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Opening extract from

The Haunting of Uncle Ron

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For Joseph

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Chapter 1

Spooky!

There I was, staring out of the window.

We had new people moving in next door and there was a girl. She looked AY-MAY-ZING in her bobble hat and stripy socks. And she looked nice as well.

Then I saw a taxi stop outside our gate, and Uncle Ron got out.

Uncle Ron is the sort of visitor that no one wants. He doesn't warn you he's coming. He just arrives on your door step with two giant suitcases, and beams at you.

"Surprise!" he says, as if everyone should be happy to see him. "Surprise!"

And it's not a nice surprise, either.



Uncle Ron never says how long he plans to stay. He's always stuffing his face. He has three meals a day when he's here, and he eats non-stop snacks. He leaves crumbs on the kitchen counters, and he brews strange herbal teas until our tea pot stinks of things like fennel and rose hips. Uncle Ron thinks that someone else will wash and iron all his clothes without so much as a "thank you" from him.



And he spends all day talking to old, dead people.

"What?" I asked Mum one morning. "Uncle Ron really talks to ghosts and ghoulies?"

"No," Mum said. "No one as interesting as that. Just boring old dead people." She saw the look on my face. "He talks to spirits, Ian," she explained. "Shades from the other world. People who have 'passed over'. People who are dead."

I gave a little shiver. "Spooky! What do they want?" I said.

"Just listen in," said Mum. "You'll find he chats to them about where he may have left a missing sock. Or whether the red spotty tea-towel might have fallen behind the fridge. Or if his best blue underpants are in the wash."

"Why would a spirit bother to come back from the Other World to chat to Uncle Ron

about something as boring as where he might have left his socks?" I asked.

"Search me," said Mum.

"But have you heard these spirits talking?" I demanded.

"Of course not," Mum said. "They're just in his head. The problem is that Uncle Ron has no imagination. That's why his chats to all the people in the Other World are about dull things like missing socks, instead of something interesting like missing bodies, or the looming threat of plague, disaster or death."