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Opening extract from

Young Werewolf

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1. AN EERIE ENCOUNTER

It happened on a Sunday evening in October.

A horrid evening.

Matt and Lisa had gone to the cinema. When they stepped out onto the street after the film, it was already dark. Matt didn't like the dark. If it was up to him, he would have banned the night a long time ago. The night and the moon and everything else that went with it.

A cold, wet wind blew into Matt and Lisa's faces. It whipped up the fallen leaves. People turned up their collars as they rushed home. Dogs growled at each other. And above them

all, the moon hung milky white between the clouds.

"What a stupid film," Lisa said. "Totally stupid."

Without another word she started towards home. She took such long strides that Matt had trouble keeping up, as usual. Lisa was a head taller than Matt, and she was his very best friend.

"I didn't think the film was that bad," Matt said.

"You don't say," Lisa mocked.

Matt and Lisa did not like the same films. Lisa liked anything with animals. Matt liked space stories. Lisa liked films where everyone was terribly nice to each other. Matt liked ones crammed with baddies. But they both enjoyed arguing about films, much more than they enjoyed the films themselves.

They turned into the small path that led to the railway underpass. Their breath hung in the air like white smoke.

"Brrr!" Lisa's face screwed up. "I hate going through here. It smells and it's creepy."

"Oh, come on," Matt said. After he had watched a film, he always felt a little braver than usual.

The underpass gaped like a black mouth. It did not look very welcoming at all, but it was the shortest way home.

Lisa took Matt's hand. "Yuck!" she said. "It smells worse than usual today, doesn't it? And there's something different about the smell ..." Her steps made eerie echoes in the darkness, and her voice sounded strange and hollow. "Hello?" she called. "Is anybody there?"

"Lisa, stop that!" Matt said. He felt his way along the cold, wet tunnel wall. In his

imagination, he was Commander Matt and he had landed on an unexplored planet. But the darkness made his heart race, even as Commander Matt.

A train thundered above their heads. Then the silence returned.

"Matt!" Lisa whispered. "Matt, look over there."

"Stop the stupid jokes!" Matt growled back.

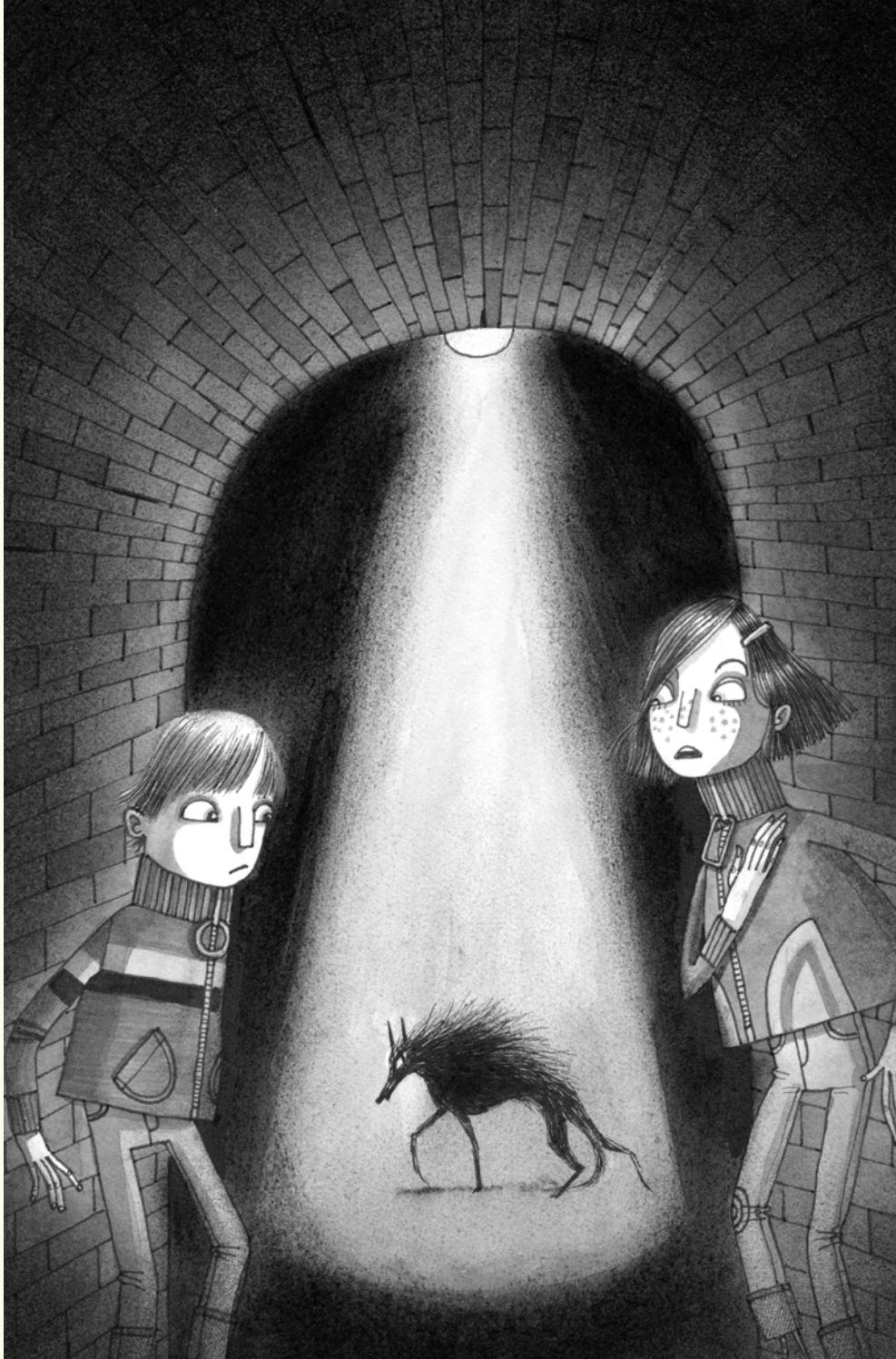
But Lisa wasn't joking.

The light of a street lamp glowed at the other end of the tunnel. And right there, just one step from the exit, Matt saw a dark shape.

It wasn't human. A fox, perhaps? No ... a dog.

"Great," said Matt. "You like dogs, don't you?"

Matt didn't like dogs at all. Not one bit.



"I don't like that one," Lisa whispered. "It looks scary. Hadn't we better turn back?"

Matt shook his head. Nonsense! Turn back because of a dog? He could imagine what his big brother would have to say about that. He took a deep breath and walked towards the dark shape.

As Matt got nearer, the dog lifted its head and sniffed. Its eyes were bright yellow, like glowing amber. Its tail was firmly tucked between its legs.

Matt squeezed against the tunnel wall. The more distance he could put between that pointed muzzle and himself, the better.

"It's got yellow eyes!" Lisa hissed. "No dog has yellow eyes." She tried to pull Matt away by his arm. "Get away! That's a wolf. A real wolf!"

"Rubbish!" Matt pushed himself further along the tunnel wall. This was ridiculous. Who ever heard of a wolf in the middle of the city?

The dog lifted its head and followed him with its eyes. They glowed in the darkness like golden fires.

Matt was just about to push past when his foot hit an empty drink can. With a great deal of noise, it rolled against the dog's paws.

Matt gave a start.

Lisa screamed.

And the dog snapped at Matt's hand.

It was as quick as lightning. So quick that it hardly hurt.

Then the dog made a leap and vanished into the darkness.

"He bit you!" Lisa screamed. "Oh no, he bit you! Does it hurt?"

"No," Matt muttered. He stared at the black tunnel wall. Best not to look at his hand.

"Come on!" Lisa said. She pulled Matt out of the tunnel and over to a street light.

Matt screwed his eyes shut and held out his hand. It felt very hot. Hot and throbbing.

"You were lucky!" Lisa said. "It doesn't look that bad."

"Really?" Matt still didn't dare to look at his hand. He was sure it was an awful mess. "Isn't it, like, all torn up and stuff?" he asked.

"Not at all!" Lisa giggled. "It's just a scratch."

Matt opened his eyes. "I can't stand seeing blood. It makes me feel all weird."

"Who'd have thought it?" Lisa said. She pulled a tissue from her jacket pocket and wrapped it round his hand. "What about those films you always drag me to? They're full of blood!"

"Films are different," Matt said.

On shaky legs, Matt followed Lisa across the street and past the shops that were closing for the night. At last, they reached the building where both of them lived. Matt was on the ground floor, Lisa right at the top.

"OK, then." Lisa pushed the door open. "Go and see a doctor tomorrow, yeah? In case of rabies."

"Yeah, yeah!" Matt watched as she skipped up the stairs on her long legs. Then he hid his hand in his jacket pocket and pressed the doorbell.