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Opening extract from

Young Monsters

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For Linda and Ian

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Contents

1 Sent Away 1

2 The Head 8

3 Grout 17

4 Bolted 24

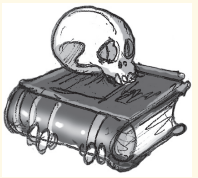
5 The Task 33

6 Into the Wild 39

7 Horror of Horrors 43

8 The School Spectre 51





Chapter 1
Sent Away

Lon's father was forever calling him a "young monster". Lon didn't like this at all, but his father was a stern man. To tell the truth, Lon was a bit afraid of him. One day his father said –

"Lon, pack your bags. I'm sending you away."

"Away?" Lon gulped.

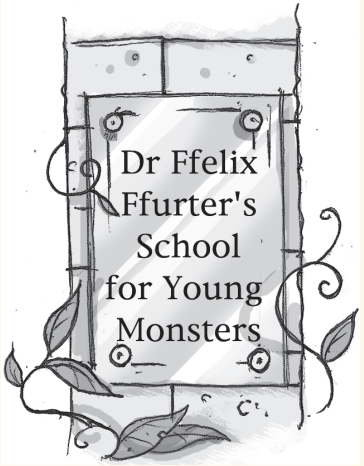
"To my old boarding school where they know just what to do with young monsters like you. I'll be popping in to see how you're getting on and, if I don't see improvements very soon, I shall be most unhappy."

So Lon was sent off in a pony and cart to his father's old boarding school. As they neared the gates, the pony reared up, almost tipping Lon and the driver out.

"Whoa, boy! Steady, steady!" the driver said. When the pony had settled down, the driver said to Lon, "This is as far as I'm taking you. Old Nell won't go through these gates."

Lon got down from the trap. The driver threw his bag out after him and drove away at speed. Lon stood at the gates of his new school, looking at the big sign beside them.

All of a sudden, a sharp voice said, "What is your business here?" The words came from the gates themselves.



"I've been sent to study here," Lon replied.

"Another young monster!" the gates cried, and they swung open with a sound like sharp knives scraping across dinner plates. "Well, come in, come in. If you think I'm going to waste my day talking to you, you're wrong."

Lon walked inside. "Thanks very much," he said as the gates grumbled shut. He was a polite boy.

At the end of the weed-covered drive there stood a huge ramshackle house. When



Lon reached the front door, he seized the great iron knocker and banged it as hard as he dared. There was a pause. A really long pause, in which there was no sound of any kind. It was the kind of pause that gives a person ... how can I put it? The willies.

But then the door creaked open. Very, very slowly. Very, very creakily. Lon expected to find someone standing on the other side, but there was no one there. He went in, and found himself in a massive entrance hall full of cobwebs and shadows and rusty suits of armour.

"H-hello?" he said timidly as the door closed behind him. "Is there anybody here?"

He thought he heard a cackle of laughter. He looked about but could see no one. He decided he must have imagined it. But he did not imagine the large cat that ran at him and sank its sharp little teeth into his ankle.

“Eeeeeeyoooowaaaaaaaah!” said Lon (or something rather like it).

The echo of Lon’s screech of pain bounced around from wall to wall and up and down the stairs for some time before it got fed up and fell to the floor in a sulk. Another silent willies-ish pause might have started up then if it had not been for the voice.

“You mustn’t mind Tiddles,” the voice said. “He loves boys’ ankles, that’s all.”

It was a muffled voice, and it seemed to come from a large bowl of fruit on a tall trolley.

“Wh-where are you?” Lon said with a gulp.

“Somewhere between the grapes, the bananas and the rotten apples,” the voice replied.

Lon removed some of the fruit and peered into the fruit bowl. There, right in the middle, was a human head.

And it was looking right at him.

