

PETER

'Peter thinks he can see ghosts!' declared the school bully Barry in front of the whole assembly.

A ripple of laughter flowed out from its epicentre, breaking on the shores of the form teachers that demarcated the ends of rows of students.

'Silence!' bellowed Mr Marks, the head teacher. 'Mr Watkins, the boy there in the middle of your row. He's the culprit. Lewis, yes Barry Lewis, I might have guessed the outburst came from you. See me after assembly in my office! And you too, Peter Maddison, you can join him. As for everyone else, I am keeping an eye on you all. There is still plenty of space in my detention room after school.'

The bell sounded for first lessons, but Peter was still in the head teacher's office.

'So, what's all this nonsense, Peter? Haven't we had this conversation before?'

'It's not nonsense, Sir. I can see ghosts. I can also see energy surrounding them like a protective halo. I have sat in church and seen things.'

'You have a very vivid imagination, but why waste your time on such things. Mr Overton suggests you will be Oxbridge material with your history. What church did you say you attend?'

'I didn't say, Sir.'

'You're being obstinate, Peter. What church do you attend?'

'The Good Shepherd, here in Tanley, Sir.'

Mr Marks rubbed his chin and then proceeded to sit. The chair creaked as he fell back lounging. Peter gazed out of the window and chanced on a ghostly face looking straight back at him. The face he'd seen before resembled a smiling African man. The African man raised his right index figure up to his mouth gesturing to Peter to remain quiet.

'Now listen young Peter,' said Marks. Do not trouble yourself with all this witchcraft hullabaloo. The torment from your peers will continue if you do and I won't be able to protect you. All I can do is give Barry Lewis detention and 100 lines.'

'I rather you didn't, Sir.'

'He's a wrong-un that Barry Lewis. I knew his father. A right villain.'

'Barry's alright. It's not his fault.'

'Go to class. And let's hear no more of this.'

Peter walked into his history class. Mr Overton, who was lecturing on the virtues of Elizabeth I, paid no attention to Peter's late arrival. The only chair available was to the left of Barry Lewis. As Peter sat, Barry snarled.

'I've got detention cos of you ghost man,' whispered Barry.

'No, you haven't. I told old Marks that it wasn't your fault.'

'Why the hell did you do that?'

‘Meet me in the playground at lunchtime. Can’t explain here.’

Following lunch taken in the school canteen, Peter made his way out into the playground. Barry broke off from his gang of thugs and meandered over.

‘This better be good, weirdo.’

‘First of all, you’re not in detention. I made sure of that. Thing is, I can see ghosts and it’s not for you to say otherwise. Now you listen to me, how many times have you gone looking for something and not being able to find?’

‘Yeah, I am always losing my phone.’

‘And?’

‘Well, when I do my homework, which is not very often, I seem to lose the page I’m reading when I turn away or leave the room, but then I come back later the book is open again at precisely the right page. Never been able to understand that.’

‘It’s spirit working its mischief.’

‘What you going on about? What spirit?’

‘And your phone?’

‘I get my mum to call it. Nothing. And then I find it in my school bag or under my bed. Stupid really. Anyway, what’s this got to do with you seeing ghosts?’

‘It’s spirit I tell you. You clearly have a gatekeeper who’s a bit mischievous. You know, a bit of a laugh. That’s good.’

‘How can it be good and what’s this about a gatekeeper? The only gatekeeper I know appears in my computer game.’

‘Everyone has a gatekeeper. Someone who watches over us. Makes sure you’re ok and if not, suggests you make changes or decide things for the better.’

‘I’m lost,’ said Barry with a dismissive tone. ‘You’re going nuts!’

‘Look, I know we haven’t got on and you’ve been bullying me for yonks; but even you can make a change. That’s if you want to. Take a new path. What’s there to lose?’

‘I’m not sure I like the sound of any of this. Seems spooky to me.’

Barry looked behind him. Steve and Gary were waiting for his signal to join him and beat up Peter. Barry shook his head, and the two assailants begrudgingly moped off to their next victim. Barry turned back to face Peter.

‘Well, Barry?’

Barry shrugged his shoulders. ‘Alright.’