

'Blast!' said Charles. 'We'll never find them in the dark. We'll have to walk.'

They trudged along the track. The forest was very creepy. There were all sorts of strange noises . . . and one noise in particular seemed to be following them. First it was a rustling. Then it sounded like soft footsteps. And then they heard someone—or something—breathing.

'Wh-what is it?' stammered Alfred. He remembered the innkeeper's warning. 'You don't think it could be a v . . . v . . . ; He didn't dare say the word 'vampire'.' 'I d-d-don't know,' Charles stuttered. 'But I'm scared . . .'

From behind them came a soft, horrible laugh.

'Run!' screamed Alfred.

They pelted through the forest as fast as they could go. The unknown thing chased them. And it was catching up.

Suddenly they burst into a clearing—and to their relief there was a cottage, with lamplight in the windows.

'Help, help!' they shouted, hammering on the door. The door opened and four astonished faces—a man, a woman, and two children—looked out.

'Save us!' Alfred begged. 'We're being chased by a vampire!'

'Come in, quickly!' said the man. He slammed the door behind them and bolted it.

'Thank you!' gasped Charles. 'You've saved our lives!' The man smiled. His wife smiled. The children smiled. They all had long, pointed fangs.

'You're very welcome,' said the man. 'In fact, you're just in time for dinner . . .'

## Don't Go There



Alfred and his friend Charles were travelling on horseback through Transylvania. At a wayside inn, they asked the quickest way to the next town.

'The quick way is through the forest,' said the landlord. 'But the *safe* way is by the turnpike road. It'll take you an extra half a day.'

'What a waste of time!' said Alfred. 'We'll go the quick way.'

'No, sirs!' the landlord protested. 'It's too dangerous! The forest is haunted by . . . ' He leaned forward and whispered, 'Vampires!'

'Superstitious nonsense!' snorted Alfred. 'There are no such things. No; it's the forest way for us, eh, Charles?' The landlord pleaded with them to change their minds, but they only laughed and set off on their horses for the forest.

Soon, dusk fell. It got darker and darker, until they could hardly see a thing. Suddenly there was a rustle in the undergrowth. Frightened, the horses reared, throwing Alfred and Charles from the saddles. As the two men sprawled on the ground, the horses galloped away.

'Well?' said the fairy to Joe. 'And what do you wish for?'

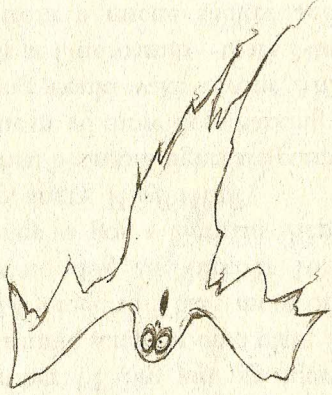
Jack and John sniggered. 'He's stupid,' they said. 'He'll wish for something really useless.'

Joe scowled at them both and said crossly, 'Oh, drop dead!'

*BLING!*

Joe grinned at the fairy. The fairy grinned back. Then Joe gathered up the three million pounds and went

home.



## *I Wish . . . (1)*

Jack and John were very unkind to their little brother, Joe. They teased him and called him stupid, and they were always kicking and pinching him. Joe had to put up with it. Jack and John were much bigger than he was.

One day when they were all in the woods, Joe found a strange golden-coloured stone. He really liked it. So Jack and John took it away from him.

Joe started to cry. 'Give it back!' he sobbed. 'It's a magic stone, and it's mine!'

'Magic!' said Jack scornfully. 'There's no such thing!' He rubbed the stone to clean it up a bit . . .

*BLING!* A fairy appeared.

'Hello,' she said. 'I am your Fairy Godmother, and I'm going to grant you three wishes. One each. She looked at Jack. 'You first.'

Jack goggled, then thought fast. 'I wish for a million pounds!' he said.

*BLING!* A huge pile of money appeared at his feet. 'Your turn,' said the fairy to John.

John was determined to do better than Jack. 'I wish for two million pounds!' he said.

*BLING!* An even bigger pile of money appeared.



## All the Fun of the Fear

Kevin and his best mate, Rich, were at the funfair. They went on some of the rides, then won some Hallowe'en fright masks at the raffle range.

'I've got a brilliant idea,' said Kevin. 'Let's go on the Ghost Train. We'll sit behind a couple of girls, then just before the ride finishes we'll put on the masks. The train comes out, they turn round, and—WAAAAH! It'll be a real laugh!'

Rich thought it was a great idea too. They paid their money and, as they had hoped, found empty seats with two girls right in front of them.

The ghost train started off, and rattled through the doors into a dark tunnel. A loud wailing noise started up; lights flashed, skeletons and bats jiggled, horrible laughter echoed around. The boys didn't think it was very good—you could see the strings half the time—but the two girls screamed their heads off every few seconds. They were perfect scaredy-cat victims. This was going to be brilliant!

'Must be nearly the end now,' whispered Rich as a tacky werewolf popped up and gnashed its cardboard teeth at them. 'Let's put the masks on!'

They pulled the masks over their faces. Rich's was a skull, and Kevin's was a horrible green warty witch. BAM went the doors, and the train shot out into the open air again and came to a halt.

The girls were gasping and clutching each other. Kevin leaned forward and said, 'Hi!'

The girls turned round, and let out shrill screams of terror. Kevin creased up. 'Fooled you!' he cackled, and pulled his mask off. But the girls kept on screaming. They were both looking in horror at Rich.

'OK, joke's over,' said Kevin. 'Take it off, Rich.'

He looked at Rich. Rich looked at him. Only ... Rich didn't have a skull mask any more. He had the hideous face of a ghoul.

'I'm not Rich,' said a voice that sounded like mud and gravel. 'He's in *there*.' It pointed back towards the tunnel, then grinned horribly, showing black, broken teeth. 'And he's never, *ever* going to come out!'



fortunes. Anyone she was less keen on got a nasty one. The Head had already had three complaints. Then a new customer came in. An old woman, wearing a tatty black coat and a crumpled hat with a veil that hid her face. Mrs Steel was outraged. Scruffy people shouldn't be allowed at school fêtes, she decided. She'd give the old bat a really *horrible* fortune, to teach her a lesson.

She made more witchy signs over her crystal ball. 'Oh, dear,' she said with relish, 'I don't like the look of this. I'm afraid there's bad luck in store. *Very* bad luck!' The old woman interrupted, 'That's interesting, dear. Because I predict bad luck, too. But not for me. *I'm* going to tell *your* fortune. And this is it:'

She pushed back her veil. Instead of a face, the grinning skull of Death stared out at Mrs Steel. A couple of minutes later, a scruffy old woman shuffled out of the tent. The next customer went in—and her scream stopped the village band. An ambulance was there in minutes. But it was much too late.



## Tell Your Fortune . . . ?

**E**veryone groaned when they heard that Mrs Steel was going to tell fortunes at the school fête.

Mrs Steel was always trouble. She predicted nice things if she liked someone, and horrible things if she didn't. The Head had complaints about her every year.

But Mrs Steel was one of the school governors. And if she didn't get her own way, everyone knew about it. At the fête Joe and his sister, Laura, watched the scruffy tent where Mrs Steel was doing her stuff. Someone came out. He looked *very* annoyed.

'Mr Crowhurst,' whispered Laura, 'She doesn't like him.'

'But look,' said Joe, 'there's Lady Muxworthy going in. Mrs S is always trying to impress her. She'll probably tell her she's going to win the Lotto jackpot!' In the tent, Mrs Steel simpered at Lady Muxworthy and made witchy signs over her crystal ball.

'So kind of you to patronize our fête, your ladyship,' she snarmed. 'Now . . . Ah! I see good fortune in store! Do you, by any chance, ever buy a Lotto ticket . . . ?' Lady Muxworthy left looking pleased, and Mrs Steel continued. Her favourite people got wonderful

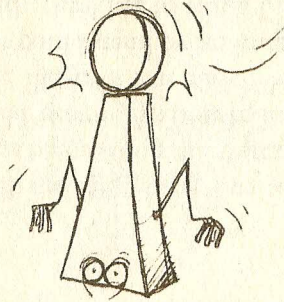
You won't need it at all. Ever again . . . I'm sorry; didn't anyone explain to you? Don't you remember . . . ?

'Ah. You *do* remember. Yes, it was a terrible shame about the coach crash, wasn't it? Please don't look so worried. It's very nice here, I assure you. You *will* enjoy yourselves.

'Welcome to the afterlife, Mr and Mrs Aynsworth;



## Holiday Hotel



'Good afternoon, can I help you?  
Oh, yes; Mr and Mrs . . . ? Aynsworth,  
of course. Let me see . . . yes, we have your  
reservation. You're with the coach tour party, aren't you?  
I thought so. Quite a lot of you all booking in at the  
same time, ha-ha! If you could sign here, please . . .

That's it. You're in Room 803, on the seventeenth floor.  
If you'd just like to wait a moment, one of the porters  
will show you where the lifts are.

'Yes, the weather is lovely, isn't it? Mind you, it  
always is here. Sunshine every day! Bit of a change from  
England, I expect . . . No, I've never been to England.  
Would I like to, did you say? Well . . . it would be nice  
to see it. But I won't get the chance now, of course.

'I speak very good English? Oh, thank you—it goes  
with the job, you know. A receptionist has to be very  
skilled at languages. All languages. I mean, we get people  
from all over the world here . . . How long have I  
worked here? Oh—ages. In fact it's been so long that  
I can't remember any more.

'Your luggage? Well, no, it hasn't arrived. No, no; it  
isn't lost, it's just—Mr Aynsworth, please don't shout! If  
I can just finish? You see, you won't need luggage here.

'Oh, I don't know . . . ?' Lisa crouched down and stared hard at the frog. 'OK, let's just say you're telling the truth—'

'I am, I am!' the frog pleaded.

'All *right*. Listen. *If* you're telling the truth, and we kiss you, and you turn back into a human, what's in it for us?'

The frog blinked. 'Well . . . I'm not rich. But I'd give you a hundred pounds. It's all the money I've got.'

'A hundred pounds . . . ?' Lisa repeated thoughtfully. 'Hmm . . . ?' Jane could see her doing some mental arithmetic. And Jane was getting interested now. Just say the frog *was* on the level? They could buy a lot of things with a hundred pounds!

'Right,' said Lisa. She picked the frog up and put it in her coat pocket. The frog started to protest, but the pocket muffled its cries. Lisa started to walk on.

'Hey!' said Jane. 'Aren't we going to kiss him?'

'No way,' said Lisa coolly.

'But a hundred pounds is a lot of money!'

'Sure,' said Lisa. 'But think how much more we can earn with a talking frog!'

## Just One Kiss



Jane and Lisa were on their way home from school. They lived in the country, and the school bus had just dropped them in the lane that led to their homes. There was a hedge beside the lane, and as they passed a particular bush, they both clearly heard a small voice cry, 'Help!'

They stopped. 'Where did that come from?' asked

Jane.

'Down here!' cried the voice. 'At the bottom of the

hedge!'

They looked down. Crouching in the undergrowth

was a small, green frog.

'Yes, it *was* me,' said the frog. 'I can talk.'

Lisa shook her head to clear it, and Jane pinched herself to see if she was dreaming. But the frog was still

there.

'Please,' it said, 'will you help me? I'm human,

but I was turned into a frog by an evil sorceress! It

hopped forward and gazed up at them with huge,

googly eyes. 'I know it sounds corny, but there's only

one way to break the spell, and that's if a girl kisses

me.'

'I don't believe this!' said Jane. 'I've gone nuts!'



## The Appointment

The blacksmith and his wife sat at their daughter's bedside, their faces bleak and their hearts heavy. Their beloved little girl was dangerously ill. The physician could do no more for her, and it seemed unlikely that she would live through another night.

Downstairs, the grandfather clock began to chime midnight. The chimes sounded like a funeral bell, and the blacksmith's wife began to cry softly.

Then came the sound of loud knocking at the front door.

The blacksmith hurried downstairs. Outside in the darkness stood a stranger, muffled in a heavy cloak and hood, and leading a tall, handsome black horse.

'I need your services,' said the stranger. 'My horse has cast a shoe, and I have an appointment I must keep tonight.'

The blacksmith didn't want to shoe the horse. He only wanted to stay close to his child. But the night was cold and wet; a cruel night for walking, as the man would otherwise have to do. And perhaps his appointment was vitally important to him?

'Of course,' he said sadly. 'Bring your horse into the forge. And while I shoe him, you can sit by the fire and get warm.'

The sound of the blacksmith's hammer rang in the night, and soon the shoeing was complete.

'Thank you,' said the stranger. 'You are very kind. Now I will pay you.'

The hood of his cloak fell back, and where his face should have been was a bare, bony skull.

'I am Death,' said the stranger, 'and my appointment was with your daughter. But because you put my needs before your own, I will not keep the appointment. Goodnight, my friend.'

He mounted his horse and rode away. The horse's hooves made no sound whatever. The blacksmith stood gaping after him, hardly able to believe what he had seen and heard. Then suddenly his wife came running from the house, her face like a star.

'Husband!' she cried joyously. 'Our little girl just opened her eyes and smiled at me! Come quickly, and see—she is going to get better!'

Thermos flask. 'I've got some hot coffee. Plenty for both of us.'  
Peter *was* cold, and he opened his mouth to say, 'Yes, please! But then he hesitated. He didn't know why, but for some reason he felt uneasy. Was the man's face a bit too pleasant? Was his smile a bit too friendly?'  
'That's kind of you,' he said, 'but I'm fine. I think I'll just go back to sleep.'

The man shrugged. 'Please yourself,' he said.  
When Peter woke again, the sun was shining and the fog had gone. The stranger had gone, too. And there was no sign of the ashes of a camp fire.  
Which wasn't surprising. Because in the spot where the man and the fire had been was a sheer drop, hundreds of metres down on to jagged rocks.



## The Kind Stranger

Peter was on a hiking holiday in the mountains. One morning, he walked further than he had ever done before. As he sat eating his lunchtime sandwiches, fog began to close in, and within minutes it was so dense that he couldn't see where he was going. Sensibly, Peter decided to stay where he was until the fog cleared. If he went blundering on, it would be all too easy to fall over a precipice!

There was a small cave behind him, so he made himself comfortable inside and settled down to wait. Soon, he fell asleep. When he woke again, night had fallen, and the fog was still as thick as ever. But a light was flickering outside the cave. Peter peered out, and saw another man in hiking clothes sitting by a camp fire a couple of metres away.  
'Hello,' said the man, smiling pleasantly. 'Are you lost?'

'No,' said Peter. 'I was waiting for the fog to clear, and I fell asleep.'  
'Ah, very sensible of you to wait,' said the man. 'Mind you, this won't clear until morning. I know this area, and I know what the fogs are like. You must be cold. Why not come and sit by my fire?' He held up a

But two days ago he brought in another bone. And this one was *human*.

There was no mistaking it. It was an arm bone, and it definitely belonged to a human being. That *really* gave me the horrors, and I told Scruff off. 'Bad boy!' I said. 'Don't you bring anything like that into the house again!'

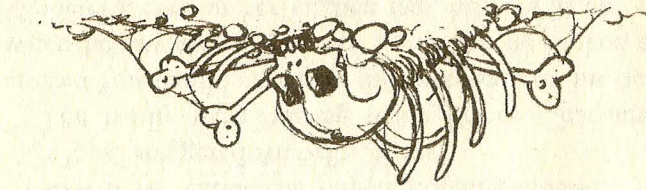
But dogs don't understand, do they? Yesterday, there was a human shoulder blade on the kitchen floor. And today . . .

Well, I don't want to think about the skull. And now my bags are packed, and Scruff and I are going away.

Well, we've got to, haven't we? I mean, what if anyone saw what he's been digging up? They'd ask questions. And though it's been years and years since I buried that man in the garden, it wouldn't make any difference to the police.

Here, Scruff! Come and have your lead put on. Good boy! There we go. All set. Right, Scruff. Walkies!

Very long walkies . . .



## Bones

Scruff's a great dog. But I wish he wouldn't keep digging up the garden.

It started with plants. I didn't really mind. I'm not keen on gardening, and poor old Scruff had been in the animal rescue place for so long before I got him. I reckoned he deserved a bit of freedom and fun. So when he came in with a whole bush in his mouth, roots and all, and his tail wagging like a propeller, I just laughed and called him a daft old thing.

There were more bushes after that. But then he must have started to dig deeper. One morning, in he came and dropped a bone at my feet. It gave me a funny turn for a moment, I can tell you. But when I looked closer, I saw it was a beef bone. Pretty ancient, too. Some other dog must have buried it long before Scruff was born!

Next, it was half a china plate. Weird, that. I mean, who puts broken crockery into a hole in the garden? You stick it in the dustbin, don't you? Scruff found more china, till I began to think someone years ago must have buried a whole dinner set. I decided that Scruff wasn't the only eccentric who'd ever lived here, and let him get on with it.

following along behind them. It really made my skin crawl. And nearly every night we heard the music.

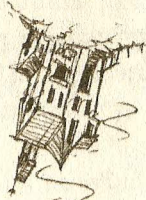
Mum still didn't want to know, but after a few weeks of it the rest of us had had enough. So last night, when the music started again, Dad and my brother went downstairs. My sister and I wanted to go with him, but we weren't allowed to. So we stayed with Mum, waiting. The wait seemed to go on for ever—but at last Dad and my brother came back. Their faces were grim. There was no doubt of it, they said. They'd *seen* what was down there. And now, we're going to have to do something about it.

You see, people haven't lived in this house for years. We made sure of that. We scared off everyone who even *thought* about moving in. But people don't believe in ghouls, or bogeymen, or whatever you want to call us, any more. So for the first time in ages, suddenly there are *humans* here.

We're not going to share our house with humans. No way. So tonight, we're going to *get* them. And then no one else will want to live here again.

*Ever*

## Haunted House



**T**his house is starting to give us all the creeps. For ages there was no sign of trouble at all. But about a month ago, things started to happen.

Mum was the first to see something. It was late at night, on the stairs—a little girl, she said, wearing a long white garment like a nightie. It *really* shook her up. The rest of us—Dad, me, and my brother and sister—didn't believe her to start with. We thought she was imagining things. But a couple of days later, my brother saw the girl, too, going up the stairs just the way Mum had said. And the next night, we all heard these weird noises—like music, but not any music we'd ever come across before. It was coming from downstairs. Dad wanted to investigate, but Mum wouldn't let him. If there was anything horrible down there, she said, then she didn't want to know!

Trouble was, though, we couldn't ignore it, because from then on it got worse and worse. *Every* night something happened. Other figures started to appear, not just on the stairs but in the kitchen, the sitting room, even the bedrooms. I saw three of them for myself. A man and a woman, with that same little girl

Quickly she looked again, thinking she must have made a mistake. She hadn't. There were *four* faces. Lizzie slowed down and risked looking over her shoulder.

Robin, Polly, Tim. Nobody else.

*I must be tired, she thought. I'd better concentrate extra*

*hard.*

She drove on. They were almost home now, and as they passed the local church Lizzie glanced in the mirror

again.

There were four children in the back.

She braked so hard, she nearly swerved off the road.

Polly yelled, and Robin shouted, 'Watch out, Mumm!'

The car had stopped. Lizzie sat very still, staring

ahead.

'What's up?' Robin asked. 'Have we broken down?'

Lizzie didn't answer. *What had she seen?* She was

too scared to look a third time, but she remembered.

A fair-haired girl, wearing a ghost costume.

If it was a costume . . .

Then, close to her ear, a small voice whispered,

*'Thanks ever so much for the lift.'*

Lizzie jumped, and Robin protested, 'Mumm, what's

going on? You're spooking us!'

Taking a deep breath, Lizzie looked in the driving

mirror.

Three puzzled faces stared back. But behind them,

beyond the car's rear window, a vague shape was

hurrying through the church gate. Into the graveyard.

As Lizzie looked, it raised a hand and waved.

With shaking hands, Lizzie put the car in gear and

drove away.



## Come To My Party

*(This is for the REAL Lizzie and Robin!)*

Robin's friend was giving a Halloween party. Robin's mumm, Lizzie, drove her there, and arranged to pick her up afterwards.

The party was like a spooks' convention. Robin went as a witch, and there were ghosts, aliens, vampires, monsters and just about everything else you could think of.

They ate, played games and danced, then told stories by the light of pumpkin lanterns. Most of the stories were about ghosts, of course; everyone knew Halloween was the night when ghosts were free to wander wherever they liked.

When it was time to go home, Lizzie arrived to find Robin waiting with a werewolf and a vampire in tow. 'Hi, Mumm. Can we take Tim and Polly home, too?'

'Of course,' said Lizzie.

The three children scrambled into the back of the car. 'Hanksh, Mifsh Awwan!' said Polly through her vampire teeth. Lizzie laughed, and they set off.

The children were excited and noisy, and as she drove Lizzie glanced at them in the driver's mirror. Four happy faces grinned back at her.

*Four . . . ?*

LOUISE COOPER

# SHORT

and SPOOKY!



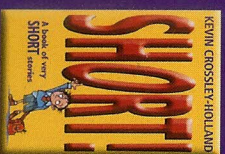
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