



## CHAPTER 1

# THE SKELETON

Samir scanned his biology classroom. It had been repainted since last term. There was no teacher yet — a rarity at Wallace Academy. Usually teachers were waiting. Making sure no one was too rowdy, especially on the first day of a new term.

“Yo, losers!” Samir yelled. His best friends Akim and Rasheed had walked in.

Samir had only seen them once over the summer.

“Hey, man!” Akim high-fived Samir, and Rasheed fist-bumped him. As more students came into the classroom, the noise levels rose.

“How was your summer?” Samir asked, leaning on a desk.

“I can’t believe it’s over and that we’re back at this dump already,” Rasheed moaned.

“I know,” Akim said. “Glad we’re in the same biology class, though.”

“Maybe we’ll get to see more pictures of naked bodies this term?” Samir cracked up.

The bell had already rung, but with no sign of Mr Bones, and his mates egging him on, Samir walked up to the full-length model skeleton next to the whiteboard. It stood limply, with its head drooping. He shook its hand. “Lovely to meet you. You’re new around here, aren’t you? I’m Samir.”

Katie, who quite liked Samir when he wasn’t being over the top, yelled from the back, “Ooh Samir, got yourself a new girlfriend?”





Somewhere in the distance, the waves rolled onto the shore with a hiss, but there was no song. He pulled the window shut and frowned. Who had been singing? Was Deena playing tricks on him? She wouldn't come in the middle of the night just to sing under his window. Anyway, she couldn't sing like that. Nothing human could. Why had he been in such a hurry to get outside? Shivering, Adam threw himself under his duvet and fell into a deep sleep. The song swam around his dreams, twisting and winding itself around his mind.





## CHAPTER 1

# THE DISAPPEARING PATH

Teddy pulled on his lead. He barked and hurried along, excited to explore.

“What’s he seen?” Austin asked.

“No idea,” Grace replied, letting Teddy tug her towards whatever it was he was so interested in. Austin rushed along behind them, bumping into Grace when Teddy stopped suddenly to sniff at a pile of autumn leaves.

“Why don’t you let him off for a bit?”

“Not when he’s like this,” Grace said, waiting for Teddy to move along again. “I don’t want him to run away. He’s just excited because this is all new to him.”

It was quite new to Grace too. She and Austin were cousins — their mums were sisters. Grace’s parents were getting a divorce and she’d just moved with her mum to live on the same street as Austin. Grace had hated having to leave without her dad, but it was fun living next to Austin. She went to the same school as him. They were both fifteen and in the same year, and though they didn’t share a lot of classes, they saw each other almost every day. It was half term now, so they had a week off to explore together.

Teddy dragged Grace another few steps before stopping again to sniff a fence post. It had a sign on it that read Willow Woods. “Look,” Grace said, pointing down a path between the trees, “I can see our houses.”

Austin shook his head. “That’s weird,” he said. “I





turned to look back along The Lane. Nothing there except trees and bushes. The relief at their escape, mixed with embarrassment, made Joe laugh.

“What’s so funny?” Mira asked.

“Us,” Joe said. “We were scared of an empty, abandoned path.”

“Us?” Mira protested. “I only ran because you did.”

“You ran first!” Joe argued.

Mira didn’t believe that but she started to laugh as well. “We got scared by an empty lane, a frightened bird and old stories, didn’t we?”

“I suppose we did,” Joe admitted.

Mira touched her fingers to Joe’s head. They came away red with blood. “I think The Lane doesn’t like you.”





CHAPTER 1  
**NO RULES**

Leo was the most popular guy in school. Not bragging. It was the truth.

It wasn't surprising. Leo had everything. His mum was a famous actor. His dad was a retired Formula One driver. They were loaded. Leo always had the newest phone and games console on the day they came out. His parents were totally cool — no rules, no curfew, no stress.

Everything in Leo's life was perfect, except...

Except for the *dreams*.

He always dreamed about the same place. It was another home and another family, different from this one. An ugly black cat with half an ear missing, and a sister who was always practising the piano — badly. He had a tiny bedroom with babyish Star Wars wallpaper which was peeling in the top corner. He had an old phone with a broken camera. In the dreams he did maths homework and folded clothes and peeled potatoes. Boring stuff.

But they felt so real. He could smell the washing powder and hear the dripping bathroom tap.

*BLEEP-BLEEP-BLEEP*

Leo fumbled with his phone to switch off the alarm. He reached down to stroke the cat, which always slept curled up on the end of his bed. It wasn't there, and neither were the cartoon Yodas on the wall. Of course. The cat and the wallpaper were part of the dreams. He was back in his comfy king-sized bed in his massive bedroom. It took a minute for his brain to catch





Maya stopped to pick it up and the others continued without her.

She was struck by an odd smell, like old meat that had been left in a bin for too long. So much for the fresh sea air she'd been looking forward to.

She tucked Ella's litter into her pocket and looked around. With the others gone, the chamber of horrors had a much more unsettling feel.

The vampire's face seemed to be twisted with pain, as though its fangs had cut into its own flesh.

Frankenstein's monster was screaming, as though real electricity was running through its body.

The werewolf's eyes looked strained, as though it was in real agony.

And the zombie was bent double, its mouth frozen in a cry for help.

