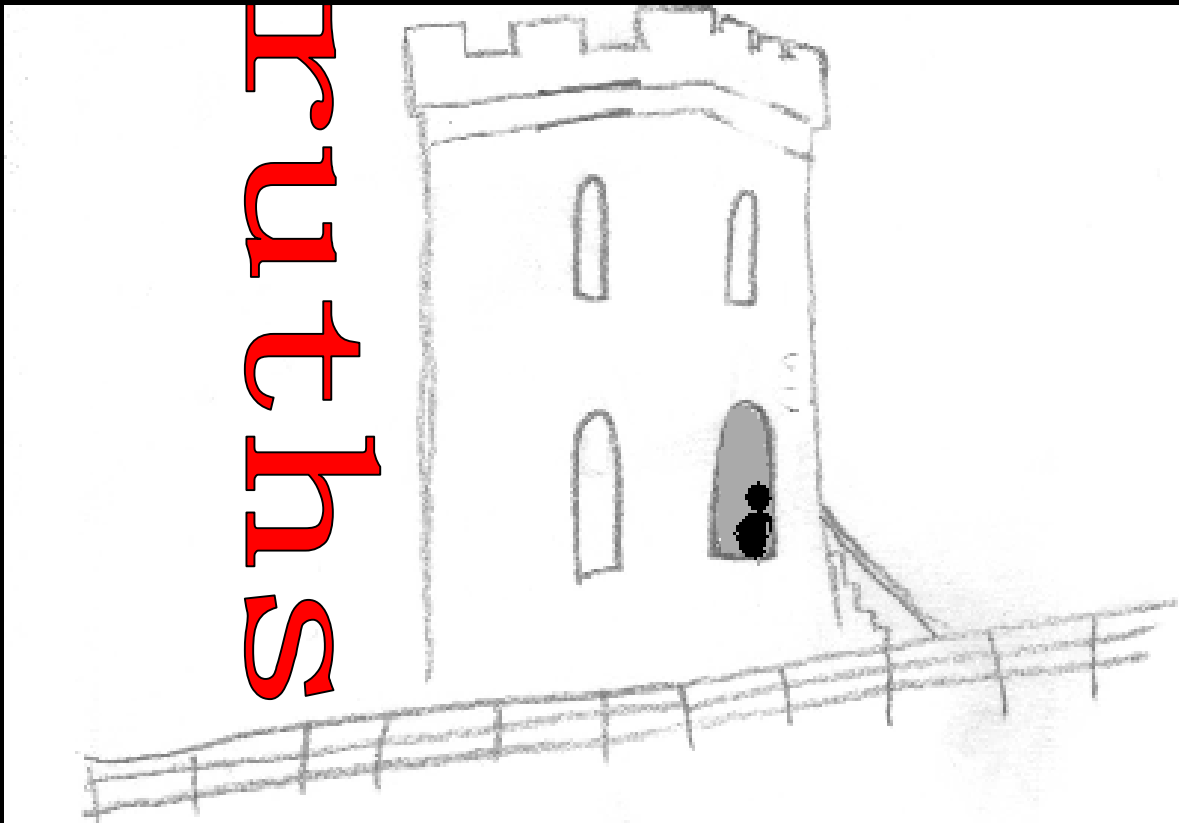


Untold



**By The Romsey School
Mountbatten School
Hounslow School
Hardley School
Applemore College**

Chapter 1

When I woke up it was still dark and I knew straightaway that everything was different. Everything was deathly quiet, except for a strange whirring noise, which seemed to be coming from some distance. I slipped out of bed, shivering in the cool night air, and peered through the curtains.

The next thing I noticed was the emptiness of the sky: no moon, no stars. It was pitch black except for the faint glow emanating from the abandoned castle on the top of the hill overlooking Loch Morag. As I was about to turn away, a movement caught my eye: a shadow darted across the light. I reached for my binoculars but I couldn't find them in the dark so I stumbled across the room to the light switch, never taking my eyes off the shadow. My knee brushed against the radiator and I instinctively jerked away from it, expecting to feel the heat burning my leg. Instead it was stone cold, yet I was sure Dad turned the heating on last night. I clicked the light switch but the bulb merely flickered, then died. I looked back at the castle but the shadow had gone. It suddenly occurred to me that, in the two weeks since moving to Scotland, I had never seen any signs of life in the castle. However, I then remembered that Dad always kept a torch by his bed in case of emergencies, so I decided to feel my way to my parents' bedroom.

As I reached for the torch my elbow nudged a glass of water, which splashed over Dad's face. Surprisingly, neither Mum nor Dad woke up, or even moved. This was odd; my Mum was normally a very light sleeper. I turned the torch on and shone the dim light onto their faces. Once again they didn't wake up. Frantically I shook them and yelled, "Wake up!" But to my horror they lay there motionless, barely breathing. I grabbed Mum's mobile, but there was no signal. I dashed downstairs, almost tripping in the dim torchlight. I punched in 999 on the phone but, to my dismay, the only sound from the phone was the familiar whirring noise that I could also hear from outside. I still didn't know the area very well, but thought that there must be someone who could help me. It was then that I remembered there was another cottage a few minutes down the lane.

I pounded on the cottage door, still gasping for breath after sprinting there. "Help me! It's an emergency", I shouted through the letterbox. From inside the cottage I heard the slow tap of a walking stick. Eventually the door creaked open. A wizened old man with matted grey hair and beard stood there; his bent frame supported by his walking stick.

"Beware the Castle Morag; a dark evil lies within!" he rasped.

"But my parents..." I started to say.

"Beware!" he repeated as the door slammed in my startled face.

Deciding that the best thing to do was to check on my parents, I returned home. However, when I reached the front door and tried to turn the key in the lock, I discovered that it wouldn't fit. In the moment whilst considering what to do next, there was a rustling noise from the bushes behind. I ran. Fear gripped me as I fled along the track towards the castle, wanting to escape from whatever was in the bushes but I certainly wasn't going anywhere near that crazy old man!

As I approached the looming building, the whirring noise grew louder. Worrying about so many things, I collided with a figure running in the opposite direction. "Sorry, are you OK?" I asked the stranger. I scrambled to my feet and saw a boy of about my own age standing in front of me. I shone the torch in his face. There was something in his eyes that made me feel uneasy. However, I was too relieved to find someone who might be able to help me to be worried by this. "Can you help me? My parents won't wake up and I don't know what to do," I asked desperately

"Where were you going?" asked the boy, ignoring my plea.

"I've seen a light and a shadow in the castle," I replied, "I thought I might find help there."

"Don't be ridiculous, no one lives there... any more."

"Who are you and why are you running away from the castle?" I asked suspiciously.

"People call me Hunter" he replied, ignoring part of my question, "What about you?"

"I'm Barney," I said. "And I don't care if you believe me or not, but I saw something in the castle and I'm going to investigate. I need to know what's going on."

"Yeah," said Hunter, "We might as well go together... if your mind is made up."

We walked towards the castle in silence until I turned to Hunter and repeated my question, "Where did you say you were coming from?"

"I didn't," he replied and continued on. I was beginning to wonder whether I had made the right decision to let Hunter join me, but as the fog rolled in I felt comforted knowing someone else was there – even though my mind raced through a variety of possibilities concerning my new friend. There was something odd about his refusal to answer my questions; why wouldn't he tell me where he was from? As I stole occasional glances at him I noticed he was starting to fidget nervously especially as we approached Castle Morag. What is happening in that place? Just as I was asking myself if I should turn and bolt, I thought I could hear a faint tapping following behind us ... similar to the sound of the old man's walking stick. I swung around to confront him, the light of my torch lit up the dark forest on the side of the track and the shadows danced in front of me; as if they were alive. At this point I had had enough and was ready to demand answers from the old man, but when my torch focussed on the track I couldn't see anyone. Filled with more nerves than before I asked Hunter, "Do you know a crazy old man who lives in a cottage down there?"

"I know of him," he replied.

"I thought I heard him following us," I whispered.

"Never leaves his house. Scared of voodoo nonsense," Hunter answered shortly, "Creepy, old man."

But as we walked on, I continued to hear the tapping noise close behind. The old man's words of, "Beware the castle" kept ringing in my head and I wondered if there was any truth in what he said. Suddenly I snapped myself out of it; I'm getting freaked out by an old man and a fidgety teenager, when what I really need to worry about is my Mum and Dad.

Before I knew it the great castle doors were looming over us and the whirring noise was deafening. Hunter seemed oblivious to it, which struck me as odd. As I went to knock Hunter argued "there's no point; I've told you, no one lives here." But ignoring him, my hand moved towards the door. Before I could knock, the ancient doors swung open, revealing yet more inky blackness. Stepping into the doorway, the torch, like the light in my room, flickered and died leaving us stranded in the darkness.

From above me I heard a heavy voice growl, "Welcome back Hunter!"

Chapter 2 (Mountbatten School)

In the gloomy light I turned back to gaze at the door. It was incredibly old, made out of wood that appeared to have been burnt. My hand slowly returned to the rusty handle, but Hunter grabbed my arm and pulled me away. He was too strong. His arm was like a giant oak tree, hard as a vice and his hand was cold – stone cold.

I felt a shiver run down my spine, and looked up to find where the deep voice was coming from. Instead I saw the crazy old man from before.

“What do you mean? Where did you come from? Why?” I spluttered.

“Don’t worry, you are fine now, all will be explained”, said the old man with a darkened tone in his voice, that made me shiver.

The tapping had stopped, the whirring noise had gone. In the silence all I could hear was the thumping of my heart. Before I could stop him, Hunter pushed me inside and locked the door. It was pitch black inside this room too. I searched frantically for my torch, but couldn’t find it. Dad wouldn’t be happy that I had lost it but realising this was a silly thought in the circumstances, I screamed desperately,

“What’s going on? Where am I? I want to go home!”. The only answer was silence. Not a sound. After a while, which seemed a painful eternity Hunter said my name – coldly. He made me jump and his eyes glowed red in the dark.

“I want to go home, my parents need me”, I whimpered.

“They’re fine, but if you stay here we will help you”, said the old man.

“Really? How?” I asked

“We will tell you after dinner”, said Hunter.

At that moment, I realised my tummy was rumbling like mad.

“Come and sit here”, said the old man.

“Where?”, I asked, “I can’t see a thing!”

Suddenly the lights came on and the old man was standing right in front of me, too close for comfort. I sat on a cobweb-infested sofa and Hunter brought in two plates – confused by this I childishly asked.

“Do I get any dinner?” Again silence. No answer.

“Where’s the food?” I continued. I suddenly realised it was me they wanted - just as they shouted, “We’re looking at it!”. I wrestled free of the tenacious grasp I fell to the floor, unable to move, motionless, I questioned whether I could summon the energy to run away.

I crawled backwards, away from the old man whose menacing eyes were watching my every move. Away from Hunter and the certain death that awaited me. The whirring noise had started up again, and now became a ringing fury. Hunter and the old man began to move. I stood up and felt an astonishing wind fly past me, almost knocking me off my feet. Crystals from the chandelier in the ceiling fell, ripping a deep cut in my thigh. I cried out in pain, feeling the first trickle of blood down my leg. The old man approached me slowly; his mouth was open wide showing white icicles of teeth. I was sweating with terror and dread as I looked at the man towering over me. He leapt at me and ignoring the pain I scrambled out of the old door. My heart was pounding and by breath heavy, I was petrified but this would be my only chance of escape from this nightmare. I sprinted back towards the old cottage, checking over my shoulder now and then. In the inky darkness I tripped on a stone and stumbled then everything went black...

Chapter 3 (Housdown School)

Pain shot through my leg. It was as if my breath was caught, trapped under my skin. My hands started to move and feel the cold, smooth surroundings. As my eyes opened they seemed to shoot into the darkness like daggers. The air came back to me as I drew in a breath; a clammy taste entered my lips. The scent of wood, as if freshly cut, entered my nostrils. There was no question – something was surrounding me.

Even if my exhausted limbs had any remaining strength I wouldn't have sat myself up, for although I couldn't see it, I knew there was some kind of lid resting inches above my panic ridden body. Where was I? A very claustrophobic, enclosed space, but what was it? A box...? A cupboard...? Some small room...? A coffin...? A COFFIN? No. It couldn't be; that would be just like a horror movie and things like that don't happen in real life, yet that was the most logical explanation. I had to get out. Was I already buried? Surely not – I'd have woken up! I raised my arms, desperately hoping that I could remove the lid, but I couldn't. I could feel cold sweat crawling down the back of my neck as I battled against my physical weakness to free myself, but to no avail.

The panic began to really hit hard then, seeping through my veins and abolishing the miniscule sense of hope I still felt. I resigned myself to the fact that I was going to die, my only regret was that I hadn't saved my parents. I was dying alone and for nobody but myself. As I adjusted to this strange new frame of mind, an odd sense of calm flooded over me. My senses came back under my control and I began to listen, straining to hear any clue that might give me a chance of life.

I heard a door creak on its hinge. Footsteps came closer, as if just metres away. Hearing the faint sound of voices, whispering as if trying not to wake a baby, I froze, motionless, straining to hear what was being said. I could hear the voices murmuring and then finally stating:

“It's time...”

Shuffling sounds surrounded me as I felt the coffin lift into the air. I sniffed slightly and yelped in pain as a piece of the cold satin lining brushed along my throbbing cut. I was gasping for breath now and felt very claustrophobic. I tried to feel around me once more, but couldn't find anything to help me. Suddenly my breath caught in my dry throat as my fingers brushed over what seemed like a hole, rather close to my head. I craned my neck into an awkward position, desperate to see out of the hole: success! Walls covered in paintings flew past me as whoever was carrying me quickened their pace. Suits of armour whirled past me and a statue of a man loomed around the corner, his face disturbingly familiar. A door creaked open and I could no longer see anything through the hole. Panic gripped my body as the coffin was laid down with an unnerving thud.

The voices started up again. My heart pounded like a person was trapped inside of me with a mallet, desperately reaching for freedom. Did these people think I was dead? I opened my mouth but the dust seemed to clog my throat so no noise came out. The voices were muffled as if they knew I was listening with all my might. The voices stopped suddenly as if someone had cut the speakers' throats unexpectedly. Then I heard a clicking sound, as if a door had been unlocked. A chink of light seeped through to me. The lid creaked noisily, revealing my captors. They were lit faintly by candlelight. I looked up at their faces – their eyes were bloodshot and their faces were as white as ghosts. A sudden wave of realisation hit me. I sat up, heaving my bodyweight slowly. Looking into their eyes, I whispered in horror: “Mum? ... Dad?”

Chapter 4 (Hardley School)

Their bloodshot eyes turned completely crimson red. Protruding over the bottom lip and drenched in blood, the flickering candle revealed two fangs on each side. These weren't my parents, they couldn't be – not unless they were in fancy dress!

"Hello Barney!" they said in unison. It was the sound of their voices that comforted me, but to see their frightening faces, I just couldn't trust myself to speak. The *man* spoke in a low hiss, "We've been waiting for you. Where have you been?" He sounded so... calm, yet looked so angry. How could this be?

Interrupting, the woman said too sweetly, "I've made you some biscuits, would you like one? You've always liked my biscuits, haven't you?" I glanced down at the small round discs. They seemed harmless but looked an awful lot like the ones you get in church. What was happening? Why were they being so much like my parents, but so much not my parents?

"No thank you," I replied. A flash of lightening came from outside and as I turned to look to where my parents had been - I saw an empty space. Shaking my head in disbelief, I blinked again. I was in such a state I didn't know whether my eyes were playing tricks upon me.

There she was again, only centimetres from my face. I screamed in shock more than fright this time, "I've made you some biscuits, would you like one?" She repeated, only this time she sounded angry, louder yet eerily calm. I did not know what I was thinking; perhaps I wasn't thinking; perhaps I shouldn't think. My arm reached out before I could stop it picking up one of the biscuits. As it went into my mouth I realised what I had done – well not quite and I may never know the way my luck was running; I realised I should not have done it though. Suddenly overhead, the sky darkened over the morning light. A flock of ravens swarmed into the sky screeching loudly, their black wings flapping in anger and greed. My parents came nearer, smiling. They came closer to me, licking their glistening lips in pleasure. Mouth wide open, the whirring noise started again but louder this time, I closed my eyes, covered my ears and winced and waited for the pain.

"Wait! He needs to know why first!" screeched the woman I had, for thirteen years, believed to be my mother.

Glancing sideways with a jerking action, I noticed Hunter standing there – smiling. I realised, for the first time how his features, and those of the statue in the hallway, resembled those of my father; the same dark hair, pale complexion and cold eyes. He smiled again but the smile contained no warmth. It was like an icy wind on a winter's day.

And so I waited – waited for some explanation.

Chapter 5 (Applemore College)

I sat there motionless; my body grew colder as time went by. My life is/was a lie. Thousands of words streamed through my muddled mind but only two stood out - "*it's time*". With all that has happened I completely ignored the moment when I was in the castle and the voices that said these vital two words. But now I need to know what it was time for.

Not knowing much, I thought of the time when we were just about to move to Scotland. Mum and Dad, well the folks I remember as my parents, were both stressed about the move but there was something suspicious about Dad and how he kept shouting at me. He never shouted. Yet he was concerned about his stupid torch – when it could not be found that is. I put it down to the move, but when I found and returned it to him, he would whisper his gratitude and then say, "you'll never know when you might need it" but the scary thing was that the sentence ended with "but you will". I now realise that this move and this situation are no coincidence.

The wooden cask started to make me feel a little more protected.

Hearing them talk, brought me back to the present, my thoughts drifted then to the old man. I asked my Mum cautiously about his whereabouts, I didn't need any more surprises. My *mum* screamed "It is none of your concern; he is nothing to you". I flinched. I still can't get used to this ... this ... being in front of me. She continued,

"If he had not have warned you in the beginning – we would have handled this – we would have made it go smoothly. Silly old fool".

The door creaked once more and quite timely he entered, eyes cast to the floor. It was apparent his 'weird' instincts were still fighting inside of him. I say still because when I first met him, he warned me and then later tried to attack me. The man spoke,

"I was 13, like you, I was taken to the Castle, like you, but I have lived in internal hell ever since that moment, but unlike you ... I will die ..."

Before he could finish his sentence, my so called father appeared before my eyes. With a jerking motion he shoved me back into the coffin and before I knew it, the lid was shut. Trapped again and all I could hear were angry voices!

I felt an excruciating pain shoot through my body as I felt my puzzled mind lift, squeezing through a very small space I was out into the open. My eyes slowly opened to reveal in front of me, the coffin I was more recently in. I suddenly realised that Hunter was no longer with us. What I remembered as my 'parents' picked up the coffin and swiftly swept towards a small side room. The whirring noise seemed to be emanating from within. The doors creaked open to reveal an endless row of coffins identical in every way; evenly stacked. I naturally followed. I brushed a dusty nameplate with my hand, it read 'Hunter the 13th'. I repeated the action. Again and again. Panic. The coffins each read Hunter 13th. I frantically began to claw open the coffins one by one; all the boys looked no older than 13. It was then that I realised that the noise was coming from my coffin. A gust of unnatural wind blew me back - it carried a cloud of dust from the ancient wooden boxes, and with it *my coffin*, which seemed to glide without any effort. I left the castle at a sprint.

It wasn't long before I stumbled but someone seemed to soften my fall whispering the word ... Barney. Confused, I managed to stabilise myself and after checking I was alone, looked towards the entrance of the castle. I instinctively reached for the ancient door, it swung open and through the inky blackness a heavy voice growled ...

“Welcome back Hunter!”



"Welcome back
Hunter!"

Barney and his
parents move to
Scotland. One

night he wakes
up to discover
that his life
is full of
untold truths..