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LEGENDS OF FUNLAND

MELANIE FLORENCE

Legends of Funland

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In this high-interest accessible novel for middle readers, Buddy tries to impress his big brother by spending the night in a haunted theme park.

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KEY SELLING POINTS

- In *Legends of Funland*, three friends plan to spend the night in a theme park rumored to be haunted.
- This book features themes of sibling dynamics and facing your fears.
- The main character learns there really is a ghost, but it turns out it is just a young boy like himself.
- This award-winning author has written two previous hi-lo books, *He Who Dreams* and *Dreaming in Color*.
- Enhanced features (dyslexia-friendly font, cream paper, larger trim size) to increase reading accessibility for dyslexic and other striving readers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo credit: Denise Grant

MELANIE FLORENCE is a writer of Cree and Scottish heritage based in Toronto. She is the author of *Missing Nimâmâ*, which won the 2016 TD Canadian Children's Literature Award; *Stolen Words*, which won the 2018 Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award; and the bestselling *He Who Dreams* and *Dreaming in Color* in the Orca Soundings line.

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JUV039140 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Self-Esteem & Self-Reliance

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For the Despicable Three

During the day Funland was absolutely full of life. Music, piped in through old speakers, tinkled in the background. The screams of kids, waiting breathlessly at the top of the Danger Drop before plunging down the steep hill, pierced the air. And the delicious smell of popcorn, cotton candy and french fries wafted across the park.

The park buzzed when it was full of people. When the rides and the midway games were all lit up and crowded with excited kids dragging their parents around by the hand.

During the day, Funland was alive, and deep in the darkest part of the park, the ghost slept.

But at night, when everyone went home and all the lights and music faded, he woke up.

At night he moved around the park.

At night he was free.

Chapter One

“Buddy? Can you come down and set the table, please?”

Buddy.

He was really starting to hate being called Buddy.

His real name was Benjamin. Ben. A name that described someone who had lots of friends. Who

was good at sports. Who was brave and exciting and not afraid of anything.

But Buddy? Buddy was...forgettable.

Buddy was clumsy and afraid of the dark.

When it came down to it, Buddy was pretty sure he wasn't very interesting at all.

But his brother had started calling him Buddy when he was a baby. It stuck. No one called him anything else.

"Buddy!"

"Yeah! I'm coming." Buddy stumbled down the hall toward the kitchen and nearly crashed into his brother.

"Careful there, Buddy." His brother had just come out of his room, rubbing his eyes and pushing his hair out of his face. Buddy grinned. The nickname didn't sound as bad coming from his Ryan. It sounded more like he was calling him "pal."

“Sorry,” Buddy mumbled happily. He always happy to see his brother. Ryan was five years older and five times cooler than he’d ever be. Buddy glanced into his brother’s room, which was crammed with a drum kit and several guitars. There was a motorcycle jacket thrown on the floor, and a pair of boots that were about twice the size of Buddy’s own sneakers. Everything about his brother was cool. As far as Buddy was concerned, Ryan was a rock star.

And he wanted to be just like him.

Ryan grabbed him and pulled him in for a hug.

“Want to throw the ball after breakfast?” he asked.

“Yeah! Definitely.”

He knew he was lucky to have such a great brother. His friend Jimmy had an older brother who rarely said a word to him unless it was “Get out of the way” or “Stop bothering me.” And his

friend Stephanie's older sister was no better. Jimmy and Steph thought Ryan was cool too.

Buddy grabbed plates for himself, Ryan and his mom and set the table. On weekends when his mom was home, she liked to make big breakfasts of bacon and eggs. Or pancakes. Today it was waffles with fruit salad you could scoop onto the waffle. Buddy didn't. He liked his waffles drowning in syrup.

"What do you have planned today?" his mom asked, sitting down and sipping her tea.

"We're going to play some catch," Buddy said. "Right, Ry?"

"Yep. Right after I've loaded up on waffles."

"I love how close you two are," his mom said, smiling.

"Yeah, yeah. We secretly can't stand each other, Mom. We just keep it well hidden. Right?" Ryan winked at Buddy.

Buddy laughed. "Definitely. I can't stand him." He stood up to clear his plate and ducked as Ryan fake-punched him playfully on the arm. "You stay there and finish your tea," he told his mom. "We'll clean up."

"How did I get so lucky? I have the best boys in the world."

Buddy smiled too. Because he thought he had the best family too. It had just been him, Ryan and his mom for as long as he could remember, and Ryan was more of a dad to him than his own father had been. Buddy put on his baseball cap—the one Ryan had worn when he'd pitched a no-hitter the previous season—and picked up his glove from the kitchen counter.

"Are you ready?" he asked Ryan.

"Ready as I'll ever be, Buddy." His brother put an arm around him and pulled him outside.

Chapter Two

The ball flew through the air and landed in Buddy's glove with a satisfying *WHAP*. He pulled it out and threw it back to his brother. He loved it when they played catch. He might not be good at sports, but catch was easy.

"Good throw!" Ryan called out from the other end of the yard. "Hey, did you hear about Tommy Bracco?"

“No.” Buddy caught the ball again and sent it back. “Is that the kid who got in trouble for setting off fireworks in school?”

“No.” Ryan laughed and caught the ball easily. “And that didn’t really happen. That’s one thing you learn in high school. Half the things kids say they did, they didn’t really do.”

“Then why do they say it?” Buddy asked. Kids bragged about stuff all the time in middle school, but no one had ever claimed something as big as fireworks at school.

“Because they want people to think they’re cool.” His brother made a spectacular catch behind his back and sent the ball flying back to Buddy.

“They all think *you’re* cool,” Buddy said. He jumped for the ball but missed. He landed heavily in the grass. “And you don’t make up stuff like that.”

His brother came over and sat beside him. He picked up a blade of grass and held it between his

fingers. He blew on it, making a loud whistling sound.

Buddy picked up a piece of grass and blew on it too. But it didn't make a sound. His fingers just ended up all covered in spit. He wiped his hands on his pants.

"No. But some kids like making stuff up. It makes them feel more important."

"So what happened with Tommy Bracco?" Buddy asked.

"He told a bunch of kids that he snuck into Funland and spent the night there."

"Are you serious?" Buddy was paying attention now. Funland was the local theme park, and it was one of his favorite places to hang out with his friends. It had really awesome rides and games you could play to win things like stuffed animals or basketballs. Ryan had won a giant stuffed cob of corn one year—it was still sitting in the corner of Buddy's room. Buddy liked the bumper cars best. He

had lined up to go on the roller coaster the previous year but couldn't make himself get on it. It was huge! He'd never been able to talk himself into going inside the haunted house either. The music and screams coming from it made the hair on the back of his neck stand up. Jimmy and Steph told him the screams were recorded, and he didn't have to be scared. But there were people inside who'd been hired to scare everyone who came through. Buddy knew that on top of the recorded screams were the actual ones of terrified kids being scarred for life.

"He said he walked around looking for the ghost and went through the haunted house and ate caramel popcorn all night."

"But don't they have security guards? Why didn't he get caught?"

"That's what I asked. And he didn't have an answer."

"What does that mean?" Buddy was practically leaning into Ryan's lap, waiting for the details.

"It means he was lying."

"He didn't sneak in?" Buddy's eyes were huge.

"Nah. You'd have to be pretty smart to get around the security guards and cameras and everything. And if you got proof of the ghost, you'd be a legend. And Tommy Bracco is definitely not a legend. I am pretty sure he made it all up."

Buddy nodded.

Ryan looked at his phone. "You okay if I go hang with the gang for a bit? They're on their way over."

Ryan meant his bandmates. They were okay, but they mostly ignored Buddy.

"Yeah, sure. Can I come watch you practice later?"

"Sure." Ryan was up and inside the house before Buddy could haul himself to his feet. Maybe Jimmy and Steph wanted to come over and read comics or something. He was dying to tell them about

Tommy Bracco. There was no danger of anyone ever calling Buddy a legend. But at least he'd never make a story up to fool people.

Chapter Three

Steph and Jimmy were impressed with Buddy's story about Tommy Bracco. He felt pretty important passing on such great information to his friends.

"I can't believe he lied!" Jimmy was outraged.

"I can," Steph said. "Tommy Bracco is a jerk. He's always doing stuff just to get attention."

Buddy nodded. Ryan had basically said the same thing.

"Do you think he even tried to sneak in?" Jimmy asked, taking a long drink out of his can of soda and then burping dramatically.

"Gross," Steph told him. "And no."

"There's no way he'd be able to get around the security guards even if he *did* make it inside," Buddy said.

"He wouldn't think of bringing something to distract the guard dogs either," Jimmy told them.

"What makes you think they have guard dogs?" Steph asked.

"Of course they have guard dogs! Don't you watch any crime shows? Which is why I'd bring a steak or something."

"Remind me never to look through your backpack," Steph said.

A sudden crash of drums and cymbals signaled the beginning of Ryan's band rehearsal upstairs.

"Do you want to watch them?" Buddy tilted his head upward.

“Sure.” Jimmy was already on his feet. He was learning guitar and liked to ask Ryan for tips. So he was always keen on checking out their rehearsals.

Buddy led the way upstairs to Ryan’s room, where the band was warming up. There was no sign of Ryan.

“Where’s my brother?” he asked Paul, the drummer.

Paul pointed a drumstick down the hall toward Buddy’s room. “Girlfriend drama,” he said, rolling his eyes.

Buddy glanced in the direction of his room. His brother’s girlfriend, Mia, often came to rehearsals.

“I wouldn’t, bro,” Lara, the keyboard player, told him. “She’s pretty mad.”

“About what?” Steph asked.

Lara shrugged. “She thinks he was flirting with someone at our last gig.”

“Was he?”

“No. But when has that ever mattered?”

Buddy was edging down the hall toward his room. The closer he got, the louder Mia’s voice got.

“I saw you, Ryan! You were all over that girl.”

“I don’t even know who you’re talking about, Mia.” Ryan sounded so upset that it made Buddy’s heart squeeze in his chest. “You’re literally the only person I talked to.”

“I saw you. Maybe we should just end things right now.”

Buddy rolled his eyes. He wished Ryan *would* break up with her. Lately he seemed to spend more time arguing with her than having fun.

“No! I don’t want to break up. But the band is waiting. Can we talk later?”

Sheesh. Buddy had heard enough. He turned to go but caught his foot and stumbled against the bedroom door with a thud.

Crap.

The door flew open, and Buddy landed on his bedroom floor. He looked up into Mia's furious face.

"Oh my GOD! Can't we get any privacy!"

"You're in my room," Buddy squeaked.

"Ryan, do something!" she shrieked.

Buddy looked over at his brother, expecting him to back him up. But Ryan looked absolutely furious.

"Buddy, why do you always have to be in the way? And when are you going to stop being so annoying? Just get out of here!" he yelled.

Buddy, heart pounding in his chest, scrambled to his feet and ran out of his room.

Chapter Four

Buddy heard his bedroom door slam shut behind him. He kept going.

“What are they arguing about?” Jimmy asked, not looking up from his phone.

“Buddy?” Steph *did* look at him. “Hey, are you okay?”

Buddy couldn't speak. He just shook his head.

“Jimmy! Come on.” Steph took Buddy’s arm and led him down the hall and outside. The three of them sat down on the back stairs.

“What happened?” Jimmy asked. “Dude. Say something!”

Buddy shook his head. He couldn’t say what he was thinking out loud. His friends were looking at him, waiting for him to tell them what had happened. Instead he took a deep breath.

“How hard do you think it would be to sneak into Funland at night?” he asked.

“What? Why?” Steph was frowning. “What happened?”

“Nothing. I don’t want to talk about it. So? How hard?”

“I mean...I guess it would be pretty easy to get in,” Jimmy said, looking thoughtful. “You’d just have to get a ticket like everyone else.”

“What do you mean?” Buddy asked.

"Well, you don't have to actually sneak in, right? You can just go in during the day and then find somewhere to hide out when it closes."

Buddy looked at him. "You're a genius."

"I know," Jimmy said, grinning.

"And what about once we're inside?" Buddy asked.

"Wait. Are you really thinking of doing this?" Steph asked.

Buddy thought about the way his brother had spoken to him. He nodded. "Yeah. So once we're in, what do we need to do?"

"Okay." Steph said. "Well...the big thing to worry about is the security system."

"So we avoid the guards. Big deal." Jimmy looked ready to leave for the park right that second.

"Slow down," said Steph. "The guards are easy enough to avoid, that's true. We just keep an eye out for them and stay in the shadows. But the park has

an automated security system now. They have cameras. We would need to hack into the system to make sure we weren't spotted."

"Could you do it?" Buddy asked.

Steph shrugged. "Assuming it's more or less the same as the school's security system, yes." Steph had been fixing problems with the school's cameras ever since the principal discovered she had a knack for it. "They'd know it was down pretty quickly though."

"Can you loop a video or something? That's what they do in the movies," Jimmy said.

"Theoretically, yes. But there would be too many cameras for that. Unless..." She looked thoughtful.

"Unless what?" Buddy asked.

"Unless they keep their backups in the system from the night before. If they do that, I should be able to just hack into their system and change the date in the computer, then hit *playback*. Yeah, that could actually work," she said, nodding.

“Okay. What else?”

“Well...” Jimmy shifted uneasily on the steps.

“Well what?” Buddy asked.

“What about the ghost?”

Steph laughed. “There is no ghost, you dope. That’s just an urban legend.”

“Umm, yes there is! Martin Lowe and his brother saw it when they were there right until closing.”

“Right. I’m so sure Martin Lowe saw a ghost.” Steph rolled her eyes.

“He did! He even got a picture!”

“Did you actually *see* the picture?” Steph asked him.

“Yeah. It was blurry, but it totally looked like a guy coming out of the haunted house.”

“Was he wearing a security uniform?” Steph asked sarcastically.

“Forget the ghost,” said Buddy. “I don’t think it’s real, but if everyone else does, that only helps my plan. We’re going to sneak into Funland and

spend the night. And after we do that, everyone will know how brave we are. And no one will ever underestimate us again," he added, glancing up at the house.

"We'll be legends." Steph smiled.

"And finding the ghost will just be a bonus," Jimmy said with a grin.

Chapter Five

Eventually Ryan and Mia came out of Buddy's room. Mia left, slamming the front door, and Ryan joined the band in his room. When the coast was clear, Buddy went into his room to pack a few things. He told his mom he was heading out with Steph and Jimmy and grabbed his bike. He didn't bother saying goodbye to Ryan.

They made a quick stop at Steph's to grab her laptop and then headed to Jimmy's to prepare for their adventure. Buddy had told his mom he was staying overnight at Jimmy's. Jimmy's mom thought he was staying with Steph. Steph's parents thought she was at Buddy's. They all stayed at each other's houses often, so it was unlikely their parents would bother to check that they were all where they said they were. They were free for the night.

"We could head to the park now," said Jimmy. "We could go on some of the rides and get something to eat."

"Are you ever *not* hungry?" Steph asked.

"No. Not really."

"Sure, why not?" Buddy said. "That gives us"—he looked at his phone—"five hours to find somewhere to hide. The park closes at ten."

"You sure you want to do this?" Steph asked.

Buddy pictured his brother and the look on his face when he learned that his “annoying” little brother had spent the night in Funland. He hoped his bravery would impress Ryan.

He nodded. “I’m sure. Jimmy?”

“Wouldn’t miss it.” He grinned. “Steph? Are you having second thoughts?”

“No way. And I’m dying to see how advanced their security system is,” said Steph.

“Okay then. Let’s go,” Buddy said, grabbing his backpack and leading the way.

It was a quick ride. Funland was only fifteen minutes from Jimmy’s house.

“We can’t leave our bikes in the rack,” Jimmy pointed out. “The security guards might see them and wonder where the kids are who left them there.”

Steph looked at him. “Smart!”

“Hey, I have good ideas too,” he said, looking pleased.

They turned around and rode away from the park entrance. Back on the main road, they stopped in front of a donut shop. "This is better," Buddy said, getting off his bike and locking it to a post outside the shop. Jimmy and Steph did the same.

"Okay, are we really doing this?" he asked them. It was their last chance to back out. Jimmy looked more excited than Buddy had ever seen him. "Heck, yeah!" he said.

Steph was checking the power level on her laptop. She stuffed it back into her bag, slung it over her shoulder and said, "Yeah! Let's go become legends!"

They walked back to the front gate of Funland.

They bought their tickets at the main booth and pushed through the turnstile.

Their big adventure had begun.

Chapter Six

The park was crowded with people. That made it easy for Buddy, Steph and Jimmy to blend in.

Steph played around with her phone, looking for the park's Wi-Fi, while Buddy scouted places to hide. Jimmy bit the end off a corndog he had bought and looked up longingly at the giant roller coaster above him. Death Drop was not for

the faint of heart. Riders screamed in terror as they hurtled along the tracks.

"Can we go on a few rides first?" Jimmy begged. "We don't have to hide for hours yet."

Buddy looked up. There was no way he was getting on a roller coaster of any size, let alone the Death Drop. His stomach dropped just thinking about it.

"Why don't you two go ahead, and I'll look around some more," he said.

Steph nodded knowingly. Buddy's fear of rides wasn't really a secret, but they didn't need to discuss it every time they came to the park.

"Yes!" Jimmy said, grabbing Steph by the arm.

"Hold my bag!" Steph said, handing it to Buddy before being yanked toward the line. Buddy wished for the millionth time that he was brave like his friends. He wished he could line up with them and not feel absolute fear and horror at the thought of being taken up, up and up and then

plummeting down. He watched his two friends jostling each other in the lineup. They laughed as their hair was blown upward by the force of the coaster cars rushing past them.

He shrugged and wandered off to look for the perfect spot for them to hide. It had to be somewhere the guards wouldn't think to look and where no one would notice them on their way out. Behind the concessions wouldn't work. The area was too open. They'd be caught as soon as security wandered past. And they couldn't hide near the games booths. The people working them would spot them as they closed down for the night.

Buddy kept walking. He knew Steph and Jimmy would be in line for a while. He could afford a few minutes of poking around. He smiled at a child waving a massive cone of cotton candy. It gave him an idea. The kiddie section closed before the rest of the park because it was so quiet after dinner. All the little kids had to get home for bed,

he guessed. So there wouldn't be many people hanging around that area when the park started emptying out.

He followed the kid with the giant cotton candy. Past the kiddie coaster—even that one made Buddy a bit nervous. Past the games where every player was guaranteed to win a prize. Past a popcorn stand and the ride where kids chose dinosaur cars that rose into the air and went around in a slow circle. He had loved that one as a kid. Truth was, he'd probably still go on it if he could. On the brontosaurus.

He stopped in front of the merry-go-round. Horses of different colors, on a brightly decorated base, moved up and down in time with the music. He remembered it well. He used to beg his mom to let him ride this one all the time because he really wanted a horse of his own. This was as close as he had ever gotten. He'd always chosen the brown horse with a blue saddle. He'd called it

Frederick for some reason. He watched the horses go around for a while before going back to meet Jimmy and Steph.

They were leaning against the fence, waiting for him.

“I know where we can hide,” he said.

Chapter Seven

“There,” Buddy told them, nodding toward the carousel.

“What...like, behind the horses?” Jimmy looked very confused.

“No! Not behind the horses. Do you see what I’m talking about?” he asked Steph. She shook her head, and Buddy grinned. If his friends couldn’t

see the hiding place, then he was willing to bet no one would find them there.

“Well, where then?” Jimmy asked.

“Underneath the horses,” Buddy said, pointing at the base. “There’s a hidden door on the other side. Probably where they store extra parts and stuff. We can crawl in, and there should be enough room to sit and wait until the park closes.”

“But won’t someone see us?”

“This section of the park closes earlier. By eight o’clock there shouldn’t be anyone here. We can walk right in anytime after that. That is, if Steph can disable the cameras.”

“Oh, I can disable them.” She smiled. “I already checked. Their system is pretty basic. Should be pretty simple.”

“How long do you need?” Buddy asked.

“Ten minutes.”

"Can we at least eat before then?" Jimmy asked.

"And I want to try my luck at the basketball hoop game."

"And what are you going to do if you win a basketball?" Steph asked, rolling her eyes.

"Won't it fit in your backpack?"

"I'm not carrying a basketball for you!"

"Hey, you two, chill. Maybe you should skip the basketball one, Jimmy," Buddy said. "But we have lots of time to eat."

"Didn't you already inhale a corn dog?" Steph asked.

"And ride the bumper cars?" asked Jimmy, ignoring Steph.

"Sure."

"What about cotton candy?"

Buddy laughed. "Yeah, why not?"

"And a hot dog?"

"Honestly, you sound like my little brother," said Steph. "And he's five!"

“What? I’m hungry!”

“Don’t worry—we have lots of time,” Buddy said. Just then his phone vibrated. He pulled it out of his pocket and glanced at the screen.

Where are you?

The text was from Ryan. Buddy stuffed the phone back into his pocket without responding. Let him wonder where he was. He hoped Ryan was worried. But then he remembered he had told his mom he was staying at Jimmy’s. Ryan would just ask her where he was. In any case, he really didn’t think he owed his brother a response. Ryan hadn’t apologized for yelling at him or saying he was always in the way. He’d be sorry tomorrow when everyone was talking about how Buddy had spent the night at Funland. He’d be a legend, and his brother would be begging to hang out with him.

“Hey! Earth to Buddy!” Steph waved her hand in front of Buddy’s face. “What do you want to do first?”

"Sorry. Umm...I guess the bumper cars?"

"Yes!" Jimmy punched the air. "You are going down! I'm so good at bumper cars. Seriously. I should go pro."

"Last time, you ran into the wall and couldn't get back into the middle," Steph reminded him. "You literally were wedged against the wall the entire time. You didn't hit a single person."

"Yeah. But the times before that, I was great."

"I think you even cried a little," she said, laughing.

"I did *not* cry!" Jimmy was laughing too.

"I think you did," she teased. "I definitely saw a tear or two."

"No way! Bumper-car pros do not cry."

"I bet I can make you cry this time." She grinned.

"You're going down!" Jimmy repeated. "Sooooo down, Steph!"

Buddy watched as his friends jostled each other and laughed. He wanted to join in. But all

he could think about was the look on his brother's face when he found out they had spent the night at the park.

I'll show him, he thought.

Chapter Eight

The rest of the evening passed in a whirlwind of food, rides and games. Jimmy was not having much luck winning anything.

“I think these games are rigged,” he told them as they walked away from the ring-toss booth.

“You’re just realizing that?” Steph asked. “They are *definitely* rigged. The rings are made to bounce off the pegs. And the basket toss is just as bad.”

"What do you mean?" Jimmy asked.

"They have the baskets tipped just enough to bounce the ball back out every single time," Buddy told him. "Everyone knows that. It's physics."

"No it's not." Steph rolled her eyes. "It's geometry. Jimmy! Seriously? You can't be hungry again!"

Jimmy had stopped in front of the chip truck. "We have to hide soon. I don't want to be hungry."

"Shh!" Buddy pulled him close. "Not so loud. Someone will hear."

"Dude. We're by the Death Drop. *That's* all anyone can hear."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I'm just nervous." Buddy looked at his watch. The park would be closing in less than an hour.

"Okay. We have about a half hour until we have to hide." He whispered the last few words, glancing around to make sure no one overheard them. "Does anyone need to pee?" As soon as he said it, he regretted it. He was not their mom! But

Jimmy and Steph both raised their hands. "Okay. Let's take care of that first and then we can grab one last snack. Once we're back in the kids' section, you can get started on the security system, Steph."

Within minutes they were walking back through the park, stuffing fries into their mouths.

"I really hope I don't get hungry later," Jimmy said between mouthfuls. "I should have got something extra just in case."

"Don't worry. I brought granola bars," Steph told him.

There was a chain blocking the entrance to the kiddie section, but after a quick scan of the area, the three friends climbed over and walked quickly down the path.

"Wait!" Buddy called out, pulling them to the side and off the walkway. "Look." He pointed at a video camera aimed down on the path.

"We should have done this sooner. Give me a minute," Steph said. They walked a little deeper into the trees lining the path so they were hidden. With any luck, they hadn't been picked up on any of the cameras before they'd had a chance to disable them.

Steph sat down and pulled out her laptop. By the time Buddy and Jimmy settled in beside her, she was tapping furiously on her keyboard.

"Can you find the cameras?" Buddy asked.

"Shh. Give me a minute."

Buddy and Jimmy moved a bit farther away to give her space to work.

"So...do you think the park is really haunted?" Jimmy asked.

"Nah," Buddy said, shaking his head. "There's no such thing as ghosts. It's just a story some kid started, and it got repeated over and over until it became a spooky legend."

"I don't know. My uncle said he saw the ghost once," Jimmy said. "He was riding the Death Drop and looked down, and it was standing in the entrance to the haunted house."

"He saw a ghost standing in the entrance to the haunted house?"

"Yeah. That's what he says."

"How can he be sure it wasn't just a staff member *dressed* as a ghost? One of the ones working the haunted house?" Buddy asked.

"I don't know. He just said it looked like a ghost."

"Well, yeah. That's kind of the point of the haunted house."

"Got it!" Steph said, lifting her arms in triumph. "Now I will just set it to run video from yesterday...riiiiight....NOW!" She hit a key and studied her screen for a few more seconds. "Yes! It worked. It's running a second-by-second replay from yesterday that matches the current time. If they

do their rounds at the same time every night, they won't even notice."

"But isn't the date marked on it?" Buddy asked.

"Nope. Just the time. The date is buried in the metadata. They'd have no reason to check that. It's older software. If they upgrade it, it will have the date stamp. But we got lucky."

"Could you have fixed it if it *did* have a full time stamp?" Buddy asked.

"Of course!" Steph grinned.

"You're amazing," Buddy said, coming over to give her a high five. And then Jimmy got into the act and high-fived them both. "So I guess we can get into position now. It will take some time for the park to empty." Buddy led the way back to the path, looking both ways to make sure no one was around.

"All clear," Jimmy announced.

They didn't come across anyone on their way to the kiddie rides. The carousel was deserted.

With no one around, it felt kind of creepy, Buddy had to admit. He wondered what the rest of the park would be like. He walked around the carousel until he found the door to the base. It was closed with a simple latch, which he opened. He pulled a flashlight out of his bag and shone it around underneath.

“Empty,” he called back over his shoulder.

“No spiders?” Jimmy asked. He hated spiders.

“I don’t see any. Looks pretty clean. No webs.”

“Snakes?” Steph asked, shuddering. “There better not be any snakes.”

“Nope. Nothing.” Buddy crawled in and then moved aside to let his friends squeeze in too. He pulled the door shut behind them.

“Now all we have to do is wait.”

Chapter Nine

Buddy's legs were stiff from sitting still for so long. At last they all agreed it would be safe by this time for them to leave their hiding place. He crawled out first, followed by Steph and then Jimmy. Buddy stretched his arms high above his head and sighed. He was happy to be out of the cramped space.

It was quiet in the park. After the busy noise of all the people and rides, it seemed weird to be able to hear the crickets now.

"We're going to have to be really careful," he reminded his friends. "The security team probably does regular rounds."

"I think they do them on the hour," Steph said. "I've been checking the video that's running on their feed."

"Okay, that's good to know. But at the start of the night, at least, they might be walking around for a bit to check on everything. We have to be on the lookout."

Steph and Jimmy nodded.

"So what should we do first?" Jimmy asked. Then he suddenly ducked down.

"What?" Buddy asked as he and Steph quickly ducked too.

"I thought I saw something. Sorry."

Buddy shook his head. "This is exactly what

we *can't* be doing. We have to stay calm. Every shadow and noise isn't a guard. As long as we don't just go wandering around out in the open, we should be fine. Let's stick together and head toward the haunted house."

"Why there?" Steph asked.

"Because that's where Jimmy's uncle thought he saw a ghost. Even if the legend isn't true, we need photos and video to prove we were here. So let's take them in the scariest locations, starting with the haunted house."

"We're going *in* the haunted house?" Jimmy looked nervous.

"Won't it be locked?" Steph asked.

"I don't think so. It won't be running, but we can walk through. We have our flashlights. And it doesn't have windows or anything, so we should be able to go in and shoot some video without being seen."

Steph and Jimmy nodded. It was as good a

plan as any. As they made their way to the main area of the park, Jimmy kept up a whispered conversation with Steph about his uncle and what he had told him about the ghost. Buddy kept an eye out for security guards or park workers that might still be hanging around. Everything looked clear. And dark. Buddy had thought all the park lights would be left on, but most of the bright lights had been turned off. There were some lights along the paths, but the booths were dark. The ride entrances were still lit up, but the lights that blazed when the rides were running were off. It was pretty spooky. He took out his phone and snapped a picture of his friends walking ahead of him. He half expected a ghost to pop out from behind one of the food stands. A chill ran down his spine.

He heard a sound in front of them. Was it footsteps? He hissed a warning to his friends.

As silently as they could, they darted behind the ring-toss booth where Jimmy had lost earlier. They waited.

“I think it was just the wind,” Steph whispered.

“I don’t hear it now,” Buddy agreed and peered around the corner of the booth.

“Anything?” Jimmy asked.

Buddy shook his head. “The haunted house is right over there. Let’s stick close to the booths as much as possible. I think we should be able to walk right in.”

His friends nodded and followed him as he edged his way toward the haunted house. Like police on a stakeout, they ran from one booth to the next, trying to stay hidden in the shadows. Buddy was about to make a run for the entrance of the haunted house when Jimmy grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

“What is that?” Jimmy gasped. He was pointing

at the doorway to the haunted house. Something was moving in the darkness.

Steph gasped too. "It's the ghost!"

Chapter Ten

“Don’t let it see you!” Steph leapt backward, pulling Jimmy with her. Buddy scrunched himself into the shadows while still keeping an eye on the mysterious figure. He frowned and squinted, tilting his head one way and then the other.

“Wait...” he said, leaning as far forward as he dared.

"Be careful!" Jimmy said. "Don't let the ghost see you!"

"It's not a ghost," Buddy replied.

"It's not?" Steph peeled her fingers away from her eyes.

"No. It's one of the banners smacking into the side of the house. The shadow just looks like a person."

"No way. It's gotta be the ghost," Jimmy insisted, looking over Buddy's shoulder.

"See for yourself." Buddy moved aside so his friends could see better.

"He's right," said Steph after a moment.

Jimmy leaned past her. "No way! It's definitely the...oh. Yeah. It's just a banner." He looked sheepishly at his friends and shrugged. "Well, it *looked* like a ghost."

"Yeah, it actually did," Buddy agreed.

"Scared the heck out of me," Steph added.

“So should we get going?” Buddy asked, nodding at the haunted house. With one last glance around to make sure there was no one nearby, Buddy started walking toward the building. Steph and Jimmy followed. At the top of the steps, Buddy took a deep breath and walked inside. The safety lights were on, bathing the walls in a spooky red color.

“Hang on,” Steph said. “Let me get a picture.” They posed under one of the lights, which made them look in the photo as if they were drenched in blood.

“Creepy,” Jimmy said. “So what now?”

“Now we walk through to prove there isn’t a ghost,” Buddy told him. “We are legends, and we are not afraid!” He took out his flashlight and shone it down the hallway. Fake spiderwebs dangled from the ceiling. The haunted house was creepy enough during the day—it was absolutely horrifying in the red glow of the safety lights.

“But...what if the ghost *is* real?” Jimmy whispered, looking around. “GAH!” He leapt into the air and nearly knocked Buddy over. “Sorry. Those mannequins look really real.” He nodded toward a figure draped in moldy-looking gauze, leaning in a doorway.

Buddy patted Jimmy on the back. “You okay?”

“Yeah. I’m good.” Jimmy was twisting and turning, trying to look everywhere at once. “I just don’t like when they jump out at me.”

“Dude, the power is off. Nothing is going to jump out at you,” Steph said.

“I know. But just in case, can you go first?”

Buddy nodded and started walking again. Jimmy followed behind him, and Steph snapped a few photos.

“Oh! Gross!” Steph threw her arms up in front of her face.

Jimmy jumped. “What?!”

“Nothing. Just these sticky webs.” Steph peeled some string off her face and shook it to the floor.

Buddy led them into a room full of mannequins posed as if they were dancing together.

“Not very scary when they don’t have the projections running,” Buddy said. “And I don’t see any ghost here,” he said to Jimmy with a grin.

“I’m just repeating what my uncle told me!” Jimmy protested.

“Well, there’s nothing in here.” Buddy looked at Steph. “Did you get enough photos?”

“Yeah. Just shooting some video...and...done.” She lowered her phone. “So what now?”

“Let’s check out the Death Drop and get some video there,” Buddy suggested.

They made their way back through the twisted hallways of the haunted house. They stepped into the entrance and right into the beam of a flashlight.

Chapter Eleven

Buddy reacted immediately. He shoved Jimmy back into the house and pulled Steph against the wall outside. Jimmy fell down but scampered out of sight. Steph looked like she was about to scream.

“Shhh.” Buddy tried telling her with his eyes that they’d be fine.

At least, he hoped they’d be fine.

Steph nodded, but her gaze darted past him. Had they been seen? Buddy was pretty sure they hadn't.

"Hey! Is someone there?" a voice called out of the darkness. A security guard.

"Crap!" Jimmy whispered from somewhere down around Buddy's feet. He must have crawled out of the entrance.

"We need to get out of here," Buddy hissed. "When he points the light somewhere else, run for it. We'll meet back at the carousel." He studied the beam of light that was sweeping back and forth. "Ready?"

Steph, looking absolutely terrified, nodded. Jimmy was crouched like he was about to start a race. Buddy raised his eyebrows and got a nod in return.

"Okay." He watched the light move in big arcs from left to right. If he timed it right, they should be able to take off and not be seen. "Ready...one...two...NOW!"

They all sprinted. Buddy nearly tripped over Jimmy but recovered. He saw Steph dart left and Jimmy run right, so he made a straight line for the Death Drop.

“Hey...what is that? Hey!”

Buddy heard the guard’s voice and thought he sounded confused. Like he wasn’t sure it was a person he was seeing. Buddy was relieved—maybe they were actually going to escape! Then he heard footsteps behind him.

Crap. At least he was leading the guy away from his friends. But he couldn’t outrun him. He ducked behind a food stand to think.

He heard the static buzz of a walkie-talkie.

“Yeah, this is Brock. I saw something out in the park. Can you see anything on your screen? I’m heading toward the Death Drop.”

Double crap. He heard the guard approaching, far enough away that Buddy was still out of the beam of the flashlight but too close.

“Negative. And I don’t see you at all. What did you see, Brock?”

“I don’t know. Could have been an animal? I’m chasing it now. Maybe just a dog, but I want to check it out. You can’t see anything?”

“Nothing.”

They were definitely about to figure out that their security system had been messed with. And that this guard wasn’t chasing a dog. Buddy either had to either start running again, with the guard hot on his heels, or find somewhere better to hide. The Death Drop was just ahead, and from this angle Buddy could see a straight line to the area where people lined up for the ride. He had an idea. A terrible, scary idea. Before he could change his mind, he took off from behind the food stand and ran as hard as he could. He was running on grass now, hoping the guard wouldn’t hear the very human sound of a person running away. He reached the maze of ropes where people lined

up and hopped into the loading area. Without stopping to take a breath or lose his nerve, Buddy ran right onto the roller-coaster track and started climbing up, doing his best not to make a sound.

Or look down.

When he got to the top of the first hill, Buddy dropped to his stomach and peered over the side of the track. He felt dizzy for a second. He was higher than he'd thought he would be. But he didn't have time to think about it. Where was the guard?

And where were Jimmy and Steph?

Chapter Twelve

The guard's flashlight appeared again right below Buddy. He flinched, then remembered where he was. The light was pretty unlikely to reach this high. He had hoped the guard would keep going, but he seemed to have realized that whatever (or whoever) he was chasing had stopped somewhere.

Buddy watched as the guard swung his light back and forth.

"Control? I lost whatever it was. Must have been a dog or a fox or something. Do you see anything?"

"We missed it. The cameras were playing a recording. Must be a glitch."

Oh crap. This was bad.

"Did you get it fixed?"

"Affirmative. We've got you over by the Death Drop."

"Copy. I'm heading back in."

"We've got something over by the south fence line. Can you check it out on your way back? Looks like there might be someone over there."

"Copy that. I'm on my way."

Buddy watched the light bob away from him as the guard jogged toward what presumably was the south fence line. Whatever that was. If the guards had the cameras back up and had seen someone, he needed to warn Steph and Jimmy.

He fished his phone out of his pocket. With the ringer turned off, he hadn't noticed Ryan blowing

it up. He ignored the texts from his brother and typed a message to Jimmy and Steph.

Where are you? Cameras working again.

He waited, heart pounding. Steph replied.

Carousel

Jimmy too?

Yeah. You ok?

Yeah. Meet you there.

Wait. If Jimmy and Steph were both at the carousel...who was at the south fence line?

Buddy looked at his phone again. He read all the messages from Ryan.

Buddy, where are you?

Look, I'm sorry, ok?

I didn't mean what I said.

Will you answer me please?

OMG what are you doing at Funland?

I'm coming. Stay there.

Buddy's heart was beating out of his chest. How did his brother know where he was?

Ry? Don't come.

No reply.

Seriously. I'm ok.

Buddy had to get back to Jimmy and Steph. From this high up it was easy to spot the carousel. He could get to it, and they could get out of the park while the guards were over by the south fence line. He started back down the track, which was a lot scarier than going up. He had to concentrate on where he put his feet, even with the handrail. And honestly, it was a lot steeper than he had realized. His feet finally touched the ground, and he turned toward the carousel, ready to make a break for it. If he stuck to the shadows, he could stay out of sight of the cameras. As he glanced in the direction the guard had taken, he suddenly realized how Ryan had figured out where he was.

The app his mother had made them all download so they'd be able to track each other.

Ryan had checked the app.

Buddy had a sudden, horrifying thought.

What if...no. No way.

Buddy opened the app and waited for it to load Ryan's location.

Oh. No.

Thoughts of meeting up with his friends at the carousel vanished. Buddy took off for the location marked by a blinking dot on his phone.

Chapter Thirteen

Buddy ran.

He didn't know where the south fence line was, but he headed in the direction the guard had gone. As long as the guard hadn't made a sudden turn, Buddy would be able to catch up to him without being spotted.

GAH!

Buddy stopped short and threw himself behind a shrub at the entrance to the Sky Screamer. He pushed a branch aside and peered through the opening.

A guard—the same one who had been chasing him through the park—was standing over Ryan, who was still on the ground. The guard was holding him by the arm.

“Yeah, Control? I’ve got an intruder in my custody. I just caught him sneaking over the fence.”

“I’m not an intruder! I was looking for my brother. He’s in the park somewhere.”

No! Buddy smacked his head with his hand. What was his brother thinking?

“Son, do you really think anyone could get into the park without us noticing?”

“No, sir. But I still think he’s in there.”

The guard’s back was to Buddy, and Ryan was facing in Buddy’s direction. Buddy gulped, took

a deep breath and jumped up, waving his arms madly. His brother's eyes widened when he saw him, and then he looked away. He yanked his arm a bit to keep the guard's attention on him. It worked.

"Hold still now," the guard said. He spoke again into the walkie-talkie. "Control? Brock again. I'm bringing the trespasser in now."

"Look, can you just let me go? I wasn't trying to trespass. I'll leave and I won't come back. I promise."

"It's too late for that now. Come on. On your feet."

The guard pulled Ryan up by the arm but dropped him when Ryan screamed.

Buddy almost ran out from his hiding spot at the sound. He knew Ryan. Something was wrong.

"My ankle! I must have landed on it funny. I don't think I can walk."

The guard glanced around like he was looking for someone to tell him what to do. "Umm...well, I can help you walk to the security office."

"No! Look, it could be broken. And even if it's just a sprain, if you make me walk on it and it gets hurt worse, that could be really bad. My dad's a lawyer, so I know what kind of trouble you could get in for that."

Buddy smiled. They didn't have a dad, lawyer or otherwise. Ryan was just trying to get the security guard to leave him there.

"I can't just leave you here," the guard told him.

"What am I going to do? Run away? I can't walk! Look. Go get some help and come back for me. I won't make it there."

"You'll stay right here?" the guard asked.

"Yes, sir. Right here."

The guard studied him for a long minute.

"All right. But you better not be pulling a fast one on me. I'll be right back."

"Okay." Ryan shifted on the ground and cried out in pain. "Can you bring an ice pack too, sir?"

The guard nodded and took off for what Buddy assumed was the security office.

Ryan watched him go and then turned toward Buddy's hiding place. He waved his arm at him. Buddy looked around in case the guard was lurking somewhere, but the coast was clear. He stood up and jogged over to his brother.

"Buddy! What are you doing? Are you okay? How did you...why are you...are you okay?" Ryan looked so relieved to see him that the anger Buddy had felt earlier melted away. At least for now.

"I'm fine. I'll tell you more later. We need to get out of here before he gets back," Buddy said.

"Right. One problem though."

“What?”

“I really did hurt my ankle. Not as bad as I told him, but I don’t think I can walk on it.”

Chapter Fourteen

Well, that *was* a problem.

A really big one.

Because Buddy was much smaller and shorter than his brother. How could he carry him?

“You should just go,” Ryan told him. “They’ll call Mom and maybe even the police. There’s no reason you should get in trouble too.”

"I'm not leaving you here," Buddy told him. Maybe he couldn't carry his brother. But he could help support his weight. And once they met up with Jimmy and Steph, they would be able to help too. "Come on. I'll help you up." He reached down to offer Ryan his hand and pulled him to his feet—or onto his right foot anyway.

Ryan gasped in pain. "This isn't going to work. You can't hold me up."

"Yes I can," Buddy told him. He put his arm around his brother. "Lean on me. Let me help you."

Ryan put his weight on Buddy. And Buddy held him up.

"Come on. We need to get out of here," Buddy told him. With Ryan hobbling and leaning heavily against him, Buddy stumbled into the darkness at the edge of the walkway, where the ground was level. They were still on the path but just out of range of the cameras.

"Where are we going?" Ryan panted.

"The carousel. Jimmy and Steph are waiting there for me. As long as we can stay off the security cameras, we should be fine." Buddy glanced up at the nearest camera just as his phone vibrated in his pocket. He paused and shifted Ryan's weight so he could pull it out. A text from Steph.

Where are you?

He should have let his friends know what was going on so they wouldn't worry.

Sorry. Ryan is here. He's hurt. On our way to you.

Ok. Turned cameras back off. They'll notice at some point but you are ok for now.

"Steph turned the videos cameras back off."

"Won't they notice that?" Ryan asked.

"Yeah. But probably not for a few minutes. I know you're hurt, but we have to hurry."

"Okay." Ryan gritted his teeth, put a little more weight on Buddy and started to hobble forward

again. After a few moments he asked, "So how did you break in anyway?"

"We didn't." Buddy grinned. "We bought tickets and came in while the park was still open."

"Smart," his brother said, nodding. "But how were you able to stay after it closed without anyone noticing?"

"There's a crawlspace under the carousel. We hid in there."

Ryan gawked at him. "That's brilliant. I mean... it's still trespassing...but it's brilliant."

"I know. It's just...after you yelled at me today, I really wanted to show you how brave I am. I figured if I could spend the night at Funland...maybe see the ghost...I don't know. I thought maybe you'd stop thinking of me as just an annoying little kid. Maybe you'd think I was almost as cool as you."

"Buddy, I don't think you're annoying. I swear. I was just upset. I'm sorry I yelled at you. I didn't mean what I said."

"It's okay. I honestly wasn't even sure I could go through with this. Being mad at you actually made me *feel* brave for once," Buddy admitted. "I even walked up the Death Drop track."

"No way! You're afraid of heights!"

Buddy smiled. "Not anymore." They were almost at the carousel, and he could see the outlines of Steph and Jimmy waiting for them in the dark. "And Ryan?"

"Yeah?"

"You and Mia are not good together."

"I know." Ryan looked sad for a moment. "You know, after hearing how brave you have been tonight, I think maybe I'm ready to have a tough conversation."

Wow. His brother was inspired by *him*, by something he had done. Now that was cool.

Buddy waved to his friends and lowered Ryan to the ground.

"We need a plan," he said.

Chapter Fifteen

"I think the plan should be to get out of here as quickly as possible," said Steph.

"Right. But Ryan isn't very mobile. He hurt his ankle, so he's not going to be able to jump a fence or anything. We're going to have to help him."

"That definitely complicates things," Jimmy said.

They all looked at him.

"Thanks, Captain Obvious," said Steph.

"Well, it does!" he replied. "We could have made a run for it before, but now we have to figure out something else."

"They're going to realize I'm gone any minute," said Ryan.

"And that I've messed with their cameras again," Steph added.

"Yeah. We need to get moving," said Buddy. He took a deep breath before his next words. "I think the best way for us to get out of here is through the front entrance."

"But there are cameras everywhere out front!" Steph said.

"I know. But they won't be expecting Ryan to head there. And they don't even know we're here. Plus right now they can't see the camera feed anyway, right?" Buddy said.

Steph looked at her computer and nodded. "It looks like they still haven't noticed."

“Okay. Good. Jimmy, come take Ryan’s left side. Ryan, we may have to run for it at some point. You can just try to hop. But between the two of us, I think we can carry you if we have to.” Ryan nodded and put his left arm over Jimmy’s shoulder. Buddy took the other side. They took a couple of test steps with Ryan hopping and keeping all his weight off his injured ankle. He nodded.

“Are you guys okay?” he asked Jimmy and Buddy.

Jimmy gave him a thumbs-up with his free hand. “No problemo. You’re not as big as you think,” he joked.

“Yeah, we’ve got this,” Buddy agreed. “Steph, is there any way to know when they turn the cameras back on? I mean, you can’t walk with your laptop open, but—”

“Already taken care of. I’ve transferred the feed to my phone. And the screen is turned down way low.”

“Perfect. Okay. So we head to the front. Hopefully we can walk right out without anyone knowing we were here.” Buddy looked around the group. “Are you ready?”

“Lead on.” Jimmy saluted him.

“Yeah, Buddy, this is your plan,” Ryan said, nodding. “You take the lead.”

Buddy grinned.

It felt great to be in charge.

Chapter Sixteen

It wasn't easy moving under the cover of darkness.

"You okay?" Ryan asked them for the millionth time.

"Fine," Buddy said through gritted teeth.

"You're light as a feather," Jimmy panted.

"Sorry," Ryan mumbled.

"Stop!" Steph whispered. They all came to a sudden stop.

“What?” Buddy asked.

“I heard something.”

They stood there barely breathing, listening as hard as they could.

Nothing.

“Sorry.” Steph shrugged. “Maybe I imagined it.”

“Don’t be,” Buddy told her. “If anyone hears anything, say something. We do not want to walk into a bunch of security guards. Not when we’re so close.”

They were about to pass by the mirror maze, which Buddy had always found creepier than the haunted house. Being stuck in it, surrounded by his own reflection and having no idea which way was out, had been plain weird. He had hated the way it made him feel. If the guards showed up, they were definitely not going in there.

“Stop!” Steph whisper-screamed, eyes wide.

Footsteps.

There were definitely footsteps.

“Oh crap.” Jimmy was looking around in absolute panic. “What do we do?”

“Stay still!” Buddy whispered.

It sounded like the footsteps were coming right toward them. Though the group was mostly hidden by shadows, they were on the edge of the walkway. If a guard came this way, he’d see them.

“We need to move,” Buddy said suddenly. “Split up.”

“I thought you said to stay still!” Jimmy looked terrified.

“Stay calm. We just need to get off the path. It’s easier to hide individually than as a group. We can meet back here when the guard is gone.”

Ryan was looking around, his head darting from side to side. “Get me to that basketball booth. I can hide under the counter,” he said.

“Okay. We’ll meet at the booth to get Ryan when the coast is clear.” They quickly got him to the booth, and he crawled inside. As long as he stayed under the counter, he wouldn’t be seen.

“I’m going behind those bushes,” Steph said, pointing to a thick clump of shrubs. Buddy nodded and she set off, darting behind the bushes and disappearing from view.

Jimmy still looked panicked.

“Ice-cream stand!” he cried suddenly. He took off for the stand, throwing himself over the counter and dropping out of sight.

That didn’t leave many choices for Buddy. He looked around. The footsteps were getting closer. The guard hadn’t seen them yet. If Buddy could find a good spot to hide, they still had a chance to go undetected and get out of the park.

He glanced at the mirror maze and sighed. Then he broke into a run and darted through the entrance.

He really hated the mirror maze. And bathed in the spooky red glow of the security lights, it was a million times worse. He couldn't stand just inside the entrance. He'd have to go a little deeper into the maze to avoid being seen.

He tried not to look around. All those reflections were just so creepy—especially now that they were red. Buddy shuddered as he edged farther inside. A little farther. A little more and he'd be out of view of the doorway until the guard was gone. He held his hands out in front of him to avoid hitting a mirror and slowly moved in. There. That should do it.

Buddy stopped and waited. Then he realized he wasn't quite sure which way was out anymore. He felt his heart rate speed up.

You're fine, he told himself. It's just mirrors. You're not trapped. People go through here every day. Calm down. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, willing his heart to stop pounding.

He took another deep breath and then opened his eyes.

A pale face, unaffected by the red lights, was staring back at him.

Chapter Seventeen

Buddy had never wanted to scream so badly in his life. But he knew the guard would be passing by at any moment. All he could do was slap his hands over his mouth to hold the sound in. He stared at the face, his eyes wide in absolute terror.

He had never been so afraid.

The face looked at him curiously and cocked its head to the side, studying him. It looked like the face of a kid about his own age. Or of what had once been a kid. Somehow Buddy knew this had to be the legendary ghost. And he didn't look very scary, now that Buddy thought about it.

Buddy took his hands away from his mouth and gazed back at the boy. He was kind of wispy, like he wasn't 100 percent there. And he seemed a bit sad. Buddy was surprised to realize he felt sort of bad for him. Who would want to spend their afterlife in the mirror maze?

"Are you a ghost?" he whispered.

The boy looked confused for a second. Then he shrugged and shimmered a little around his edges.

"Whoa," Buddy breathed. This was *definitely* a ghost. He couldn't tell for sure if the boy was in front of him or if he was seeing a reflection. Did ghosts even have reflections? Oh wait, was

it vampires who didn't? Anyway, he wasn't sure. But he wasn't afraid anymore. This ghost was not a scary kind.

Buddy tried a friendly smile and nodded at the boy. The ghost's eyebrows went up and then he smiled back.

This was so awesome! Buddy wished his friends were here to see it.

His friends. Right! He needed to get back to them.

Buddy looked around. Which way was out? All he saw were reflections. Lots and lots of reflections. The ghost kept watching him.

"Do you know the way out?" Buddy asked quietly.

The ghost nodded his head.

"Can you show me? I have to get back to my friends and my brother."

The ghost nodded again. Seriously, Buddy thought, who would believe him if he told them

the famous ghost of Funland was actually not scary at all? That he was just a kid who seemed pretty nice?

The boy moved off to the left and stopped. He didn't walk exactly. Or float exactly. He just kind of...shifted. He looked back and waited for Buddy to follow. Buddy hesitated. But he figured he couldn't get any more lost than he already was, so he moved toward the figure. The ghost nodded and shifted away. Then he made a sudden right turn.

Buddy followed.

He followed him through the maze, turning left, then right, then right again, until the boy stopped suddenly and nodded toward an exit door.

"Thank you!" Buddy smiled. He started to open the door and then stopped. He turned back to the boy. "You're not...stuck here, are you? Like...

should I do something to set you free and let you move on to...wherever?"

The ghost didn't make any noise, but it was clear he was laughing. He shook his head. He reached out and touched Buddy's shoulder. Buddy felt a chill run from his shoulder down the entire length of his arm.

It wasn't entirely unpleasant.

"Okay then. I'm glad you're not trapped. Thanks for helping me out."

Buddy pushed the exit door open slowly and stuck his head out, scanning the surrounding area for the guard. There was no one there. He stepped out and started walking as fast as he dared toward the basketball booth.

Before he'd gone too far, he looked back over his shoulder at the mirror maze.

The boy was standing in the exit, waving goodbye.

Chapter Eighteen

Buddy kept an eye out for guards—and ghosts—as he jogged back toward the booth where they had left Ryan. He didn't hear any footsteps or the crackle of a guard's radio. And he didn't see any flashlight beams sweeping back and forth.

There was no sign of life at the booth. He leaned over the counter, hoping Ryan was still there, and was surprised to see not just Ryan

but Steph and Jimmy too. They were all jammed underneath the overhang of the counter.

“You scared the life out of me!” Steph whispered.
“I thought you were the guard!”

“You okay?” Ryan asked.

“Yeah.”

“Did you see anyone?” Jimmy asked.

“Uh...no. The coast is clear. But we need to move. Help me get Ryan up. Steph, can you make sure the cameras are still off?”

“Just did. The cameras are still off. They haven’t noticed yet.” She shook her head. “You’d think they’d be checking.”

“Be glad they’re not,” Buddy told her. “Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

He and Jimmy hauled Ryan to his feet. Ryan hissed in pain.

“Don’t worry—I’ll be fine,” Ryan said. “It’s just from sitting for so long.” Buddy gave him a look. “Seriously. I’m okay. Let’s go.”

The four of them set off for the main entrance, eyes peeled and ears straining for any sign of the guards. As far as they could tell, they were alone.

“Where are they?” Steph asked. Buddy shook his head. He had no idea, but he wasn’t about to stay in one spot long enough to find out. Ryan was heavy, though he was doing his best to hop along between Jimmy and Buddy and take as much of his weight off of them as he could. Steph kept checking her phone to make sure they weren’t being tracked by the cameras. She flashed Buddy a thumbs-up, and they picked up their pace a bit.

There it was. The entrance was so close. They were almost home free. Almost.

But as they got closer to the turnstiles, they saw the flaw in their plan.

“When did they put that gate up?” Jimmy whispered loudly.

Buddy’s heart sank. They had only ever been here during the day, so he’d never noticed the giant

sliding gate at the main entrance. He let go of Ryan and ran up to try to pull it open. "It's locked!"

"What now?" Steph asked.

Ryan, Steph and Jimmy looked at Buddy, expecting him to tell them what to do.

It was a strange feeling.

He'd never been in charge before.

"What do we do, Buddy?" Jimmy asked.

"Yeah. What should we do?" Ryan asked.

"Let me think for a second," Buddy said. He left Ryan leaning on Jimmy and walked over to the gate. They couldn't climb over it, not with Ryan's ankle. There was about a six-inch gap between the gate and the ground, which he was pretty sure they couldn't squeeze through.

He pushed his hair off his forehead and walked the length of the gate. Not enough space at the ends either.

Buddy frowned. Maybe there was a way through the back gate, but Ryan was in too much pain for

them to go there. They needed to get out now before the guards found them. Or turned the cameras back on.

And then he thought of something.

Buddy turned suddenly and walked back across the length of gate. He went around the other side of the ticket booth.

"Where's he going?" he heard Jimmy ask.

Buddy didn't answer. He kept walking. Just a few feet. And there it was. The stroller entrance. It also had a gate across it, but there was a ten-inch gap beneath it. He ran back to the group and threw his arm around Ryan.

"Come on. Just over here." He led them to the stroller entrance. He nodded at the gate.

"But that gate's locked too," Jimmy said.

"Look at the bottom," Buddy told him. "As soon as you're through, you can duck behind that bush there, out of sight of the cameras."

"Can we fit?" Ryan asked.

“Well, we’re about to find out,” Steph said, dropping to the ground. “Wish me luck.” She turned her head to the side, then shifted and shimmied and slithered. She was on the other side of the gate in seconds. She gave two thumbs up and then disappeared into the darkness.

“Yes!” Jimmy punched the air. “My turn.”

He threw himself to the ground and shimmied under the gate.

Buddy turned to Ryan. “You go first,” he said.

“No,” Ryan told him. “You go. They still don’t even know you’re here. If a guard shows up, it’s better if they find me alone.”

“I’m not going through until you do, Ryan. So we can stand here and argue about it, or you can save us some time and get going.”

Ryan cocked his head to the side and smiled. “You’re not a little kid anymore, are you?”

“No, I’m not,” Buddy said with a big smile. “Now go.”

Ryan hit the deck and started pushing himself under the gate. For one heart-stopping minute, Buddy thought he wasn't going to make it. He was bigger than the rest of them, after all. But with a final push, Ryan wiggled to the other side.

Buddy took one last look around. That's when he heard it.

A radio crackled. "Brock? Do you see anything?"

Chapter Nineteen

No.

No. No. No. No. No.

The guard was only a few feet away!

Buddy had no idea how the man had managed to get so close without him noticing. So far the guard hadn't seen Buddy, but in another couple of steps he would have Buddy directly in the beam of his flashlight.

Buddy looked around desperately. He didn't have time to go under the fence. If the guard came when he was halfway through, they'd all be caught. He was stuck. He'd have to dart past the guard just to find somewhere to hide.

This was it. He was about to get caught.

At least his brother and his friends had gotten out, he thought.

He closed his eyes and waited for the guard to find him.

WHOOSH!

A gust of wind burst through the entrance and pushed Buddy backward.

"Hang on, Control," the guard said into his walkie-talkie. "The wind just picked up. Feels like a big storm is brewing down here."

WHOOSH!

Buddy found himself pushed backward even farther.

What was that?

WHOOSH!

Buddy's back was now up against the gate.

"Control? I'm heading back in. I'm getting hit with a massive windstorm out here. The kid's gone."

"Roger that, Brock. Come on back."

Buddy listened as the guard moved away from where he stood, fully exposed. Within seconds the beam of the flashlight was gone, and Buddy was alone.

Almost.

Before he could make a move to slide under the gate, the boy from the mirror maze appeared suddenly before him. He winked at Buddy.

"Wait...was that you?" Buddy asked. "The wind?"

The boy nodded.

"Thank you!"

The ghost smiled and pointed at the gate.

"Yeah. Okay." Buddy turned to go, then looked at the boy again. "I hope I see you again."

The boy grinned and raised his hand to his forehead in a little salute, and before Buddy could turn around, he was gone.

Whoa.

Buddy shook his head, dropped to the ground and squirmed his way under the gate.

Jimmy was reaching down to help him up the second he made it to the other side. "What took you so long? I came back to see if you were okay."

"The guard came by before I could get under the fence!" Buddy said, brushing off the back of his pants. They met up with Steph and Ryan by the bush and started walking away from the park as quickly as they could.

"I parked over at McDonald's." Ryan nodded toward the main road. "I think I can drive. It's my left ankle that I hurt, and it's actually feeling a lot better now."

"Okay. Let's get your van and then we can pick up our bikes," Buddy told him.

"Wait. How are we all ignoring a pretty big thing here? If the guard was there, how did you get away?" Steph asked.

"I didn't," Buddy admitted.

"If you were at the stroller entrance, there was nowhere to go," Ryan pointed out.

"Yeah. He was about three steps away from seeing me," Buddy told them.

"So?" Jimmy asked. "What happened?"

Buddy looked at the others and then smiled widely.

"The ghost helped me," he said.

"The *what?*" Ryan, Jimmy and Steph all shrieked at the same time.

"I got lost in the mirror maze, and the ghost helped me find my way out, and then he came back and distracted the guard."

"You saw a ghost?" Steph asked. "Like...a real one?"

"Of course he was real!" Jimmy said, turning

and starting to walk back to the stroller entrance.

"I *told* you! I'm going back in. I want to see the ghost!"

"NO!" Buddy, Ryan and Steph yelled.

Buddy grabbed Jimmy's arm and pulled him back. "We're not going back in," he told his friend.

"But I want to see him!"

"He's not going to still be there now. And besides, we need to get out of here in case the guards decide to start looking again."

"We're off the property," Ryan pointed out.
"I think we're safe."

"Yes!" Jimmy punched the air. "I knew it was real!"

"Not to be a disbeliever or anything...but are you sure you saw an actual ghost?" Steph asked.
"Are you sure you weren't just...looking at your reflection?"

"Well, first of all, we looked nothing alike. And he was kind of shimmery. And he floated.

So yes. I'm sure. And he made this huge windstorm happen. It was definitely not me who did that."

"That is so cool!" Ryan said admiringly. "You may be the only person who has ever seen the Ghost of Funland."

"You are going to be a legend!" Jimmy said.

"I don't think I'm going to tell anyone," Buddy said.

"What? Why?" Ryan asked.

"I don't know. I wanted to prove—mostly to you—that I could do something like this. I climbed the Death Drop. Steph hacked the security system. And all three of us snuck into the park and didn't get caught, *and* I saw a ghost. I don't need anyone else to tell me how cool that is. The people who matter were there with me."

Ryan smiled and pulled Buddy tighter against him.

"You really are cool," he said.

That felt really good.

Chapter Twenty

By the time they'd picked up their bikes and loaded them into the back of Ryan's van—which was empty, thankfully, because all the band gear was in the house—it was late.

Really late.

"You should just stay at our house tonight," Ryan told Jimmy and Steph as they piled into

the back seat of the van. Buddy climbed into the front, beside his brother.

“Okay,” Jimmy said agreeably. He yawned widely. “Man, I’m starving! Can we get something to eat on the way?” He looked hungrily at the McDonald’s drive-through sign.

“Anyone else hungry?” Ryan asked.

“Actually...I am,” Buddy said.

“Me too,” Steph admitted.

“What? Steph is actually hungry for once?” Jimmy teased.

“Hey, I get hungry. I just don’t eat constantly like a raccoon,” she said. “Unlike you.”

“I’m okay with that comparison,” Jimmy said, laughing.

They hit the drive-through and then, loaded down with fries, burgers and nuggets, headed home.

As soon as they got back to Buddy’s, they

realized how tired they were. Ryan tiptoed into his mom's room to let her know there was a full house. Then he came out and helped Steph get settled on the couch.

Buddy and Jimmy came to say good night, and the whole conversation started up again.

"I can't believe you saw the ghost and I didn't," Jimmy said for the hundredth time. "I should have gone back."

"Well, he wasn't there anymore," Buddy reminded him. Again. "So you couldn't have seen him."

"And, technically speaking, Buddy saw him twice," Steph reminded him, pulling the blankets up under her chin.

"Don't remind me!" Jimmy moaned. "Too bad you didn't get proof!"

"How would he get proof?" Ryan asked. "You can't take pictures of ghosts."

"I think that's vampires," Buddy said. "I think you can take pictures of ghosts."

"Wait...are you sure?" Ryan asked.

"He's right," Steph volunteered. "Vampires don't have reflections. Buddy, you're the only one here who has actually seen a real ghost. Did he have a reflection?"

"I'm...not sure," Buddy admitted.

"No one is going to believe it," Jimmy told them.

"Well, I'm not telling anyone, so it really doesn't matter," Buddy reminded him.

"I still can't believe you're not going to tell anyone," Ryan said.

Buddy shrugged.

"I think keeping it a secret is way cooler than bragging to everyone like Tommy Bracco did," Steph told him.

"I am 98 percent sure Tommy Bracco was

lying,” Buddy reminded her. “And if I told people, they’d all try to sneak in, and it might scare the ghost away. He seemed pretty happy there.”

“That’s really cool, actually,” Steph said.

“Yeah. And this way, I can still look for him the next time we go,” Jimmy said. “I’m gonna keep going until I see him too.”

“Okay, boys, time to get some shut-eye,” said Ryan.

“You sound just like Mom!” But Buddy was only pretending to protest. He couldn’t wait to get some sleep. It had been a long night.

“Good night, boys,” said Steph.

“See you in the morning,” said Jimmy.

“I bet we can talk my mom into making waffles again,” said Buddy. He looked over at Ryan, who gave him two thumbs up.

Jimmy and Buddy climbed into the bunk beds in Buddy’s room. For a while they lay

awake with only the streetlights shining in through the window.

Ryan tapped on the doorframe. "Hey, I was thinking I could take you all to Funland next weekend." He smiled. "During regular operating hours, of course."

"Yes!" said Jimmy.

"That would be awesome," said Buddy. "Good night, Ryan," he added.

"Good night, Ben."

Buddy...Ben...closed his eyes and smiled into the darkness.

Orca currents

NOW WHAT?

Read on for an excerpt from

Haunted Hospital

THEY
THOUGHT
THEY WERE
ALONE.



Xander and his friends get in over their heads during a role-playing game in a supposedly abandoned hospital.

Excerpt

Once his heart rate had returned to normal, Xander began to explore the maze of hallways that twisted and turned deeper and deeper into the building. He checked each of the rooms along the way. Some were empty. A couple still had beds in them. He took photos of potential sites that might work for *Spirits and Specters*.

And it was giving him some story ideas. He tapped the voice-recorder app on his phone and spoke into it.

“Alison Rigby died in this very room on a chilly winter night,” he said, recounting some of the details from the legend he had researched. They would be great for the mission setup. “Even though she had contracted TB, she might have lived longer if the doctors hadn’t injected her with experimental drugs. Her screams filled the hallways. The medical staff observed the poor woman gasping for air in her final moments. She died in utter pain and fear. Now her spirit walks the halls.” When he was done, he played it back. “Not bad, if I do say so myself. I just need more haunted rooms for inspiration.”

He propped the door open with a rubber doorstop he had found on the floor and noted the room number—176. He navigated new corridors, identifying landmarks to help him find his way back. His light flashed on an Exit sign. The door

opened to a stairwell. But Xander couldn't go up or down. A giant tangle of barbed wire was nailed across both flights of stairs.

Xander spoke into his phone. "Stick to the main floor. No sense in wrecking more of my clothes."

He headed out of the stairwell and explored the rest of the corridor. Another set of double doors loomed in the distance. He aimed his light at them.

Two eyes reflected back at him from behind one of the windows. "What the heck?" When Xander looked closer, the eyes were gone.

"Stupid cat," he muttered. "Had to be the cat. Right? Yeah. And why are you still talking to yourself, man? Get a grip."

Xander's feet suddenly felt like he had stepped in wet concrete. He raised the phone and aimed the beam of light at the closed doors again. No sign of the eyes.

"Must have been my imagination." He turned on the recorder app. "If I can figure out how to make

something that looks like reflecting eyes, Li will lose her mind. Note to self—buy marbles and string.”

Xander willed his feet to move forward. He inched closer to the doors, keeping the light trained on the windows. His legs tingled with anticipation.

He carefully pushed one of the doors open. A rush of air and dust swirled up. He shone the light down the hallway.

“Whoa. The gang is going to love this place.”

Xander thought for a second about whether he should continue to explore. He swept the flashlight beam along the walls and doors. Two gurneys were off to one side, some large cardboard boxes on the other. The hallway looked pretty much like the others. He decided he had seen enough and turned away.

As he made his way back through the maze of corridors, he switched his camera to video mode and filmed everything. A video map of the hospital layout would be useful for planning their stories.

He neared a corridor blocked off with a web of yellow hazard tape, and the stench of mold and mildew shot up his nose. He shone his light through the web. Parts of the ceiling had fallen down, and water dripped onto the floor. The floor was shiny with some kind of gross green gunk.

He spoke into his phone. "Watch out for places with yellow warning tape. Parts of the building aren't really safe. Try to score some hospital gowns and bedsheets for set decoration and wardrobe. Maybe at the thrift store? Ooh, yeah. If we can find some surgical masks, definitely get those."

He stepped away from the yellow tape.

"Working my way back to home base," he said. "Rooms 176, 148, 112 and 129 are all great. Need some chalk to mark off the halls so people don't get lost."

He continued to film until he reached the nurses' station. Then he checked the video. Although the images were dark, they provided enough sense of the layout to help him plan out the missions.

Xander's chest tightened. Did he just see what he thought he saw? He rewound the clip. They only appeared for a second, but yes, he was almost certain he had captured a second set of eyes in a window as he filmed his return to the nurses' station. But it must have been a trick of the light. Maybe all this talk of ghosts was making Xander see things. He didn't really believe all the stories he told. He just loved getting his friends worked up.

Xander looked around, unable to shake the feeling that he was being watched.



Melanie Florence is a writer of Cree and Scottish heritage based in Toronto. She is the author of *Missing Nimâmâ*, which won the 2016 TD Canadian Children's Literature Award, *Stolen Words*, which won the 2018 Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award, and the bestselling Orca Soundings titles *He Who Dreams* and *Dreaming in Color*.

MAYBE THIS WASN'T SUCH A GREAT IDEA.

For as long as Buddy can remember, there has been a rumor that the local theme park is haunted. After a fight with his big brother, Buddy convinces his friends to sneak into the park to spend the night so he can prove he isn't a scared little kid anymore. But can Buddy and his friends avoid the guards, the cameras and whatever is haunting the theme park? Could the whole thing be just an urban legend after all?

This is an advance reading copy of the uncorrected proofs and is not for sale. Changes may be made to the text before publication, so **all quotations for review must be checked against the final bound book.**

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