

## The Smiling Ghost

‘Mam says there’s no such thing as ghosts,’ Emily chants to her best friend, Maggie.

Maggie shrugs her shoulders. ‘Well, I don’t care what your mam says because I saw it!’

Emily sets off to walk across the park towards home. She doesn’t want to hear anymore from Maggie because she is scared. Her brother has a spooky ghost-story book in his room, and she doesn’t like the pictures in it.

She can hear Maggie skipping along behind her and she kicks at the pebbles on the side of the path.

‘Wait up,’ Maggie calls.

But she hurries on. ‘Shut up!’ she yells. ‘You’re just showing off and making it all up.’

‘I’m not, Emily. It was a big white cloud that floated down on me when I was lying on the top bunk.’

Emily bites her lip. She knows what her mam would say and tells her friend, ‘You probably just got tangled up in the sheet.’

‘I...I didn’t,’ Maggie claims and stops to catch her breath. She starts to cough.

Emily stops when she hears Maggie coughing. Her Mam told her that Maggie has a bad chest and her mum is worried about her.

She turns around and Maggie is bent over with her hands on her knees just above her red shorts. Her head is down, and she coughs some more for a longer time then spits out some yellow gluey stuff onto the path.

Emily hurries to her and puts her hand on Maggie’s shoulder. She can feel her skinny bones shaking. Emily knows her shoulders have much more muscle on them. ‘Are you alright now?’

Maggie lifts her head up and gasps trying to catch her breath. She usually has rosy cheeks, but her face is pale. She looks like she’s been crying. She runs to Maggie’s house and tells her mum.

Maggie wipes her eyes. ‘I was coughed up,’ she says.

Emily is not convinced but figures she will take her hand just in case. It feels cold and a bit damp. They start to walk slowly through the park and Maggie mentions the ghost again.

‘Okay, tell me what the ghost really looked like,’ Emily says. ‘I bet it went, Ooooooo.’

Maggie giggles and swings their hands together backwards and forwards. ‘Nah, of course it didn’t. But it was friendly-like.’

‘Friendly!’ Emily hoots. ‘How can a ghost be friendly?’

‘Because it smiled at me.’

Emily giggles. ‘Ghosts can’t smile,’ she says, and feels happier now because her friend’s cheeks are pink and shining again.

‘I’m telling you, Em,’ she says. ‘Most of the sheet was covering it’s body but there were two circles cut out for it’s eyes, which were blue by the way, and a long slit for it’s nose and then a bigger moon-shape for its mouth.’

Emily screws her nose up and imagines the moon-shape. ‘So, could you see it’s lips in the hole?’

Maggie nods. ‘Yeah, that’s how I knew it was smiling at me,’ she says. ‘They were bright red like my mum’s lipstick.’

They reach the edge of the park and Emily can feel Maggie’s hand is warm again but all the same she reckons she should walk with her to her house.

‘And, Em, do you want to know what the ghost said to me?’

Emily nods then smiles when she sees Maggie’s mum come to the gate to meet them. She is glad they are home and knows her mum will look after her. ‘Go on, then. What did it say?’