

# BILLY BUTTON

CAVAN SCOTT

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## CHAPTER 1

# FORGOTTEN FRIENDS

Billy Button had green skin.

At the time, Liam didn't think anything of it. After all, Billy wasn't the same as other boys. He came and went as he pleased. One minute he wasn't there, the next he had appeared at Liam's side. Ready to play. Ready to cause trouble.

Billy could do anything he wanted. Nothing stopped him. Not rules. Not parents. Not teachers.

He could even walk through walls.

Because Billy wasn't real.

Liam hadn't thought about his imaginary friend for years. Until this morning, in fact. Until he had been rifling through the drawer beneath his bed and felt something cold and hard against his fingers.

He'd brought the object out and stared at it in amazement.

A big, green button.

He'd had it since he was five. His grandma used to let him play with the buttons from her sewing kit. He'd spend hours sorting them into different shapes and colours.

The big, green button was his favourite, and one day she said he could take it home.

It was the same day he met Billy.

Liam was playing in the garden on his own. No brothers or sisters. Not since the accident anyway. Not since they'd lost Marcus.

And Dad.

So he made up his own brother. A boy his own age, just a bit taller, with long arms and legs. Like a spider. A mop of unruly hair sat on Billy's head and his eyes shone like pinpricks of light.

At first, Billy would come whenever Liam held his grandma's button tight in his fist. Soon, he could call Billy without need of the button, although Liam always kept it in his pocket anyway. He was never lonely when Billy was around. Never scared. Billy always knew what to say to cheer him up, flashing that cheeky, lopsided grin.

Even Mum got used to Billy being around, although she couldn't see him, of course. Sometimes, she even set an extra place at dinner, not that Billy liked her cooking.

"Ugh, that's rank!" he'd complain, pulling the funniest faces. Liam would try not to laugh – and fail.

Mum didn't mind the giggling. She was just happy to hear Liam laugh again.

She wasn't so glad when Liam started blaming Billy for things.

"Billy ate the last custard cream, Mum. Not me."

"Billy lost my coat."

"Billy smashed your vase."

"Billy told me to run away..."

She lost her patience then. "You need to grow up," she snapped. "Forget about Billy. Live in the real world."

Eventually, Liam did exactly that. He went to school. Made new friends. Friends who were real. Who Mum could see.

And not one of them had green skin.

Billy simply faded away. Out of sight, out of mind. Until today. Until Liam found that button again.

He had it in his hand now, turning it over and over as he listened to Mr Newman call out the register. The plastic was cold, even though it was the hottest day of the year. It had always been the same and, until now, Liam had never thought it was odd.

Mr Newman continued through the names.

“Jon Mann?”

“Here.”

“Helen Wright?”

“Here.”

“Billy Button?”

Liam’s head snapped up. “What?” he said out loud.

Mr Newman looked puzzled. “Liam?  
Is everything all right?”

Liam glanced around, feeling his face flush.  
Everyone was staring at him.

“Sorry, sir. It’s just...” his voice trailed off.  
Someone sniggered at the back of the class. Liam  
swallowed, his mouth dry. “The last name on the  
register, sir. Wh—who was it?”

Mr Newman checked the computer screen.  
“Ben,” he said. “Ben Clifton.” He turned to peer  
at Liam. “Is that OK?”

Liam’s cheeks were now burning hot. “Yeah,  
I’m... sorry, sir,” he muttered. “Just thought you  
said something else.”

Mr Newman shook his head and carried on  
with the register. Liam felt an elbow nudge him  
in the side.

“What was that about, you idiot?” said a  
fair-haired boy called Chris Hussey.

Liam shook his head, staring at his desk as if his life depended on it. He could still feel everyone's eyes on him. "Nothing," he grunted. "Just being stupid. It doesn't matter."

"Loser," Chris snorted, but he didn't mean it. Chris and Liam had been friends from the moment they'd met. Best friends.

The button in Liam's hand grew colder than ever.