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Opening extract from

Araminta Spook: Skeleton Island

Written by

Angie Sage

Illustrated by

John Kelly

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SCHOOL TRIP

My friend, Wanda Wizzard, and I live in Gargoyle Hall, which is a boarding school for ghouls. Oops, I mean girls. We used to live in Spook House with a whole load of ghosts—and also my aunt Tabby and uncle Drac, and Wanda's parents, Barry and Brenda Wizzard. Now we spend the week at school and go home to Spook House at weekends because Brenda misses Wanda. No one has



said anything about missing me, but I think my uncle Drac secretly does, even though he would not dare tell Aunt Tabby that.

The only thing I miss about Spook House is our ghosts. We have three really good ones: Sir Horace, who is a knight in rusty armour—definitely not in shining armour like they are in all the stories. There is Sir Horace's page, Edmund, who, even though he moans a lot, is quite brave. And there is Sir Horace's ghost-wolfhound, Fang, who is a big, messy dog and does not realise he is a ghost at all. Fang is fun.

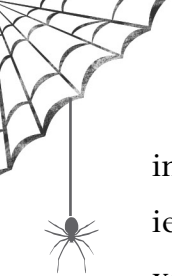
Gargoyle Hall School is fun too, but it doesn't have any ghosts. It had a horrible monster when we first came but that wasn't a real monster, it was two nasty girls in a monster suit, and they have gone now.

I prefer ghosts to monsters; they are so much more interesting and I have often thought it would be really good if we could have a school ghost. When I mentioned that to Miss Gargoyle, who is the headmistress, she just laughed.

Even Wanda did not seem very keen. "We have lots of ghosts at home, Araminta," she said. "What I would really like at school is a pirate."

I sighed. Wanda has got a craze for pirates and it is all my fault. I have an old pirate map of Skeleton Island, which has a big cross on it showing where their treasure is buried. Uncle Drac gave me the map when I first went to Skeleton Island with him. I had wanted to look for the treasure, but Uncle Drac said that bats were much more





interesting. So, even though there was buried pirate treasure and an old shipwreck you could see at low tide, we went to visit a boring cave of bats. The best bit was on the way home when Uncle Drac told me lots of pirate stories.

But last week, when we first heard we were going to Skeleton Island on a school trip, I made the big mistake of showing Wanda my pirate treasure map and telling her one of Uncle Drac's stories—and now she is pirate mad.

The morning of our trip to Skeleton Island, when we were in the school dining room and I was having my favourite breakfast—wobbly porridge and syrup—Wanda said, "Isn't it brilliant, Araminta?"

"Wherris?" I mumbled and spat some porridge out by mistake.

"Manners, Araminta," Bossy Bella called out. Bossy Bella is one of the big girls who sits at the end of the table and makes sure we behave. She was going to come on the trip too, to help out. "Do not talk with your mouth full," she said. "It is rude and no one will understand what you say."

That was not true. Wanda always understands what I say when I talk with my mouth full. And she obviously had, because she carried on with what she was saying: "It's brilliant that we're going to Skeleton Island today."

I swallowed my porridge and said, "Yes, it is. Totally brilliant."

"Wouldn't it be great to see some real pirates? I'd love to meet one," Wanda





said. "Pirates are much more fun than ghosts."

"Wanda," I replied very patiently, "real pirates are not fun at all. Uncle Drac told me some horrible stories about pirates."

"But pirates are so exciting!" said Wanda in an excited, squeaky voice.

"No they are not, they are *boring*," I told her. "All pirates do is go around pushing people off planks and saying '*Arrgh!*' in a silly voice. You cannot have an interesting conversation with someone when all they say is, '*Arrgh*.'"

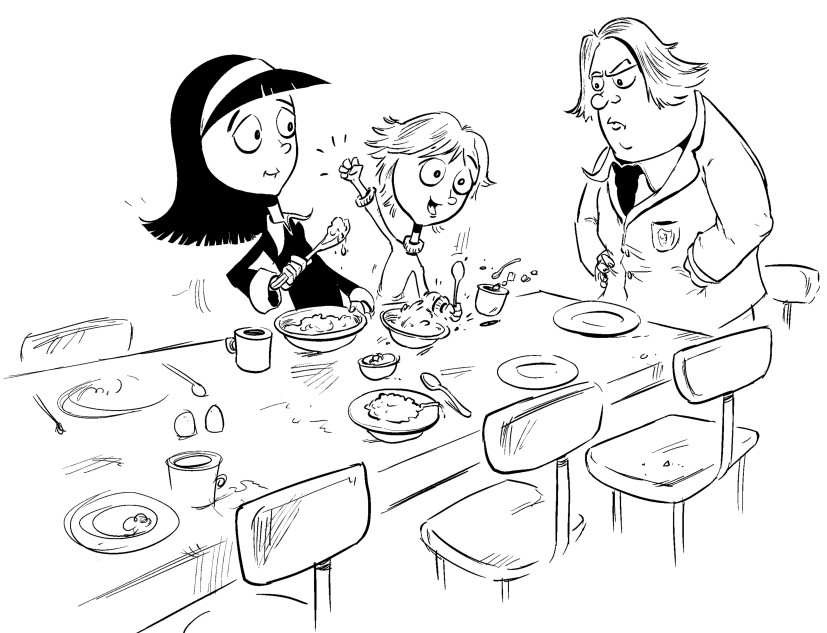
Wanda made some syrup circles on her wobbly porridge and said, "But, Araminta, pirates always have a parrot and that is who you talk to."

"Huh," I said and flicked some syrup over Nosy Nora, who was busy listening in. "Who wants to talk about birdseed all day?"

Wanda raised her eyes up like she was looking for a piece of porridge stuck to her fringe. And then Creepy Cora, who is thin and spiky and is Nosy Nora's best friend, said, "I like talking to parrots."

I was not surprised. Creepy Cora looks a bit like a parrot herself.

Wanda gobbled up the rest of her wobbly porridge very fast and then she said, "Skeleton





Island will be so exciting. I can't wait!" and she jumped up from the table.

"Sit down, please, Wanda," Bossy Bella said. "It is good manners to wait until everyone else at the table has finished."

So Wanda sat down. "But, Araminta," she said, "suppose we found a pirate *ghost*. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Wanda was right. I would definitely like that.