

IAN EAGLETON

THE BOY
WHO CRIED
GHOST

 SCHOLASTIC



Published in the UK by Scholastic, 2024
1 London Bridge, London, SE1 9BG
Scholastic Ireland, 89E Lagan Road, Dublin Industrial
Estate, Glasnevin, Dublin, D11 HP5F

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or
registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

Text © Ian Eagleton, 2024
Cover illustration by Melissa Chaib © Scholastic, 2024

The right of Ian Eagleton to be identified as the author
of this work has been asserted by them under the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

ISBN 978 07023 3137 4

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way
of trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated
in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is
published. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any other means
(electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without prior written permission of Scholastic Limited.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.
Paper made from wood grown in sustainable
forests and other controlled sources.



1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, incidents
and dialogues are products of the author's imagination or are
used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people, living
or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

www.scholastic.co.uk





PROLOGUE

Who Ghost There?

Richard Barnes's problems all started a week before the new school term. As they pulled up outside Grandma's house, he felt a sharp, stabbing pain in his chest.

He was fed up.

He was tired.

He was angry.

He'd made it very, very clear that he didn't want to move.

Richard got out of the car and stretched his legs. It had been a long, long journey. Mum looked tired and nervous. She'd talked all the way here, but Richard had ignored her.



Surely she doesn't want to be back here, either? To come back after... After...?

Look, there wasn't necessarily anything wrong with their new house. With Grandma's house. In fact, Richard's first thought was how big it was. That was a pleasant surprise. His second thought, as he stepped through the creaking front door, was that Grandma liked mirrors. A lot. They seemed to hang everywhere, giving the impression of a strange, spooky House of Mirrors. For some reason, they made Mum furious. She stomped in and out of the house, unloading boxes, muttering something about Grandma being "obsessed with herself".

There were three bedrooms and steep narrow stairs that led up, up, up to an attic. The living room was horrible – the carpet was salmon pink and the walls were a garish orange – but Richard's new bedroom was almost double the size of his old one. He climbed the stairs slowly, running his hand absent-mindedly along the wall. The house smelled musty and the wallpaper was yellowing in places.

As he pushed open his bedroom door, Richard took a deep breath. He wasn't sure why. It felt as if once he stepped inside there would be no going back. That they were here to stay. That it would be ... permanent.





When he walked over to the window, Richard saw that the bedroom looked out over a large wild garden, at the end of which was a dilapidated tree house, set high in an old oak tree. They'd never had their own garden before, so Richard knew he should feel lucky.

But something felt wrong.

Richard turned to take in the room. His bed was pushed up against the wall on his right and there was a set of drawers next to it. Opposite the bed was a huge mahogany wardrobe that immediately made him uncomfortable. He remembered a film he'd watched with Mum – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* – about a little girl called Lucy who stepped through a wardrobe into a frozen land of magic. It reminded him of this wardrobe: tall and foreboding. There was nothing particularly unusual about it – no ornate engravings or secret compartments or rusty keys – but when he tried to open it, he realized it was locked.

What's the point of a locked wardrobe? Richard wondered.

He looked around the room for a key, but couldn't find one.

As he went back to the wardrobe, Richard shuddered. The air around him felt cold. He stepped away and shook his head.



I'm imagining things. Again.

And yet Richard couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't right. He left the bedroom as quickly as he could.

Later that night, Richard couldn't sleep. It was half past three in the morning. What did they call it? The Witching Hour? The house was silent. Their cat, Clawdia, was snoozing on the end of his bed, curled in a tight ball, a paw covering her face.

The clock on the wall was ticking loudly in the hushed stillness and a small sliver of moonlight sliced through the curtains. Richard was wide awake. The summer holidays would soon be over, and Richard was rehearsing his lines for the first day of Year Six at a new school. He often rehearsed conversations, running them through his mind like a playscript. What was it Mum always said? "*Just visualize it. You are brave. You are strong. You can do this!*"

Act I, scene i

Setting: Richard's new classroom. It is bright and colourful. It feels safe.



Richard walks into the room confidently. He looks suave and cool, his curly black hair shining.

RICHARD: *(smiling and waving)* Hi! I'm Richard.

Everyone looks up, smiling back at him. He saunters around the room, giving everyone high fives.

RICHARD: Hi! Hi! I'm new here. Who can I sit next to?

Richard overhears his new teacher, Miss Campbell, tell Mr Levick, their teaching assistant, that she has a feeling he'll be the best student she'll ever teach.

COOL KID #1: Oh! Oh! Come and sit next to me!

COOL KID #2: *(jumping up excitedly)* No! Sit next to me, Richard! We can play footie together later!

COOL KID #3: Miss! Can Richard sit next to me? Pllleeeaaassee?



The children all clamour around Richard, telling him how trendy and amazing he is. He laughs, knowing that he is already the most popular kid in the class.

As he stared at the ceiling, Richard replayed this scene over and over again. Everything would be great! His new teacher would be kind and funny and wouldn't make him write or read too much. All the kids would be friendly too. There was nothing to worry about.

Nothing.

Richard looked around his room. Everything seemed strange and new in the darkness. He screwed his nose up. There was a nasty smell lingering in the air. Had it always been there? Shadows lurked in every corner, and clothes and boxes lay scattered around his new bedroom. He was still hoping that he wouldn't have to unpack. That Mum would say they could just go home. That his grandmother, whom he'd never met, hadn't died. They were *supposed* to sell the house, that's what Grandma had said. But not long after Mum had inherited the house, they found they had nowhere to stay and needed to move quickly. It was supposed to be a fresh start, but Richard hoped they wouldn't be here long. He hoped that he could



go back to George and Azarin and start Year Six in Mr Hamilton's class like he'd planned. He hoped that everything would just go back to normal and—

That's when he heard it.

Or *didn't* hear it, to be precise.

The clock on the wall had stopped. The minute and second hands seemed to be trembling, unable to move forward.

Perhaps it's broken? Richard thought sleepily. *Perhaps it was damaged while we were moving or—*

Suddenly Richard heard a strangled, scratchy sound. It crept around the room and made his skin crawl. It was as if someone was wheezing, breathing in pain. Richard pressed himself deep, deep down into his pillow and clung tightly to the duvet. Maybe he was imagining things?

Perhaps I'm just tired? Or I'm nervous about starting a new school? I'm just—

It came again.

This time it was louder. It grated and crackled.

Don't move, Richard. Don't move.

Again the sound reverberated around the room, a rough gravelly sound somewhere between terror and sadness.

Where was it coming from?





It seemed to be getting more and more insistent, as if it was calling him, drawing him in. Richard's heart thumped.

Don't move. Don't breathe. Don't—

There! There it was again, ragged and chilling. It was coming from far over the other side of the room, from the wardrobe.

Richard took a deep breath and jumped out of bed. One step, then another. The floorboards groaned underneath him as he moved towards the wardrobe, but he didn't care. He had to find out what was going on.

He took another step. Just one step at a time. The nape of his neck was itchy and he could feel beads of sweat starting to form on his forehead, even though he was sure it had got colder. In fact, he could almost see his icy breath in the air and his teeth had started to chatter.

What was going on?

He didn't know what propelled him forward. Curiosity, maybe? A desire to finally face something, to look it in the eyes and say, "No. You can't do this to me!"?

After what seemed like an eternity, Richard made it across the room. The wardrobe loomed over him, like a dusty, shadowy monster. He placed his ear against the doors. The wood was cool.





Richard waited, listening intently.

Nothing. There's nothing in there.

He'd imagined it all! Again! He felt tired. So tired.

He breathed a shaky sigh of relief.

And then it came.

The strangled, scratchy sound.

His heart lurched and he gulped, his throat dry.

He'd been right. The sound was coming from inside the wardrobe!

But this time it was different.

This time it growled, "Rrrrr... Rrrrrr..."

It sounded like a caged animal. Richard jumped back in fear and covered his ears. He didn't know what was in there or why it was there, but he could feel it watching him, its eyes boring at him through the wardrobe.

It was in the inky blackness of the bedroom that Richard faced two terrible truths.

The first was that there was something truly terrifying in that wardrobe. Something ancient and evil.

The second truth was that Richard knew it would be up to him to make sure the doors to the wardrobe remained shut, for ever.

