

# Ghost Trouble

Pete Johnson

*Random House Children's Books*

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About the Author

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# About the Book

Two terrifying tales from the award-winning Pete Johnson

## *The Ghost Dog*

Daniel's story about a bloodthirsty dog goes down well at a spooky party. But then somehow his imagination comes to life and the howling monster begins to haunt his dreams!

Winner of the Young Telegraph/Fully Booked Award

## *The Creeper*

Lucy finds an old tape of the spine-chilling story of the Creeper – a horrific creature looking for revenge. Lucy knows she has just done something terrible – will the Creeper track her down?

Winner of the Stockton Children's Book Award

# **PETE JOHNSON GHOST TROUBLE**

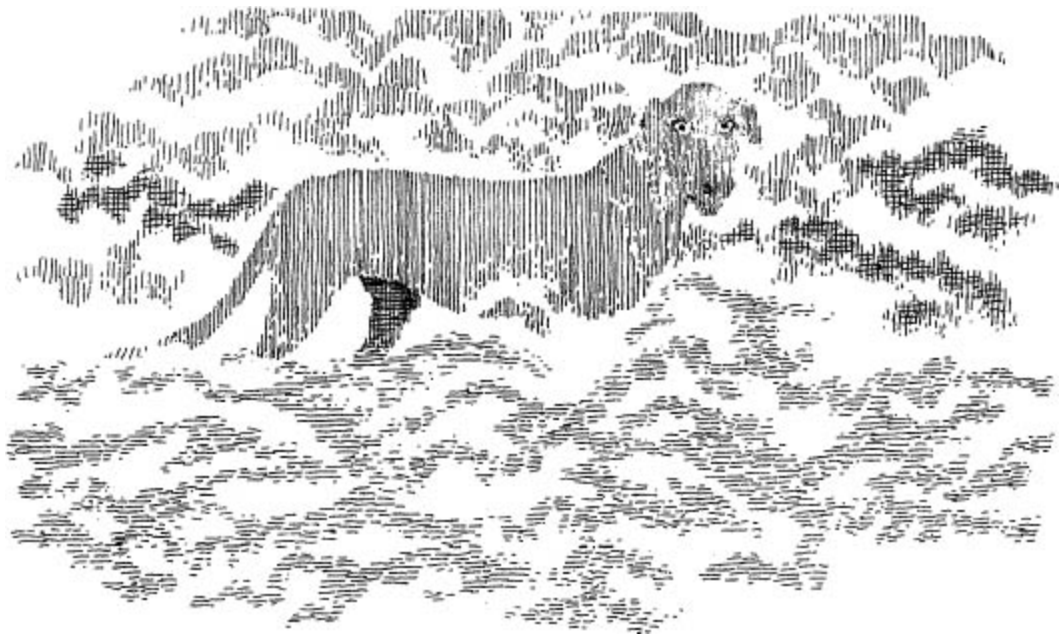
**Corgi Yearling Books**

# **THE GHOST DOG**

Illustrated by Peter Dennis

The Ghost Dog is dedicated to  
Jan, Linda, Robin and Harry;  
Rose, Jack and Freddie Jewitt;  
Jo and Laura May;  
Alex and Grant Harnett

With grateful thanks.





# ***CHAPTER ONE***

THE FIRST TIME I only saw its face.

Out of the darkness it came floating towards me.

It had evil red eyes.

Blood poured out of its mouth.

It was the ugliest, most horrible thing I had ever seen.

And I'd brought it to life.

I'd thought it was only mad scientists in stories who could create monsters. Not ten-year-old boys like me: Daniel Grant.

Don't ask me how I did it. I'm still not sure. I certainly never meant it to appear at my spooky party.

\* \* \*

It was Laura's idea to have a party for Halloween.

She first mentioned it after school when we were taking Rocky for a walk. Rocky is my pet rat.

At first I'd wanted a dog but my mum wouldn't let me. So then I went to the pet shop and saw this albino rat in a cage. And he looked at me so imploringly I knew he wanted me to buy him. So I did. Now I reckon he's the best pet you can have.

Every day after school he snuggles down my shirt while Laura and I take him to the common. There we let him run around. He loves that but he never tries to get away. In fact, he can be a bit of a pain because he wants to be stroked all the time.

Rocky was licking orange off our fingers when I started yawning again.

'You've been yawning all day,' said Laura.

'I know,' I said. 'It's because . . .'

I hesitated. I didn't want to tell anyone and yet I did. Perhaps I would just tell Laura.

By the way, people are always calling Laura my girlfriend and I know they say it as a kind of joke but it really annoys me.

Laura and I often go fishing as well as kick-boxing every Wednesday. She's an excellent goal-keeper and never seems to mind being the only girl when we play football. In fact, I think she likes it. She's quite small with dark brown hair and a quiet whispery voice, although she can shout when she wants to. She's my best mate and she has been ever since we met at infant school.



So then I told her. 'You know on the news they said about that man who'd escaped from prison?'

'The one with the really mean face,' began Laura.

'That's him,' I said. 'Well, I didn't get much sleep last night because I kept hearing these noises and I was sure he was hiding in my attic.'

Laura's eyes grew bigger. 'And what was it?'

'Rocky jumping up and down in his cage,' I replied. 'At least I think that's what it was.' We both laughed nervously,

then I started stroking Rocky. 'When I was younger, a lot younger,' I went on, 'I used to arrange my toy soldiers so that all their guns were pointing at the door. Then some nights I'd put my tanks out too . . . I still like to have something by my bed even if it's only a tennis racket, just in case.' I paused.

There was silence for a moment before Laura said, quietly, 'What I hate is when that man at the end of *Crimewatch* says, "Sleep well tonight and don't have any bad dreams, will you?" And I think, it's all right for you in your nice, comfy studio with about two hundred people around you, but I'm on my own upstairs . . . some nights I'll be thinking about what he's said so much, that I have to go and switch my light on and stand in the light for a little while.' She shivered and smiled. 'It's Halloween next week.'

'I know.'

'We must do something,' she said. 'And not trick or treat. Last year everyone was doing that. No, we ought to have a proper party where we can play *Murder in the Dark*.'

'I love *Murder in the Dark*,' I cried.



'And afterwards we could all sit round and tell really gory stories,' she said. We looked at each other excitedly.

Then Laura sighed. 'Only my dad would never let me have a party like that.'

I silently agreed. Laura's dad's all right but he gets stressed very easily. Like yesterday, he made Laura go up to her room just because he found her shoes down by the sofa.

'There's always my house,' I said.

'Do you think your mum would let you?' asked Laura.

'It depends what sort of mood she's in, but I think I can talk her round, especially if I get Roy on my side.' Roy is my mum's boy-friend.



But in the end I didn't need Roy's support. To my total surprise Mum said 'Yes', rightaway.

'How many friends can I invite?' I asked.

'About six,' suggested Mum.

'Not counting Laura.'

Mum smiled. 'Not counting Laura . . . and we'll have to keep an eye on Carrie. We don't want her getting scared.'

Carrie is my seven-year-old sister. 'Nothing scares her,' I said.

Next day Laura and I worked out who we were going to invite. Top of both our lists was Harry, because he's mad. He really is. I mean, I've never seen anyone laugh like Harry. He's got this really loud laugh and when he starts he just can't stop: tears fall down his face and he always leans too far back on his chair and falls over. Then, because he's laughing so much he can't get up again, which winds teachers up something rotten. It's brilliant to see.

Next to Laura, Harry is probably my best mate. He got really excited about the Halloween party. So did everyone else we invited. Then, two days before Halloween, came shock news.

'I know you're going to be disappointed,' said Mum, 'but I'm afraid we're going to have to cancel the Halloween party.'

I looked up sharply. 'Why?'

Mum became embarrassed. 'Well, Roy's been offered this job which means he'll be away on business a lot in America over the next few months, so he's asked if Aaron could stay here with us and make a fresh start.'

Aaron is Roy's son. I'd only seen him about twice but that was enough. He just loves himself; a total bighead. Mum went rattling on. 'So Aaron will be moving in on Friday night. I know that's when we'd planned your party but I can't manage a party on that night as well. Don't worry, though, I will make it up to you.'



'Don't bother,' I muttered.

'Oh come on, Dan, we'll do something special soon, I promise,' said Mum. 'Got any ideas?'

'Yeah, a Halloween party,' I said. 'That's all I want.'

I was so angry about my party being cancelled it was only later I realized what else it meant: my home was going to be invaded. By Aaron.

Ever since my dad walked out, it had just been my mum, Carrie and me and I'd got to like that. I certainly didn't want it changed now.

'Why has Aaron got to come here?' I demanded. 'Why can't he go to his nan's or . . .'

'Because I want to do this for Roy,' interrupted Mum. 'It's a decision I've made and that's that.' She had a real 'Don't argue with me' look on her face. Then she added, a bit more gently, 'It is the right thing to do. Later you'll see that.'

She was smiling at me now. I turned away. Then I thought of something. 'And where's he going to sleep?'

'I can't see him sharing with Carrie, can you?' replied Mum, trying to make a little joke of it all. 'And you have got the biggest bedroom.'

But as I said to Laura later, that doesn't mean Mum can just move someone into my room without even asking me. How would she like it if I told her I was bunging another woman into her bedroom.

'She wouldn't like it at all,' agreed Laura. 'And I'd really hate to share my room with a stranger,' she added.

'This Aaron's ruined everything,' I said, 'including our Halloween party.'

It was about half-past-seven on Halloween night when Roy and Aaron arrived in this big van. The first thing Aaron unpacked was this new mountain bike, which his dad had just bought for him. I think I'm lucky if my dad sends me a five-pound gift token at Christmas.

Then Mum said to me, 'Show your guest where he's staying.'

I wanted to say, 'He's not my guest,' but I didn't, as earlier Mum had given me this pep talk. 'Now, you must make Aaron feel welcome: remember, his mum's passed away and it can't be easy for him, new home, new school . . .' So I did try and twist my face into a smile as I went up the stairs with him. But watching him pile his suitcases into my room gave me this really tight pain in my stomach.

Aaron prowled around my room and didn't look at all impressed. He pointed at Rocky in his cage. 'You've got a pet rat.' He sounded mocking.



'He's called Rocky - and he lives here,' I added, in case Aaron was going to say he couldn't share a room with a pet rat.

But instead, Aaron picked up the scarf I'd put on top of the bunk bed - just so he'd know that was my place. 'So you're a Spurs supporter,' he said.

'Yeah, what about you?'

'Arsenal is the only team worth supporting.' He turned around and glared at me. He'd had his hair shaved really short round the sides; I think he was trying to look hard. But he was actually very skinny and quite small, half a head smaller than me, even though he was a year older.

Then Mum, Roy and Carrie all tumbled into my room.

'Getting settled in all right, Aaron?' asked my mum. 'Daniel's made space for you, so there should be plenty of room.'

'Oh yes, plenty of room,' said Roy, rubbing his hands together. Then he laughed loudly, showing all his white pointy teeth. He had his arm all round Mum's shoulder. I hate it when seriously old people do things like that.

At first Carrie was skipping around him excitedly. But later, when we were all sitting downstairs having sandwiches, she just sat on Mum's lap, not talking to anyone. Aaron and I didn't say much either.



It was just Mum and Roy who were babbling away. Roy was wearing his usual leather jacket and jeans. He rides a Harley Davidson motorbike and has taken me out on it a few times. I guess he's pretty good to me, although he's never bought me a mountain bike. He said to me, 'I'm sorry you had to postpone your Halloween party.'

'It doesn't matter,' I said, quietly.

'Yes, it does,' said Roy, firmly. 'We're still going to have it, you know.'

'A Halloween party has to be on Halloween,' I muttered.

'OK, well, we'll just call it something else, like . . .'

I looked up. 'A spooky party.'



'Brilliant,' he said. 'And we'll make this party even scarier than Halloween. We can get some plastic skeletons from the joke shop and some masks and . . .'

'When?' I interrupted.

Roy turned to Mum. 'I'm back from the States two weeks tonight, so how about holding it then?'

She nodded, smiling. 'Why not?' She turned to Aaron. 'Do you like spooky parties?'

Aaron just shrugged and looked bored.

'Of course he does,' said his dad, heartily. 'Make out some proper invitations, Daniel,' he went on: 'After all, everyone has Halloween parties but spooky parties are much more special.'

'We'll do the invitations tomorrow,' I said. 'Me and Laura,' I added, just in case anyone thought I'd meant me and Aaron.

Next morning I woke up very early. And straightaway I heard it, the noise which had been waking me up all night: Aaron breathing really noisily and deeply through his mouth. It was as if he were trying to suck up all the air in my bedroom, leaving none for me.

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# **INVITATION**

**BE THERE OR BEWARE**



**IT'S SPOOKY PARTY NIGHT**

**ENJOY THE FRIGHT**

**AT: DANIEL'S CRYPT**

**ALSO KNOWN AS**

**22 WOODSIDE ROAD**

**ON:**

**FRIDAY 14TH NOVEMBER**

**TIME: 7 O'CLOCK**

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**WARNING:**

**NOT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED.**

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I crept down the ladder from my bed. At least I still had the top bunk. Then I went over to Rocky's cage. At once he was pressing his nose through the cage, eager to say 'Hello'. I let him lick my fingers while whispering to him. Then I turned around and saw I was being watched. Aaron was sitting up in bed, staring at me without saying anything.

'All right?' I muttered.

'All right,' he muttered back. And that was all we said until I fled to the bathroom.

Mum thought Aaron and I were going to walk to school together. But as soon as we got out of the front door we set off on opposite sides of the road. Luckily he wasn't in the same class as me. At lunchtime I saw him on the back field with some guys from his class, but he totally ignored me.

At home we pretty much ignored each other too. Mum remarked about how quiet he was. 'You'd hardly know he was here,' she said. Yet, he was here: watching television and continually flicking the channels to teletext; leaving his clothes and his shoes and hair gel all over my room; cluttering up the house with his mountain bike; and, worst of all, he had a way of looking at me which I came to hate: somehow he could put me down without saying a word.

Then, the day before my spooky party, Aaron did something which really infuriated me. I'd had to leave

school early to go to the dentist. So it was after five o'clock when I finally called round at Laura's. To my surprise Harry was there too, and for once he wasn't smiling. Both he and Laura looked very serious.



'What's the matter with you two?' I asked.

'Nothing, only . . .' began Harry. Then he looked at Laura. 'Come on, we've got to tell him.'

'Tell me what?' I cried.

'After school today,' started Laura, 'we went to McDonald's and Aaron was there with some boys from his class . . .'

'He was showing off so much I wanted to punch him,' interrupted Harry.

'What was he saying?' I asked.

'Oh, just going on and on about all the things he'd done. I didn't really listen,' said Harry, dismissively. 'But then he came over to Laura and me and said he'd buy us both Big Macs if we liked.'

I stared at him disbelievingly. 'He did what?'

'And he was all smiles,' said Laura. 'Kept going on about how he had the money so it was no trouble.'

I clenched my hands into fists. At once I knew what Aaron's game was: he was trying to steal my friends away from me. 'So what did you do?' I asked, my voice starting to shake.

'We said no, of course,' said Harry. 'We didn't want anything from him. He's just a show-off.'

'You can't buy friends,' added Laura, softly.

I shot her a grateful look, but then I started thinking about Aaron again. 'I really hate people like him,' I whispered, fiercely, 'who are just so full of themselves, they try and take over everything.'

'He deserves a lesson,' said Harry.

I looked at Laura and Harry, then said, slowly, 'At the spooky party tomorrow, we've got to scare him . . .'

'Yeah,' cried Harry at once.

'And we won't just scare him a bit,' I continued. 'Let's give him the biggest shock of his life.'

