

SCARE B'N'B

**GHOULS JUST
WANNA HAVE FUN**

Illustrated by
Rachael
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CATHERINE DOYLE

BLOOMSBURY

Praise for

SCARE B'n'B

'I am always excited for a new Catherine Doyle book – and *Scare B'n'B* is Doyle at her funniest, silliest, spookiest yet! But it is still full of heart and hope – and is frightfully fantastic'

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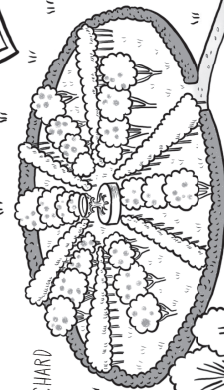
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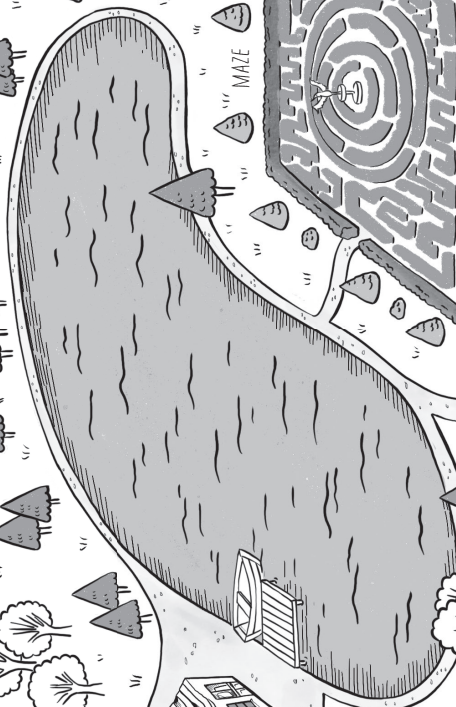
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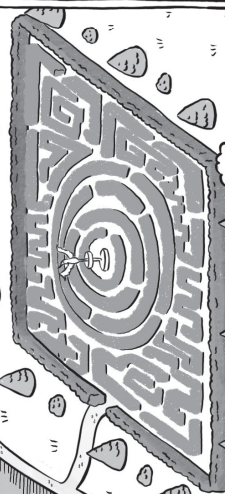
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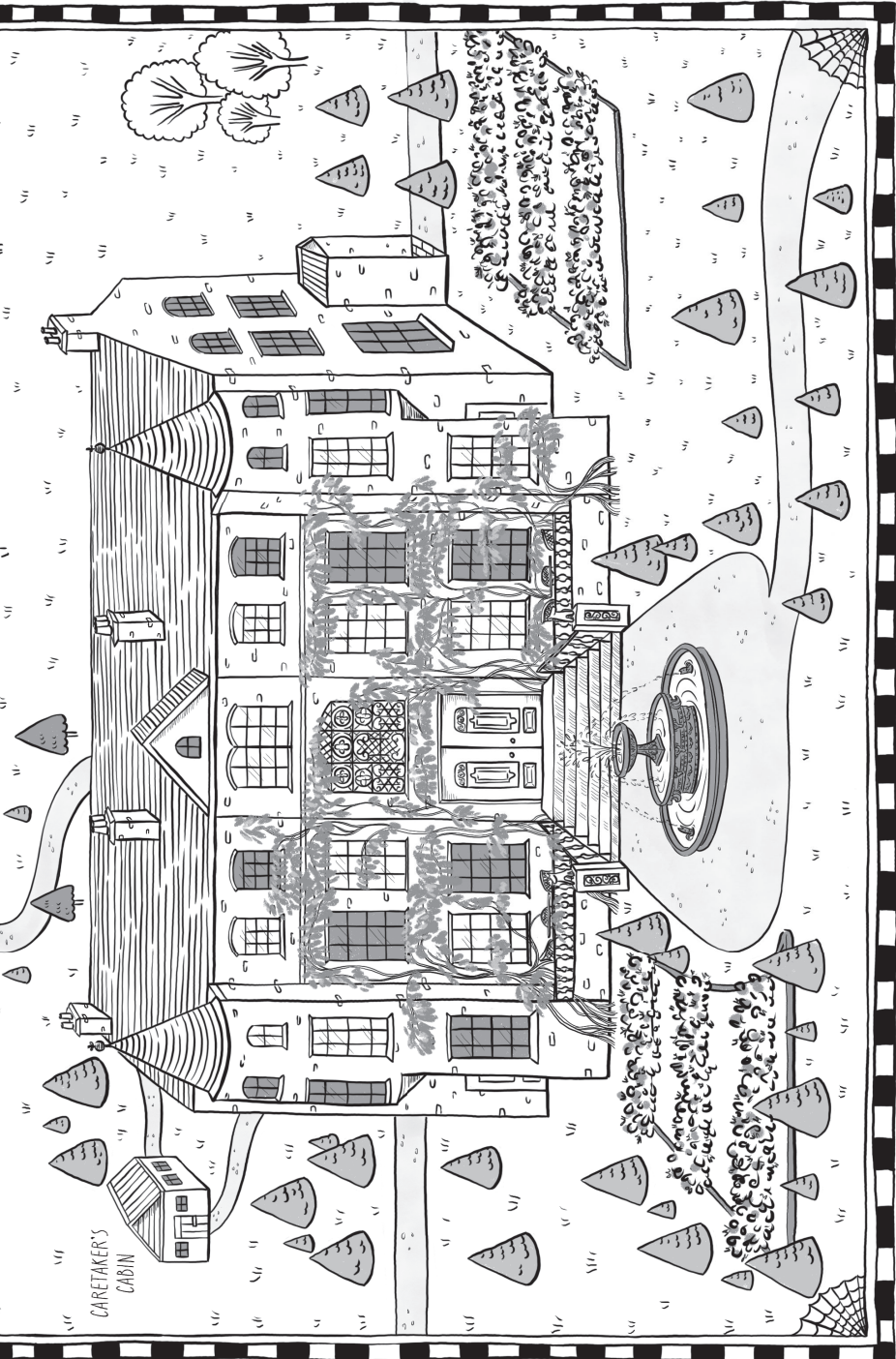


OLD
BOATHOUSE



STABLES





CARETAKER'S
CABIN

Chapter One

The Crooked Tree

Ted McKenley was about to be squished by a giant Christmas tree.

He never should have volunteered to fix the base. Crawling out from under the trembling branches, he ducked and weaved between a hail of falling baubles.

'I SAID TO HOLD THE TOP STEADY, LUKE!' he yelled to his stepbrother, nearly slipping on a glittery tinsel snake.

Luke stood halfway up the grand staircase in the festive foyer of Tartarus Hotel, holding the topmost branch of the Christmas tree with one hand and using the other to text.

Ted picked up a bauble and fired it at his head. It bounced off the railing and hurtled backwards, hitting Ted squarely in the face.

A familiar haunting laugh erupted overhead.

Ted glared up at the ceiling. The sound was coming from the Duke of Snoring, the long-dead yet irritatingly ever-present ghost who had appointed himself Chief Spooker of their brand-new hotel. Sure, the sprawling manor had once belonged to him, but that was over *three hundred* years ago!

He really needed to move on.

Instead, the duke was sitting on one of the chandelier branches and laughing so hard that he had to hold his sides together.

Red-faced and fuming, Ted stomped up the stairs and waved his hand directly in front of Luke. 'EARTH TO LUKE!'

As though blinking himself out of a deep sleep, his stepbrother looked up from his phone. 'Huh? What?' he said, completely oblivious to the rattling echo of the duke's laughter.

'You're *bending* the tree. You're supposed to hold it steady.' Ted huffed impatiently. 'Who are you texting

anyway? Can't it wait ten minutes?'

Luke shrugged, before returning to his phone. 'Alice. She wants to know if she left her scarf here.'

Of course it was Alice: the new part-time social media manager at Tartarus Hotel, with whom Luke was completely *obsessed*. At seventeen years old and with 4,212 social media followers of her own, Alice was both way too old and way too cool for Luke. Not that he was letting that put him off.

It was just like Nana Elsie said: *There's no better confidence than complete delusion*.

'Can you *please* just fix the tree?' said Ted.

With an elaborate eye-roll, Luke pocketed his phone and straightened the tree. Then promptly took off in search of Alice's scarf.

Ted glared after him. With Frankie away at boarding school and one-year-old Hazel too young to be of any real use, Ted and Luke had been entrusted with the most important task of the holiday season: decorating the twelve-foot tree in the hotel foyer. Mum wanted it to look *just* right. After all, this was their first Christmas season as a hotel and, thanks to a fast-approaching wedding booking, they were expecting more guests

than ever. For the first time since the grand opening, every room was going to be booked out. Soon, the hotel would be full and heaving, and ... jam-packed with annoying ghosts. Like the one currently swinging on the chandelier.

Ted tried not to think about that now. There were baubles to hang and tinsel to string. Sighing, he trudged across the foyer and started picking up the fallen decorations.

‘I’d help with the tree,’ crooned the duke, who was now hanging upside down from the chandelier like a circus acrobat. ‘But I don’t want to.’

‘You’d probably just find a way to set it on fire anyway,’ grumbled Ted, thinking back to when the duke had tried to burn down the entire hotel during its launch.

‘How dare you!’ The duke’s moustache twitched in offence. ‘I haven’t set a fire in ...’ He paused to count on his fingers. ‘Over *three months*.’

Ted harrumphed. ‘Most people go their whole lives without setting things on fire, you know.’

‘Well, then they haven’t truly lived, Ted.’

‘If that wasn’t bad enough, you’re *still* haunting the

hotel,' Ted pointed out. 'And letting in all kinds of ghostly guests at every hour of the day and night.'

It had made for a stressful autumn for Ted. After Frankie left for boarding school, he was stuck handling the ghostly interference all by himself, while also fitting in his schoolwork *and* chess club every Thursday. Sometimes the ghosts that came to stay were so noisy and disruptive that a guest would end up complaining to Martha, the hotel manager. It was a full-time job trying to keep the peace at Tartarus, not to mention salvage their review score online.

Not that the duke cared.

In fact, he loved the chaos.

Whenever he was bored, the duke insisted on bothering Ted. Like right now. This was probably a good thing, since Mum was in the lounge next door, meeting their first ever VIP wedding clients, and couldn't afford to be interrupted by his usual antics.

According to Martha, who dealt exclusively in gossip and tinned biscuits, the clients were *celebrities*. World-renowned pop star sensation Stylus Sinclair and her husband-to-be, Chadwick Fairweather, heir to the Choco-Doodle-Doo confectionary empire, had chosen

to get married at Tartarus Hotel. It was going to be an eye-wateringly expensive, glitzy, over-the-top spectacle to rival the fanciest of royal weddings. The hotel would soon be heaving with all kinds of aristocrats and famous people, wearing poofy gowns and penguin suits and eating silly food like mini quiches and tiny spoons of caviar. Martha had let slip that they were shipping in fifty swans just for the occasion, and there was even talk of a reindeer or two.

‘If *you* can have guests at the hotel, then why can’t I?’ huffed the duke.

‘Because you’re *dead*. And it’s *not* your hotel,’ said Ted, for the millionth time in three months. ‘Your guests don’t even pay any money!’

The duke clucked his tongue. ‘You are *so* materialistic.’

Ted was so distracted by their argument that he didn’t hear the click-clack of approaching heels or the concerned murmurs coming from behind him until Mum’s voice wafted across the foyer.

‘Who are you talking to, love?’

Ted spun on his heel to find three figures frowning at him. He could tell by the huge glittery heels and

rock-hard tower of blonde hair that the tiny woman on Mum's left was Stylus Sinclair. She had that famous look about her. Like in the right slant of sunlight, she might sparkle.

Which meant the bland-faced beanpole of a man with the swoopy hair must be her fiancé: Chadwick Fairweather, heir to the most famous chocolate company in the world. In his dark purple suit and bright gold neck scarf, he looked a bit like a chocolate bar himself.

They were all staring at Ted in bewilderment, entirely unaware of the ghost snickering on the ceiling.

Ted forced a smile. 'I was just ... making a wish. On the chandelier.' He pointed upwards. 'It's good luck. Especially in December.'

There was an awkward stretch of silence.

Then, to his surprise, Stylus Sinclair piped up. 'Well, don't hog *all* the magic!' With a look of fierce determination, she marched into the middle of the foyer, smoothed her mane of blonde hair back and looked up at the chandelier. Clearing her voice with a pointed squeak, she announced, 'I wish for my wedding to be so grand and so spectacular that everyone will be talking about it for years to come!'



The duke gave a sinister chuckle. 'That glittery little gnome has no idea what she's asking for.'

'Well said, darling,' said Chadwick Fairweather, looking slightly embarrassed. 'Now, we really should get going.'

Still holding his strained smile, Ted waved them off.

'Did you see that eyesore of a suit?' sneered the duke once the door had closed behind them. 'Talk about an arrestable offence. And that arrogant swoop of hair ... I swear there's something so *familiar* about it.'

Ignoring his prattling commentary, Ted went back to decorating the tree. When the last bauble had been hung and the branches were dripping with tinsel, he grabbed the sparkly gold star from the box and climbed up the stairs. Leaning over the banister, he stretched towards the topmost branch.

The duke floated down to the floor to circle the tree. 'It's still crooked.'

'*Shh*,' Ted muttered. 'You're starting to give me a headache.'

'You have a headache? Try being dead for three hundred and fifty years.'

Ted finally ran out of patience. ‘No one is making you stay here. Why don’t you do everyone a favour and just go *away*?’

The foyer went abruptly quiet. Ted guessed the duke had tottered off in a huff somewhere. He was prone to the odd tantrum or seven. Especially on a Tuesday.

He fixed the star in place, then hurried down the stairs for a final look.

A gust whipped up from nowhere.

The tree swayed. *Oh no*.

Twice. *Please no*.

Three times. NOOOO!

Ted dived for cover under a bench as the tree came crashing down. The room exploded into a riot of broken baubles, flattened tinsel and scattered pine needles.

When Ted looked up, the duke was smirking at him from the first-floor landing. ‘Told you it was crooked,’ he said.

Then he turned on his heel and flounced away.