JASON BANKS and the PUMPKIN of DOOM

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Barrington Stoke

First published in 2018 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text © 2018 Gillian Cross
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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-813-8

Printed in China by Leo

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Chapter 1
King of the School

Jason Banks was tall and strong, like a superhero. But he wasn't a hero at all.

He was a bully.

Everyone in his class was afraid of him. He pinched the girls and stuck chewing gum in their hair. He hit the boys and stole their lunch money. He laughed at the kids who found school work hard – and he made the clever kids do his homework for him.

Everyone was too scared to tell. So the teachers thought Jason was wonderful. He got full marks in Maths – because no one dared to say he was copying. He wrote amazing stories – because he stole other people's ideas. And he was the top goal-scorer in every game of football before, during and after school.

Because it's easy to score if the goal-keeper's afraid of you.

Jason felt as if he was the king of the school.

One day he walked into class and saw a new girl on the other side of the room. She was small and pale, with red hair and a pointed nose. All the other girls were crowding round her, telling her about the school – about the kids and the teachers and all the little tricks that make life easier. When they saw Jason, they whispered, "That's Jason Banks. Stay away from him. He's mean."

The new girl looked across the room. "Hi, Jason!" she said, "I'm Millie." And she *smiled*. As if she wasn't scared at all.

Jason glared and walked over to the table where she was standing. "Is that your pencil case?" he growled.

The new girl nodded and Jason threw the pencil case on to the floor. When she bent down to pick it up, he pushed her over. She fell on the floor and banged her head on the table leg.

"*Sorry!*" Jason said with a big grin.

"You see?" the other girls whispered. "Jason's *mean*! Stay away from him."

The new girl got up. She didn't say a word. She brushed the dust off her clothes and put her pencil case back on the table. Then she sat down, with her back to Jason.

She didn't look at him for the rest of the day. Not once.

That's fixed her! Jason thought as he walked home at the end of the day. *She knows I'm the king of the school. And tomorrow is going to be even better!*

But he was wrong about that.

*

When Jason woke up the next morning, the house was empty. As always. His mum always went off to work before he was awake.

He got dressed and ate a packet of biscuits for breakfast. Then he put on his coat, opened the front door – and stopped. Because there was something outside the door, blocking his way. Something very strange.

A pumpkin.

It was bright orange. And huge. And it had an ugly face painted on the front, with staring eyes and big sharp teeth. Propped up on top of it was a notice:

I AM THE PUMPKIN OF DOOM.

Jason stared. Where had it come from? Was it a joke? Was someone watching, to see if he was scared? Huh! He was Jason Banks and he wasn't afraid of anything!

"Stupid pumpkin!" he said out loud. "Get out of my way!"

He took a step back and kicked as hard as he could. "GOAL!" he shouted as his foot crashed into the pumpkin.

But the pumpkin didn't move. Not a centimetre. Jason's foot thudded against its bright orange skin and he gave a huge yell.

"OWWW!"

It was like smashing his foot against a rock. Like kicking a cliff. It hurt!

"OWWWW!" Jason yelled, hopping around on one leg. How could a pumpkin do that? Why was it so heavy?

He bent down to look. The pumpkin's top was loose, like a lid. He lifted it off. Inside, the pumpkin was hollow – and filled with big stones.

That was why his foot hurt so much. He really *had* kicked a rock.

"Stupid pumpkin!" he shouted again. But he couldn't stop his voice wobbling.

Then he heard a funny little noise. When he looked up, he saw a girl with a bike. She had stopped, right outside his house, and she was staring into his garden. A small pale girl, with red hair and a pointed nose.


I AM THE PUMPKIN OF DOOM

Jason knew he'd seen her before, but he couldn't remember where. His foot was hurting so much he couldn't think properly.

"What are you staring at?" he yelled. "Push off!"

He wanted to give her a real push. But when he took a step towards her – OUCH!! His foot hurt! He had to bend down and rub it to make it feel better.

When he looked up, the girl had gone.

*

Somehow, Jason limped to school. He was very slow and he only just got there in time. When he walked into his classroom, the first person he saw was the pale girl with the pointed nose.

Oh no! Now he remembered her. She was Millie, the new girl – and she'd seen

him yelling and hopping around on one leg. Looking like an idiot.

Bet she's told the whole class, he thought. *They're all going to laugh at me*. He glared round the room, waiting for the first giggle. He felt angry with everyone there.

But no one laughed. No one even looked at him – except the new girl. She glanced across the room and gave him a tiny little grin. As if she was saying, *Don't worry. I won't tell*.

Jason couldn't believe it. He was so surprised that he forgot about the pumpkin for a moment.

But not for long. He spent the rest of the day thinking about it. Where had that pumpkin come from? Who had put it there?

And *why*?

*

When Jason got home after school, the pumpkin had vanished. But Jason couldn't forget it. His foot was still sore. And when he took off his sock, the big toenail was black.

He was furious. Someone had put that pumpkin there on purpose. As a trap. When he found out who, that person was going to be very sorry. No one got away with playing tricks on Jason Banks!