

# SPOOKSMITHS INVESTIGATE THE CINDERMAN

Don't expect a warning,  
The Cinderman is calling,  
Ashes, ashes,  
Beware his name!

*For Mum and Dad,  
thank you for everything.*

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**SPOOKSMITHS  
INVESTIGATE  
THE CINDERMAN**

**ALEX ATKINSON**



USBORNE

# MAP of GREYSCAR

BEACH

KEEP OUT

GREYSCAR MINE

DANGER

KEEP OUT

GREYSCAR HOUSE

LITTLE HOPE GRAVEYARD

CREEP IT REAL HUT

COAL ROAD

SALTBURN ST.

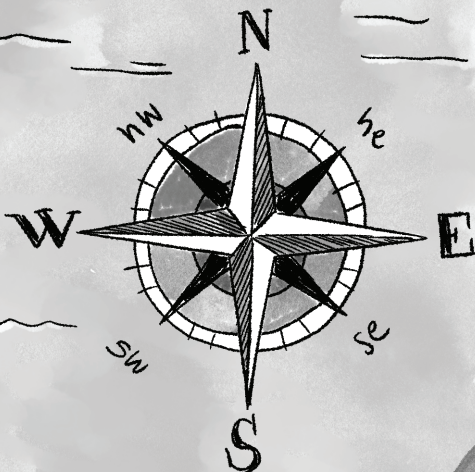
SALTBURN ACADEMY



WRECK



ISLAND



NORTH SEA

Sadie's House



INDIGO & RUSTY'S HOME

BEACH



LIBRARY

CRIMSON CRESCENT

LANTERN LANE



Dexter's House



GALLOWS HILL



MRS MAUDLIN'S SHOP

DEADMAN'S DRIVE



SEAVIEW RISE





Most twelve-year-olds would be creeped-out standing alone in a graveyard at dusk.

I'm not most twelve-year-olds.

Growing up in a funeral home, I know the dead don't come back and ghosts only exist in stories.

I check Dad isn't watching and push further into the long grass, the sweet smell of pollen washed away by the salty sea breeze. Ahead is the cliff top and what remains of Little Hope Church: a crumbling tower surrounded by lichen-covered graves. It's the perfect habitat for one of my favourite animals.

High above my head, a single shadow zigzags through the darkening sky. I freeze, my breath catching in my throat, and listen hard. Most bat calls can only be heard with a special detector, but my

hearing seems to be getting better with age. I can make out its high-pitched squeak-clicks above the crash of the waves.

The creature weaves through the air, fast and jerky as it ducks and dives, catching insects on the wing. A single pipistrelle bat can eat up to 3,000 insects in one night. That's the same as a human eating sixty roast dinners in a day. Mind-blowing. Or, in this case, stomach-busting.

Even though I can quote at least another million wildlife facts, Dad thinks my animal obsession is just a phase. No matter how many times I tell him I'm going to be a vet, he thinks I'll eventually join the family business like he did.

Me? A funeral director? I'd rather swallow a spider in my sleep! (That's an urban myth by the way. Snoring scares arachnids away.)

More bats are appearing now, shooting out of the belfry at electrifying speeds. I wade through a patch of ox-eye daisies and sit down, leaning against an unnamed gravestone covered in honeysuckle. I inhale the vanilla scent of the flowers – Grandpa would have been proud I identified them so quickly – and sit back to enjoy the show.

“Indigo?”

Ugh. Dad has remembered me. He's been chatting to the Rev about moving the cliff-top graves to the new churchyard. The Rev doesn't do quick conversations. He took so long over



our next-door neighbour's christening I thought baby Harvey would be ready for secondary school before the service was over.

If I'm quiet, maybe the two of them will keep blathering on...

"Indigo!"

Or maybe not.

I sit up.

"Are you there?" Dad shouts.

There's no right answer. He knows I'm in the graveyard. And I know I'm not supposed to be. Something about it being dangerous, but I wasn't really paying attention.

It's best I keep out of sight, so I start crawling back the way I came. At least, I think it's the way I came. It looks different on all fours, long grass hitting me in the face. I nearly impale a hand on some broken railings.

If I can just make it back to the hearse without collecting some *grave* injury (sorry), I can pretend I've been reading something worthy. There's a copy of *From Sibling Rivals to Best Friends* in the car door. The title makes me want to throw up, but Mum's been pushing me to read it ever since she started her counselling course.

My knee crunches down on a sharp stone and I bite my bottom lip to stop from crying out. Crawling hurts. How do

babies do it? I'm rubbing my knee better when two heavily polished black shoes stomp down in front of me.

Uh oh.

"Indigo Smith, what do you think you're doing?"

I stand up. The grass and seeds stuck in my hair and all over my tracksuit bottoms tell Dad exactly what I've been doing.

"I cannot believe you ignored me. Again!"

His face is an alarming shade of purple. That, combined with his grey suit makes him look like an angry thundercloud.

"We're moving the graves from this old churchyard for a reason," Dad continues. "It's not safe. Erosion has turned this whole place into a deathtrap!"

Seriously?

"It's a graveyard. Of course it's a deathtrap—"

"Don't get smart with me. In the car. Now!"

My shoulders slump as he strides off, stiff backed. He doesn't get me at all. When Grandpa died of a heart attack three months ago, all Dad's sense of fun and adventure died with him. Sighing, I trail after him, leaving the bats to their twilight dance.

By the time we reach our driveway, I can barely breathe.

The bunch of lilies in the back stink and my nose has been clamped between my fingers for over fifteen minutes.

Without saying a word, I scramble out of the passenger door and suck in a lungful of fresh air.

Our house is one of the oldest in Greyscar. It sits on its own at the far end of the road, a heap of four-hundred-year-old, weather-beaten stone. On one side is a cliff which drops down to the North Sea and on the other is a big yew hedge separating us from the Blessed family next door and the rest of the street.

I think everyone is happy with this arrangement. You see, there are stories about our house – stories about ghosts and ghouls, creeping shadows and bodiless footsteps. I don't believe any of them, but it comes with the territory when you live on a road called Deadman's Drive and your house isn't just a house, but an actual funeral parlour. We even have a black hearse parked in the driveway and gold writing on the big bay window: *Serenity Funerals – A Family Business*.

Dad gets out of the hearse and tosses me the front door keys.

“Put the flowers in the display window and I won't say anything to your mum about you exploring a derelict and dangerous churchyard.”

I groan.

“Got something better to do?”

“Yes.” I jut my chin out defiantly. “I’m going to Dexter’s to see the badgers.”

But Dad’s already walking towards the back garden, tapping at his phone.

There’s no point arguing with someone who refuses to listen. Holding my breath, I collect the flowers from the car and unlock the door to the funeral parlour at the front of the house.

The walls are painted in a soft pink that reminds me of a dog’s tongue. Mum says it’s “comforting”, but any comfort is cancelled out by the gloomy-looking portraits of our gloomy-looking relatives hanging on the walls. They are all equally hideous, apart from the one of Grandpa, all twinkly dark eyes and knowing smile.

I have two work-obsessed parents and a seriously irritating twin brother, Rusty, so Grandpa was the person I shared everything with. The one who encouraged my love of wildlife; who applauded me, aged five, as I identified a dried fox poo; who bought me my first pair of binoculars and taught me that honeysuckle smells like vanilla and that pineapple weed smells like, well, pineapple. I still can’t believe that I’ll never share anything with him again.

A weight settles on my chest, and I look away from the portraits towards the heavy oak desk in the centre of the room. There's one flowery chair behind it and two in front. A wooden floor-to-ceiling bookcase covers the back wall. It's filled with dusty old books no one touches, just the way it was when Grandpa was head undertaker.

Dad says he's kept it the same because it's reassuring for customers to find things unchanged. I think it's so Dad can still feel close to Grandpa. He lived here with us and taught Dad everything he knows about the business. He even made time to paint horrible Battle Beast models with Rusty and got him one of those fancy airbrush kits last Christmas. Rusty says he can't use it now because the nozzle is jammed, but I don't think the nozzle is the problem. I saw him getting all teary last time he took it out of the box.

Grandpa was here and then he was gone and none of us can move past the massive hole he's left in all our lives.

Tears are welling up now, so I concentrate hard on the coffin catalogues on the coffee table. The top copy shows a grinning man sitting inside a wicker casket – hilarious and grim at the same time. I know it's the kind of thing that would have made Grandpa laugh. Luckily, it works on me too. Feeling better, I lock the front door behind me and shove the flowers on the windowsill. Dad could easily have dealt

with the lilies himself, but he seems to enjoy torturing me and Rusty with random tasks. Not that I mind him torturing Rusty...

I'm about to head up to my room to get ready for Dexter's when Beethoven's Fifth Symphony sounds in the hallway. I freeze. It's Dad's ringtone. He answers it: right outside the door to the funeral parlour.

There's no way I'm going out there until he's gone. He'll only give me another job and I'm not missing seeing the badgers at my best friend's house because of some pointless chore.

While I wait for Dad's boring conversation to end, I find myself pulling out a selection of books with titles like *Benedict's History of Undertaking* and *The Life and Times of a Travelling Vicar*. Fascinating. Not. I've no idea why Grandpa wouldn't let anyone touch them.

I replace them and as the last book hits the back of the bookcase, the lights flicker as though in warning. There's a *click* followed by a *creak*. I freeze, staring open-mouthed as a coffin-shaped door swings open in the centre of the bookcase.

There's a secret door in my family's bookcase.

A secret door with steps going down behind it...

It's the entrance to a basement. Or a dungeon. Or maybe



it's a bat cave. I let out a nervous laugh, but I'm more excited than scared. I have so many questions. I could – and probably should – get Mum or Dad, but they'll just tell me it's dangerous and stop me investigating...

Or maybe they already know about the secret door and have kept it hidden? A familiar fizz of anger bubbles in my belly. It would be so typical of them to keep something like this quiet. I can hear their disapproving voices in my head: *It's too dark and dangerous and dirty.*

I'm going in.

The doorway doesn't reach down to the floor like a normal door. It's two shelves up, so I have to climb inside, ducking to avoid the clusters of spider's webs dangling from the ceiling. The light behind me illuminates a set of twisting stone steps. I take a deep breath and immediately regret it: the air in here is stinkier than Rusty's bedroom, like dust mixed with sweaty socks.

Halfway down, the stairs twist to the left, a pillar blocking the light from above. The next step down is in complete darkness. I curse myself for not having my phone on me, but heading back up to get it and being caught by Dad isn't an option, so I keep going, holding the wall to guide me. Maybe there's a light switch further down.

Five more steps and I reach the bottom. There's a faint

whispering sound, but it's probably just the pipes from the house. I take a few hesitant, shuffling steps forward and my outstretched hands brush something cold and metallic. The whispering gets louder as I pick the something up. It's the size of a coffee jar and weighs almost nothing.

Intrigued, I shuffle back to the stairs, towards the light. As I climb, the thing seems to get colder. Icy tendrils numb my hands, climbing up my arms towards my heart, leaving me wondering what could be inside.

I round the corner of the basement stairway and a shaft of light from upstairs lands on my hands.

I'm holding a dented, dusty old urn.

The hairs on the back of my neck prickle.

We've got urns all over the place. Why is this one hidden in a secret basement?

As if in answer, the urn lid rattles.

I scream and instinctively throw the urn away. It lands with a clatter somewhere beneath me. The gasping sound that follows chills me to the bone. It sounds like someone taking their first breath in a long time. Heart pounding, I race up the stairs to the doorway pursued by a dry, ash-choked voice:

*"Speak my name."*

I'm so freaked out I can barely remember my own name,

but I think...I think that voice came from whatever –  
or *whoever* – was in that urn.

Which means only one thing: I can hear the dead.