


They say twins  
have a psychic connection,  
and for Jake and Jenna that means with  
ghosts too...



HAUNTED  
HOUSE  
MARY  
HOOPER

# HAUNTED HOUSE

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# CHAPTER ONE

It was Jenna who saw the dog first, but it was me who worked out that it was a ghost. I mean, my sister's a bit dippy but she's not actually raving. If she said she saw a dog – a little brown and black beagle – and I didn't, then it had to be a ghost.

We'd only been living in Bensbury a few days when she first saw it. Three days, and it already felt too long. We'd just moved from a suburb near London with a football pitch, swimming pool, skateboard park and millions of people, to Bensbury, where there was nothing to do and about twelve people. Well, OK, I'm exaggerating a bit, but there was no pool or pitch, and the school Jenna and I had to go to in September was

a six kilometre bus ride away. What there was in Bensbury, apparently, was something mysterious called the “quality of life”.

“The quality of life,” Mum kept saying to us – like whenever we complained about there being nothing to do – “is so much better in the country. You’ll find things to do in good time. You’ll have *hobbies*. Nice country hobbies.”

She said that on our first Monday morning, when Jenna and I were staring out of the window of the shop and moaning, sighing and gnashing our teeth.

“You just have to look for things to do.” She shook her head. “I don’t know – I went to all the trouble of having twins so that you’d be company for each other. Why can’t you just play together nicely?”

“*Play* together?” I snorted. “What, like with fuzzy-felt or something?”

“As if!” Jenna said.

Jenna and I had never really knocked around together – never had to, because we’d always had our own mates before. In the holidays she’d have been doing girly things with them while I’d have been outside kicking a ball.

“You could always help me in the shop,” Mum

added. She was in charge of Bensbury's only general store and post office, and we were living in two rooms at the back of it and three over the top. OK, it was bigger than our flat in town which overlooked the gas works, but give me gas works over green fields any time.

And as for helping Mum – well, that depended. I didn't mind refilling the glass case containing chocolate bars and quite liked stacking packets of biscuits, but didn't want to do anything with boring household stuff you couldn't eat.

At nine o'clock Mum rolled up the blind which hung over the post office counter, ready for business. "Why don't you two both stand by, ready to be helpful?" she said. "You can say good morning to people, Jenna, and open doors for them, and you, Jake, can pack their shopping and carry things to their cars."

"I'd rather go outside and practise my silky right foot crosses," I said. "Just in case a talent scout comes along."

Jenna laughed scornfully. "You think you're so good, don't you? You think you're Beckham."

"As matter of fact I *am* pretty ace on the pitch."

"In your dreams. . ."

“Twins!” Mum said warningly. And then she added, “Anyway, no ball games on the green, Jake. It says so – there’s a notice out there.”

“Oh, brilliant,” I said bitterly.

And so, having nothing else to do (Mum already having banned football from the shop) Jenna and I both slouched behind the counter. I positioned myself near the chocolate raisins. Later, I thought, a few might accidentally fall out of the jar and into my mouth.

“I’ll introduce you to the customers,” Mum said, “and when they tell us their names, try and remember them so that the next time you see them you can use them. We want to be accepted here and it’s polite little touches like that which will make all the difference.”

“Oh, joy. . .” I said.

“Polite little touches. . .” Jenna added in an agonized voice.

So, we slouched there and waited and waited, but as hardly anyone lived in the village, customers weren’t exactly pouring through the door fighting to be served. In fact, it was nearly ten o’clock before anyone came in at all. In the meantime Jenna and I occupied ourselves by pressing our noses against the glass door, one

inside and one outside, and seeing who could make the worst, most horrible face at each other. Mum was out the back adding up columns of numbers and didn't know what we were doing until she came out and saw that the door had gone all breathed-on and sticky, and then she stopped us. After that, we just stared out of the window at . . . nothing. Or practically nothing.

Outside our shop was a grassy road, and on the other side was the village green, which had a few trees and bushes and a small pond (and also a notice saying No Ball Games, apparently). On the other side of the green was a pub called the Unicorn; scattered around were some lines of cottages and, further off, a church. If you went down one of the roads off the green you came to an estate of modern houses, and then some farms and a huge house called the Manor.

That was about it, unless you counted cows and stuff, and I didn't. It was the sort of cosy, flowery village you get a photo of on a calendar; one of those places where nothing ever happens. The cottages were mostly of the thatched, twee sort – apart from one on the far side of the green which looked really out of place. It might sound



funny put this way, but if the other houses were all cosy and smiley, this one wasn't. This one was frowning. It was bigger than the two on either side of it and was dark and run-down, with blackened windows and a front garden tangled with overgrown trees and creepers. I pointed it out to Jenna and we agreed that there was something weird about it, but it wasn't until later that we discovered exactly what this something weird was.

As the customers started coming in that morning I cheered up a bit because we'd got an excellent game going. Mum had told us that a good way to remember people's names was to think of a word which described them and which was similar to their actual name, so when you saw them again their appearance or their manner would remind you of what they were called. Like, one of the first people to come in was Major Butley, who was a big man with a fat, pink face.

"Bumface Butley," I said immediately after he'd gone out.

"Good one!" Jenna said.

The next man in was Mr Green, and when we said, "Good morning," he said, "Is it?" and then started going into one about moles that were

messing up his garden with molehills, how there were no daily bus services any more and how the village hall was an eyesore.

“Grouchy Green,” Jenna whispered to me.

After that we had quite a laugh. Mrs Snape (who was either snorting into a hanky the whole time, or sniffing) became Snotty Snape, Miss Hall (great big teeth and hair up in a ponytail) became Horseface Hall, hairy Mr Gibbs became Gibbon Gibbs, bald Mr Slade was Slaphead Slade. Miss Ratcliffe, who wore a tatty bit of fur around her neck and had a face like a ferret, became Ratty Ratcliffe and enormous Mrs Hugo was Mrs Huge-o. There were also a few ruder ones which we didn't tell Mum about.

It was surprising how well it worked to help us remember, actually, because later in the day when we saw the people we'd named, either in the shop or about the village, Jenna or I would say, “There's Moaning Mowlem,” or “There goes Piggy Pinder.”

About five o'clock that first day, just as Mum was about to pull down the post office blind, a new woman rushed in. She introduced herself as Mrs Scudder and said she worked as a carer for several of the older residents in the village,

including an old Mr Dudley who lived in the row of cottages diagonally across the green from our shop.

The woman looked all of a mess, hair everywhere, her blouse sticking out of her skirt and a smudge of paint down one cheek. “Mrs Scudder is *scatty*,” I whispered to Jenna, and she nodded in agreement, grinning.

“Mr Dudley’s a lovely old chap but he’s on his last legs, I’m afraid,” Mrs Scudder said to Mum. “He can’t get out now, he’s practically bedridden, so I look after him and do all his little errands.”

“Mr Dudley is *doddery*,” Jenna whispered.

It seemed that Mr Dudley needed some milk and teabags and other stuff, and as Mrs Scatty Scudder was in a hurry to get home (she was sure she’d left the cooker on), Mum told her that Jenna and I would deliver Mr Dudley’s groceries.

It was just then, as we came out of our shop with a cardboard box full of stuff for Doddery Dudley, that Jenna saw the dog.

She pointed across to the row of cottages. “Ooh! Look at that dog sitting outside there,” she said. “So sweet! I *love* beagles.”

“You love anything with four legs and a woof. Or four legs and a miaow,” I responded wittily.

“I especially love beagles!” she said.

I looked where she was looking, but couldn't see a thing.

“Beagle?” I said, mystified. “What are you talking about?” I looked up. “D’you mean eagle?”

“Of course I don't mean eagle, you dumbbo!” Jenna said. “I think I know the difference between a dog and a bird.”

“I can't see any dog.”

“There!” She pointed again, and then she said, “Oh.” Just like that.

“What d’you mean – *oh?*”

“It disappeared,” she said in a stunned voice. “Just disappeared into thin air. One minute I was looking at it, the next it had gone.”

I shook my head despairingly. “Sometimes I wonder if you were dropped on the head as a baby.”

For once she didn't come back with something, but just stood there, staring at where the not-dog had been.

We walked on to Doddery Dudley's – who was so doddery that we weren't allowed to knock at

his brass lion's head door-knocker in case it disturbed him. We had to leave the cardboard box outside ready for Scatty Scudder to take in when she came back at seven o'clock to do his supper and get him ready for bed.

"I really did see a dog," Jenna said as we came out of Mr Dudley's gate. "It was sitting right outside here on the grass."

"Well, it isn't now."

She frowned. "Where did it go, then? I mean, it didn't run across the green, or we would have seen it. Maybe it ran down a hole or something. They have those in the country, don't they? Animals dig them – badgers and rabbits live in them."

"Dunno," I said. I didn't know a thing about the country. Cows might have dug holes, for all I knew. But it was then that I thought of what it might be. "Perhaps it was a ghost dog," I said.

Jenna looked at me. "What?"

"Bet it was!" I said, suddenly feeling more interested in the whole deal. "I've just read a book about a ghost dog. It was a werewolf and it used to come in the night and bite people so that they died of a horrible disease." I made a blood-curdling noise as I said this, and leaped at Jenna's neck.

“It didn’t look like a werewolf,” Jenna said, brushing me off. “More like a cute fluffy toy.”

“Well, it would do – living here,” I said. I wasn’t sure right then whether I truly believed it was a ghost, but thought I might as well pretend it was. It would make the place more interesting. “It was *definitely* a ghost dog,” I added.

“Well, OK, just supposing it was,” said Jenna, “How come I saw it and you didn’t?”

“Hmm. . .” was all I said, because I didn’t really have any answer to that.

As we walked back towards the shop a man came trudging towards us scowling at nothing. It was warm, but he was wearing a thick tweed jacket and had a weird hat with earflaps on it. “Who’s this?” I whispered to Jenna.

“Grouchy Green,” she whispered back, then she nudged me and said in a false, polite voice such as Mum likes us to use, “Hello, Mr Green!”

“It’s a lovely evening, Mr Green,” I added.

“Is it?” said Grouchy Green, scowling deeply at us. “And who might you be?”

“We’re from the shop. You met us this morning.”

“Ah, yes, the pigeon pair,” he said, and before we could work out what this meant, added, “And

it *might* be a nice evening, but only for those that don't live next door to haunted houses."

Jenna and I looked at each other, and then I turned and caught up with him. "Excuse me," I said politely, "where is it you live, exactly?"

"Back of the green," he grunted, pointing. "Next to *that*."

I looked over to where he was pointing, which was the frowning sort of house I'd noticed earlier. "Oh. *That* one," I said.

He grunted and started walking off again, but Jenna was there next to me by then, as nosey as ever. "Haunted? Is there a ghost there?" she asked him.

He gave her a sharp look. "I hear noises. Thumpings. Screams when there's no one there. A ghost is what I calls it."

"And has the house always been like that? Always haunted?" I asked.

"I've been living here forty-three years," Grouchy said, "it's always been haunted and it gets worse around this time of the year. If you ask me, there are unquiet spirits in that house. Restless souls."

When he said this I got really excited: unquiet spirits, restless souls. *Brilliant*.

“Do you know why? Why the . . . er . . . spirits are unquiet?” I asked.

“Oh aye,” he said. “It was way back – Victorian times, so they say. A blacksmith married a young French girl and they went to live there, but she disappeared on the day after the wedding.”

“Where did she go?” Jenna asked.

“No one knows,” Grouchy said. “And they say he – the blacksmith – went alooking for her, then died of a broken heart when he couldn’t find her. Now he haunts the house searching for her, moaning like anything. People have tried to live there – twenty years back Mr Starr tried it – but they never stay.”

“Wow!” I said. “Fantastic.”

“Oh, it’s not, Jake.” Jenna put her concerned face on. “I think it’s really sad.”

“You may think it’s sad,” said Grouchy, “I think it’s blasted annoying. Weeping, wailing and carrying on and keeping good folk from their sleep. . .” And saying that, he shuffled off, muttering to himself.

“Just think,” Jenna said, staring across the green. “There’s a haunted house here. . .”

“And a ghost dog,” I added.



“So maybe it won’t be quite as boring as we thought.”

“Hey,” I said, “Mum wanted us to find something to do, didn’t she? She wanted us to have a hobby. Well, this is going to be it. We’re going to be ghost hunters.”