to her: tell me the news, not the weather.'

He started to laugh. 'I'm Simon, by the way.'

'And I'm Kelly.'

'Kelly,' he exclaimed. 'Why, that's a brilliant name.'



I was really surprised – and pleased – by his reaction, especially as a lot of people say I've got a dog's name and call out 'Here Kelly' and 'Walkies Kelly' when they're trying to be funny.

'Have you got any brothers or sisters?' he asked.

I shook my head.

‘Neither have I.’

And I don’t know why, but that seemed to create a little bond between us.



I invited him in. He was dressed casually in a blue sports shirt, baggy jeans, Kickers – and black gloves. My eyes kept going back to those black gloves. They had little pads under the fingertips and they just didn’t fit in with what he was wearing. Those gloves looked weird somehow.

I took Simon into the kitchen. Muffin, our white cat, was sitting on the table. ‘No, Muffin, bad cat,’ I said. ‘You know you’re not supposed to be up there. Come on, down you get.’

To my surprise Muffin starting arching her back and hissing. She was hissing furiously at Simon as if he were her deadliest enemy.

‘Muffin, stop that,’ I began. But Muffin had already jumped off the table and fled away.

‘I’m sorry about that,’ I said. ‘She’s normally much friendlier.’

‘She can probably smell my dogs off me. I’ve got four of them.’

‘Four!’ I exclaimed.

‘Yeah, we had three dogs and now we’ve just got another one from the animal rescue centre. All my family are just mad about dogs.’

Soon we were chatting away as if we'd known each other for years. My mum and dad introduced themselves to Simon and afterwards pronounced him 'a very nice young lad'. Later Mum also popped next door to say hello, and to find out all the news. She came back saying how Mr and Mrs Doyle had moved here quickly because of Mr Doyle's new job. But if 'things worked out' they would settle in the area.

'Maybe Mr and Mrs Atkins might even sell them the house,' I said excitedly.

Next day Simon invited me round to his house for tea. There were still lots of unpacked boxes in the hallway. I dodged round them and followed Simon into the kitchen. I couldn't believe my eyes. There were platefuls of sausage rolls, sandwiches, cakes, biscuits.

'How many people are you expecting?' I cried.

'Only you,' said Simon.



'But there's enough food here for a party.'

'We just wanted you to feel welcome,' then with a grin he added, 'and we're not going to let you leave until you've eaten it all up.'

'I'll be here for weeks then.'

'That's fine ... stay as long as you like,' he replied. Then Simon's parents appeared. His dad was very tall and balding while his mum was much smaller but with the same enormous green eyes as Simon. They both kept asking me

if I was enjoying myself and seemed really disappointed when I said I couldn't eat any more.

I was about to leave when they insisted I have some hot chocolate, 'for the journey'. I didn't like to point out I was only going next door. Simon's dad brought in a tray of hot chocolate and still more biscuits which I couldn't even look at I was so full. Then Simon's mum asked, 'So, Kelly, is your bedroom at the front or the back of the house?'

I thought this was rather an odd question but I replied, 'At the back.'

At once, Simon's parents leaned forward and stared at me intently. 'Has Simon mentioned we've got four dogs?'

'Yes, I'd really like to see them.'

Simon's mum smiled. 'Well, we kept them away while you were eating, otherwise you wouldn't have got a moment's peace from them ... At night they sleep outside in their kennel and they're good dogs but they can be a little noisy ...'

'And we'd hate to think of them keeping you awake,' said Simon's dad.

'Oh, don't worry about that,' I replied at once. 'The neighbours before you were in a band, so I'd hear drums going at two in the morning. My dad said it was a real disgrace and he kept complaining but they never stopped. So after that, a few dogs barking is nothing.'



'Well, if ever they do disturb you, please tell us, won't you?' said Simon's dad.

'Yes, come straight to us,' said Simon's mum, so firmly it was almost like a command.

I felt a little embarrassed by all this fuss. 'Look, I love dogs myself,' I began.

'Do you?' said Simon eagerly. 'Well, would you like to meet them?'

'Definitely.'

He charged off while his mum called after him: 'Make sure you check they haven't been digging in the mud ...' She'd hardly finished speaking when three dogs tumbled through the doorway; the two West Highland terriers, yelping excitedly, dived straight on to Mrs Doyle's lap. 'Not both of you up here,' she said, but the dogs ignored her protests and made themselves comfortable. Meanwhile, the brown dog which Simon described as a 'sort of spaniel' circled excitedly around Simon, his tail thumping so hard he nearly sent a vase flying.

Then I spotted a fourth dog. A black labrador wagging his tail rather uncertainly in the doorway.

'That's Plute,' explained Simon. 'We've only had him a little while.'

'His last owners were unkind to him,' said Simon's mum, 'so he's still a little bit unsure of himself.'

Simon went over to the dog, got down on his knees, put his face right up to Plute and started whispering to him. The dog seemed to be listening to him too. It was as if they were whispering secrets together.

Then Simon got to his feet and at once Plute came over to me. I stroked him gently and then he rolled over on to his back. 'See, he likes you,' cried Simon. 'I told Plute he would.' Later, Simon showed me the kennel in the garden where all the dogs slept.

'But it's huge,' I cried. 'Bigger than my bedroom.' Inside the kennel were all these thick rugs.

‘We like our dogs to be comfortable,’ said Simon.

‘I bet it’s funny when you take all four for a walk,’ I said.

‘It’s mad,’ laughed Simon, ‘especially with Plute. You see, he’s got this crazy hobby – he likes to chase cars.’

‘Oh no.’

‘Yeah, he’s always trying to run off so he can go car chasing.’ Simon rubbed Plute’s head affectionately. ‘He’s such a nutty dog, that one.’

‘Still, he’s got a nice lot of space to run around in here,’ I said. The whole garden was given over to grass. There were hardly any flowers at all but all round the garden were tall trees and bushes making it seem private and mysterious, almost like a secret garden. I liked that.



In fact, I felt really happy out there with Simon and all his dogs. Only one thing was bothering me. Simon was wearing those black gloves again. And they just looked so daft. I knew all my friends would think so too. Would he wear them to school tomorrow? He wouldn’t be allowed, would he? I couldn’t stop staring at them.

Finally, Simon said, ‘You don’t think much of my gloves, do you?’ He was looking straight at me when he said this.

‘Oh no, they’re ...’ I gulped hard. ‘Well to be honest, I don’t like them much,’ I admitted finally.

‘Nor do I,’ said Simon. ‘In fact I hate them. But I have to wear them. I’ve no choice. That’s why I’ve got to take a letter into school tomorrow.’ He sighed loudly. ‘Shall we go back inside?’



I knew he didn't want to talk about it any more. But I couldn't help wondering what was wrong with his hands. Why did he have to keep them hidden in gloves all the time?

As I was leaving I said, 'I'll call for you for school tomorrow, if you like.'

'That'd be great,' he said eagerly.

'There's another person I call for, Jeff. He lives just up the road. I'm sure you'll like him.'

Simon nodded, then said, 'The dogs have really taken to you.'

'I like them very much too,' I replied.

Simon's face broke into a smile wide enough for two people. 'It's going to be so great us living next door to each other.'

I really agreed with him, then.



CHAPTER TWO

I WAS STILL waiting for my cereal to turn the milk all chocolatey – some days it just takes ages – when Simon bounded in.

‘I’m early, aren’t I?’ His eyes were sparkling as if he was going to a party.

‘Yes, and you’re a bit keen,’ I said.

‘I know, sorry ... but Kelly, I just can’t wait.’

‘To go to school? You’re mad! So what was your old school like?’

The smile immediately faded off his face. ‘It was OK, I guess. But I know this school is going to be much better.’ Then he grinned excitedly at me.

We set off to call for Jeff. I hoped Simon would like him and not judge by appearances. You see, Jeff is very small and very round and known to everyone as ‘The Barrel’. When they’re picking teams at school he’s always the last to be chosen. In fact, no-one actually picks him they just say, ‘And you’ve got The Barrel.’

Yet Simon was really friendly to Jeff, asking him questions about school and his hobbies – well, hobby. Jeff

collects superhero comics. But Jeff gave these brief, almost rude answers and all the time spoke in this very flat tone.

We took Simon to the staffroom to see Mrs Paine. Outside the staffroom Jeff hissed, 'What about those black gloves he's wearing. I suppose he thinks he looks cool. Well, I think he looks pathetic.'

'That's so mean,' I replied. 'Simon has to wear those gloves.'

'Why?'

'I don't know exactly.'

'It's probably because his hands look so horrible. I bet they're all greasy and wrinkled and got scabs all over them and ...'

Jeff was interrupted by the staffroom door opening. Simon appeared. 'Well, she hasn't spat in my face yet,' he said.

I laughed, while Jeff just looked puzzled. Then I introduced Simon to some other people from my form. At first I think he was overwhelmed by this rush of new faces. But soon he was chatting away quite easily.



His arrival was certainly hot news. All day I was asked questions about him. It was good fun actually. Rat-bag Sarah even flounced up to me and said, 'Everyone's talking about you and Simon. Is he your boyfriend or not?'

Of course he wasn't my boyfriend but I wasn't going to tell Sarah that. So I just smiled mysteriously.

‘And those gloves. Why? Are they glued to his hands?’

Again I smiled mysteriously. ‘That’s for me to know and you to find out.’

Sarah didn’t like that answer at all. But in the afternoon she ran up to me again, smirking her head off.



‘Simon’s told me why he has to wear those gloves ...’ She lowered her voice dramatically. ‘That fire he was in must have been terrible, mustn’t it?’

For a moment I was too shocked to reply, then I said, ‘Oh, yes, terrible,’ and quickly walked away.

Fancy Simon telling Rat-bag Sarah about the fire he was in – and not me. I was really upset.

Later when I was walking home with Jeff and Simon I said, ‘Sarah told me you got your hands burnt in a fire.’

‘That’s right,’ he said shortly. Then he added, ‘I really hate talking about it.’ He shook his head. ‘I had to tell her because she just kept on and on about it. They all did, all ... except you.’ He said those last words as if he were paying me a compliment.

‘Sarah is just so nosy ... I can’t stand her actually,’ I said.

‘I think I like other people a lot more,’ replied Simon, looking straight at me. I hoped I wasn’t blushing.

Jeff gave this really loud whistle of annoyance; that was all Jeff said until we reached my house. Then he muttered, ‘You haven’t forgotten you’re going to help me with maths homework, have you, Kelly?’

Actually Jeff is practically a genius at maths, so I knew this was his code for, I want to talk to you privately. We were hardly out of Simon's earshot when Jeff was hissing, 'Well, thanks a lot, Kelly. You've practically ignored me all day.'

'No, I haven't,' I replied indignantly.

'Yes you have; at lunchtime you went off with that Simon, leaving me all on my own.'

'I left you in a room full of people,' I cried. 'And I only went off to introduce Simon to some of the football team as he's interested in playing.'



'Oh, is he?' said Jeff sarcastically. 'Well, isn't he just marvellous? I suppose old friends aren't good enough for you now?'

I felt a bit sorry for him - and just the tiniest bit guilty too. 'Oh, Jeff, don't be silly, it's only Simon is new so I have to look after him ... and you do like him, don't you?'

'No.'

'No?' I was shocked.

'I think he's too good to be true.'

'Oh, what rubbish,' I began.

'There's something weird about him and you'd better be careful living next door to him.'

I gave a strange kind of laugh in reply. 'Well, everyone else likes him.'

Of course it helped that Simon was so brilliant at sports. I'd never seen anyone jump so high in basketball. He was also an amazingly fast runner and very soon was one of the stars of the football team. I stayed behind to cheer him on after school. So did quite a few other girls. Girls were always asking me questions about him and saying things like, 'I think you're so lucky having Simon move next door to you.'

I just smiled when they said that. But secretly I agreed with them. And then came the night of Sarah's fancy-dress party. Everyone from Sarah's form was invited - even me, although I think I was only invited because Sarah's mum and Jeff's mum are always round each other's houses and Sarah knew Jeff wouldn't go without me.

Simon said he had a great idea for his costume but wouldn't tell anyone what it was; he wanted it to be a surprise.

Jeff and I didn't have any ideas at all. Finally on Saturday afternoon we went into town hoping inspiration would strike.

Ever since Jeff and I had argued about Simon we hadn't been getting on too well. I was really upset about that - and I think Jeff was too. So this trip was also our way of making up.

But Jeff was acting really strangely. He'd bought this baseball cap which he was wearing round the wrong way and he kept telling me how tough and hard he was.

I just wished he'd be his usual self. We had hardly any money so we decided we'd just buy a mask at *Jolly Jokes Galore*. This shop was right on the edge of town and always looked dark and dreary. The paint was peeling off its sign. And inside there was an old, musty smell. A man in a grey overcoat glared fiercely at us. He had a very long red nose which Jeff was certain was false; he was always daring me to pull it.

We started looking through the masks of grinning clowns and famous people. All the ones I remembered from last time were still here, only covered in an extra layer of dust. Did he ever sell anything? I wondered.

Then Jeff exclaimed, 'Look at that!' and held up a mask I'd never seen before. It was of a werewolf.



It looked really horrible. The fur which hung down from the top and sides of the mask seemed real. So did the blood dripping from its long yellow fangs. I hated it. Yet I couldn't stop looking at it.

Then all at once Jeff put it on. His grey eyes glinted at me from the werewolf mask. 'This is what I'm wearing tonight,' he cried. 'I dare you to get one too.'

I hesitated.

'Go on,' he said. 'This is much better than going as some boring old clown.'

'All right,' I said slowly. I thought there might be only one werewolf mask in the shop, but the shopkeeper climbed up his step-ladder and solemnly brought down another one. He wrapped mine up. Jeff wore his out of the shop.

'At the party tonight,' he said, 'I'm going to jump out at people and say, "I want your blood".'

'Vampires say that ... not werewolves,' I corrected.

'I know,' said Jeff at once. 'What do werewolves say then?'

‘They don’t say anything, just growl a lot and attack people ... and they howl, don’t they?’

Immediately Jeff started practising his howl. He kept his mask on all the way home.

I didn’t try my mask on again until I was getting ready to go out. I dressed all in black and I found these woolly gloves with long fingers – I suppose they looked a little like claws. Then I caught sight of myself in the mirror. I’m not one of those very pretty, sweet-looking girls like Rat-bag Sarah. My hair’s my best feature – it’s dark brown and quite long; it goes down past my shoulders now.



But otherwise I’m just normal, I suppose, except for my skin. It’s deathly pale. Someone said once I looked like a ghost. I do try and brighten myself up, like recently I wore this really glittery dress to a party, Jeff immediately shouted out that I looked like an astronaut. I suppose an astronaut is better than a ghost.

Tonight, though, my skin seemed paler than ever. Sometimes I just hate the way I look. Then I put on the werewolf mask. I looked a bit peculiar but not at all scary until I switched off the light.