"A fine gothic fable about how to face the monsters that lurk both inside and out"
LUKE PALMER
Illustrated by
Keith Robinson
BEN'S GARGOYLE
KEITH GRAY

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For the Fassl-Grays,
and the Gray-Fassls

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CHAPTER 1

The Telescope

The gargoyle didn't see Ben watching it. Ben held his old plastic telescope to his eye. He blinked twice. Was it real? Maybe it was just an ugly cat?

Ben didn't switch the light on. He knelt in the dark, looking out of his bedroom window over the streets and the rooftops. The night was frosty, with only half a moon but lots of stars. Ben had his duvet wrapped around him. The glowing numbers on his alarm clock said 00:01.

Ben wanted to swap the old telescope to his other eye, to check that both eyes could see the same impossible thing. But Ben's left eye was still black and sore because of the fight at school. It hurt to touch.

He squeezed both his eyes shut in a long blink, then lifted up the telescope again. And the gargoyle hadn't moved. It sat on a dark rooftop four streets away.

The gargoyle had a twisted monkey's face. It had grey snake scales on its back and bat's wings covered in jagged spikes, looking like they were wrapped in nasty barbed wire. It wasn't a statue. The gargoyle began to crawl.

Ben's bedroom was in the attic. It was so high up that his wide window had an amazing view above the rest of the houses. At this time of night, streetlights shone in fuzzy blobs down below, but most of the houses were in darkness. Only a handful of windows still glowed.

Ben could see the traffic lights on Mulberry Street change from red to amber to green. There were no cars on the roads. Everything was quiet. Even so, the traffic lights changed from green to amber to red.

Ben's heart beat so fast that it was hard to hold the telescope steady. He pushed the wider end of the telescope right up against the window to stop it trembling. He watched the gargoyle climb across the sloping rooftop.

"What are you?" Ben whispered aloud.

He was four streets away, yet Ben imagined he could hear the gargoyle's claws scrape on the red roof tiles as it crawled towards a chimney. A huddle of sleeping pigeons was in its path, but they burst into the air, panicking as they tried to escape.

The gargoyle snatched at them. It grabbed an unlucky flapping pigeon and bit off its head. Ben saw the gargoyle's long, silvery fangs flash.

Then it ate the bird like Ben ate Cadbury's Creme Eggs. It licked out the gooey stuff first.

Ben had to tell someone.

But who could he tell? Max's phone would be switched off, and Ben reckoned his friend would

be fast asleep. But Ben sent a text anyway, just hoping that Max would see it first thing in the morning:

"Call me! No messin!! CALL ME!!!"

Ben thought about Mum. But she wouldn't be happy with a weird phone call or text message in the middle of the night. It would just make her freak out.

So Ben had to tell Dad.

He jumped up and shrugged the duvet away but kept tight hold of the telescope. In his rush, Ben smacked his head on one of the low rafters. He yelped in pain. He reckoned he already had a million bangs and splinters from hitting his head on the chunky rafters, and he'd only been living here one month.

He ducked and scrambled to the trapdoor in the middle of the floor. He yanked the trapdoor up and open, and swung his legs down onto the

wooden ladder below. But then he stopped. He was half-in, half-out.

The telly in the living room was loud. Ben heard gunshots and shouting. Dad loved old-fashioned action movies from before CGI and superheroes, from back when Dad was a kid himself. Dad knew some of the lines the actors said off by heart.

Ben forced himself to wait, think, listen. He looked down the wooden ladder to the shadowy hallway below. The light from the telly flickered into the hallway from the living room. Did Ben dare disturb Dad? He hovered on the edge of the trapdoor. He'd tell Dad the gargoyle was the scariest thing he'd ever seen. How could Dad be angry about that?

Ben looked across at his alarm clock. 00:16. He touched his black eye. Even gentle touches made it hurt. Dad had been so angry about the fight at school that he'd sent Ben to bed early. He'd be raging if he knew Ben was still

awake. But Ben had no one else he could tell. He shivered. Thinking about being alone made Ben feel cold on the inside.

A wham like a punching fist shook the bedroom window. Ben's heart banged too – just as loud. In his shock, he gripped the old telescope so tight he almost crushed its thin plastic body. Ben gasped and twisted around to look. A pigeon had hit the outside of the window in the dark, its wings smacking, smacking, smacking the glass. It had terrified yellow eyes.

Ben half-jumped, half-fell in his scramble down the ladder to tell Dad.