



GHOSTS CAUGHT ON CAMERON



CHAPTER ONE

How To Remove A Ghost From Your Shoulder

Cameron hadn't noticed the ghost on his shoulder until he looked in the bathroom mirror. A stab of panic surged through his chest and his legs felt like they might crumble underneath him. His voice was almost strangled in his throat as he managed to shout, "Dad!"

No reply. He tried again, louder this time and not so high-pitched: "Dad!"

"What?" His dad's voice sounded a long way off. Maybe he was in the kitchen.

“I need you!”

“All right! One sec.”

Cameron kept very still. The last of the bathwater gurgled down the plughole. In the silence that followed, he heard soft footsteps padding down the landing until they stopped outside. There was a pause. “Can I help?” It was Mum’s voice. Cameron’s eyes widened and he quickly put a hand on the door.

“No!” He tried to sound calm. “I want Dad.”

“Oh...” Mum’s feet shuffled on the carpet. Cameron prayed she wouldn’t try to come in. “OK. He’s just coming.”

Dad’s heavy, slippered feet pounded up the stairs. Cameron heard him murmur, “Boys stuff maybe.”

“You know he prefers you.”

“He doesn’t. He’s just being Cameron. Needs his daddy.”

Cameron was still staring into the mirror. The ghost hadn’t moved. Neither had he. “Dad!” he groaned through gritted teeth.

“OK, OK. What’s up fella?” Dad opened the door a few inches, as if the bathroom might have been filled with a giant, ugly toad and slipped himself halfway in. Mum smiled, rolled her eyes and headed downstairs.

Cameron turned his head as little as possible in Dad’s direction. “Need to get a spirit jar,” he said in a whisper through clenched teeth. “Quick.”

Dad frowned. “What for?”

Cameron darted his eyes down towards his shoulder. “That.”

“What?”

“Look in the mirror.”

Dad glanced up and wiped some condensation off the glass. “Oh,” he said. “That. Wow.”

A small, red, slightly transparent ghost was perched on Cameron’s shoulder, apparently fast asleep. Cameron hadn’t seen one like it before. It was basically just a head with two feet and nothing else. The head was smooth, young and hairless, about half the size of Cameron’s, while its feet were like a monkey’s, very similar to hands. There was no torso in between. Its eyes stayed closed as the feet clung on tightly, but Cameron couldn’t feel a thing.

Dad pursed his lips and took a deep breath. “Have you tried the prayer?”

“Yes!” Cameron hissed. His eyes widened and his fists clenched. “Of course I’ve tried the prayer! I did the sign and everything. It’s still there.”

“Mmm. OK.” Dad stared at the mirror for a while longer. “We must have picked it up in the library earlier. Looks like it was haunted after all.”

“Well, yeah, I can see that. Can we just get rid of it, please?”

“Yup, sure thing.” Dad turned to look at Cameron again and then raised his eyebrows. “Oh, I can see it now for real. Interesting.”

“Dad! Please – I’m freezing!”

Dad opened the bathroom door again slightly. “Come on, you’re eleven now, you can handle it. Back in a minute.”

Cameron shivered a little. His hair was still damp. He had a towel wrapped around his waist but didn’t feel like pulling it up to his shoulders, even though he had been drying himself only a minute ago and that obviously hadn’t disturbed the ghost.

Both he and Dad had thought the library was a dead end. Dad had got a call from his department at the council about noises in the walls and woodwork. Someone thought it could be a problem with the pipes, or the floors, or even the foundations. They were worried the place might collapse. Somebody needed to check it out.

This was his dad's job: the council's official buildings inspector. And the town of Netherden had quite a lot of old buildings that needed inspecting. Every week, he was checking out old schools, offices, halls, houses, pools and even the castle in case anything was wrong. A lot of people knew Cameron's dad and what he did, which made it easy for the two of them to get into all kinds of buildings in the hunt for ghosts.

Dad saw there was nothing physically wrong with the library straight away. The pipes had been re-done only a couple of years ago, and the walls and floors were rock-solid. But he knew something wasn't right. The staff had been hearing all kinds of strange noises, but nobody wants to talk about *ghosts*.

So Dad had gone back later, after closing time, and taken Cameron with him. It was the deal they had. No ghost hunting alone without the other. Mum thought Dad was taking Cameron to football club or a drama group, and they let her think that. It was for the best.

The bathroom door opened again and Dad slipped in, carrying what looked like a large jam jar with a handle. He stood it on the floor, reached into a pocket and brought out a small blue candle with a box of matches.

"No change?" he said.

"It hasn't moved at all."

“Good.”

He stuck the candle to the bottom of the jar with Blu Tack and carefully lit it, making sure he didn’t burn his own hand. Then he looked up at Cameron. “OK. Are you ready?”

“Yes!”

“We’ll have to be a bit quiet because of Mum.”

“I know!”

“All right, just had to make sure. I think she’s downstairs now, anyway. Make the sign.”

Cameron tucked the last two fingers of each hand under his thumbs and lifted them up a little.

“OK,” said Dad. “I’ll start and you join in. Don’t stop until I’ve closed the lid.”

Cameron nodded. Dad started to murmur in a low voice: “Candle bright, soul sight, draw this spirit... into light.”

The little ghost sniffed in its sleep and flexed one of its feet, but that was it.

Dad repeated the rhyme and Cameron joined in.

The ghost flicked its head to one side and the other foot lost its footing for a second, slipping down Cameron’s shoulder.

Dad and Cameron said the rhyme again. And again.

The ghost’s eyes opened and it looked around from the ceiling to Dad, to the mirror, to Cameron and then down at the candle. It opened its mouth as if to shout, but no noise came out.

“Candle bright... Soul sight...” Dad and Cameron kept repeating the rhyme.

The ghost looked like it was being pulled downwards towards the candle. It was starting to slip down Cameron's back, making scrambling movements with its feet, fighting to stay on Cameron's shoulder. It kept looking at the jar, eyes wide.

Dad and Cameron didn't stop. The rhyme became just a mumble of words in Cameron's head. The same thing, over and over and over. "Draw this spirit... into light."

The little ghost lost its fight. It tried to hold on with just a couple of fingers but then the head toppled backwards. It skittered down Cameron's back, bounced off the top edge of the towel and landed in the jar with a soft plop.

Dad immediately dropped to his knees, flicked the lid over the top of the jar and fastened the clamp in place, sealing the ghost in with a click. Cameron was left mumbling the last few words of the rhyme and then stopped, spinning around to see his dad picking up the jar and weighing it in his hands.

"There we go. Tough little thing, wasn't he?"

"Yeah, I guess..." Cameron let out a long breath. "Thanks, Dad."

Dad smiled down. "No problem. As a dad, it's my duty to do anything for my boy."

Cameron's face reddened. "I'm not a baby."

"I know!" Dad chuckled and looked Cameron up and down. "Are you OK? You must be cold." He grabbed another towel from the rail and draped it around Cameron's shoulders.

"Thanks." Cameron hugged the towel tightly to stop himself shivering while Dad raised the jar up to the light. The ghost's shape

had completely gone and instead a faint swirl of reddish-brown smoke twisted around inside the glass.

“Are you sure it’s from the library?” said Cameron. “And not here? I mean, our house isn’t haunted, is it?”

“I’m sure,” said Dad. “Never been anything funny here. Just surprised I didn’t notice it earlier. Weird how it took a mirror to help us see it.”

“Maybe your eyes just needed to learn where it was.”

Dad frowned down at Cameron and then smiled. “Yeah, you could be right. Spirits are probably everywhere, they just don’t always want us to know.”

“So there could be one in our house?”

“I don’t think so. We’d have noticed something weird by now. But maybe when I’ve finished my new device in a couple of days, we’ll be able to see for sure.”

A smile leapt across Cameron’s face. “Really? It’ll be finished in two days? Can I take it to school?”

Dad laughed. “No! Cheeky. But we could take it out with us next weekend.”

“Next weekend!” Cameron’s voice turned into a whinge. “That’s ages!”

“No, it’s not. And you know the rules. No hunting on a school night.”

“Urgh. OK.”

“Good. I’ll put this one with the others when I go back down.” Dad stood the jar on top of a cupboard by some other pots, tubs and

tubes and plucked Cameron's pyjamas off the radiator. "Come on, get these on you."

Cameron unwrapped the towel from around his shoulders and dropped it on the floor. Dad held the pyjama top ready over Cameron's head, but then he stopped and frowned.

"What's this?"

"What?" Cameron craned his neck around, trying to see behind himself, but then turned to look in the mirror instead. There were faint red scratches around his shoulder.

"Does it hurt?" said Dad.

"No. Didn't feel anything."

Dad leaned in closer. "I've never seen a ghost leave real scratches before. That's weird. Let me put something on it."

"No!" Cameron jumped. "Please, Dad, it's OK."

"Don't worry, I'm not talking about Vaseline or anything slimy." He reached over to the shelf where Mum kept her herbal soaps and lotions, turning a few bottles to look at their labels. "Here we go – sage, tea tree and orange. Should work a treat."

"What?" Cameron recoiled. "Oh no..."

"Come on, keep still." Dad squirted a bit of the sticky liquid onto his hand and then smeared it across Cameron's shoulder while he squirmed. "That's it. Be over in a minute."

He washed it off with a warm flannel just as Mum's voice echoed up from the hallway downstairs. "Are you lot done yet? Someone's got to tuck Connie in and I need to have my bath."

Dad gave Cameron a quick smile before opening the bathroom door and calling back down. "All done!"



CHAPTER TWO

Dad's New Device

Cameron opened the door between the kitchen and the garage as quietly as he could and poked his head through. “Dad!” he hissed in a loud whisper.

Dad turned around quickly, eyes wide, slowly shutting down the lid of his laptop with one hand. When he saw it was Cameron, he relaxed. “Blimey, fella. Don’t creep up on me like that.”

“Sorry. I was worried about Mum.”

Dad glanced over Cameron’s shoulder at the door closing behind him. “Why?”

“Because of this.” Cameron held out his hand and Dad’s eyes widened again when he saw what he was holding.

“The jar! Oh my God!” He snatched it out of Cameron’s grip and held it up to the light, checking the brown-tinged swirl was still inside.

“You forgot to bring it down last night.”

Dad shook his head. “Can’t believe I did that.” He raised an eyebrow at Cameron. “How did you get to it?”

“I put the lid down on the toilet and stood on that. It was by all those other old jars. Mum didn’t notice it.”

Dad studied the jar again. “Good job she didn’t think it was some kind of lotion.” He bent down under the worktop and unlocked a cupboard. The doors swung open and Cameron could see their entire spirit jar collection inside.

There were two shelves, each with around ten or twelve jars. Some were large, some were small, but all were a squat, rounded shape with a rubber seal around the lid and a metal clasp that snapped down to keep them tightly shut. Most had labels, but a couple were blank.

“When are you going to label those ones?” said Cameron.

“When I get over the nightmares.”

Cameron reached in and turned a few around. He smiled as he remembered the town hall ghost, the haunted skate park and even the ghost that had lived in an ice cream van. He shivered when he remembered the ghost of the lost child, and realised that might be one of the jars without a label.

As Dad closed the doors and locked them again, Cameron said, “Are you working on the device?”

“Yup. I was just ordering a part for it, actually.” Dad opened up the laptop again and the screen flickered back into life. “Just found this cool website that seems to have everything we need.”

Cameron watched as Dad scrolled up the screen. Across the top, in simple, bold letters were the words: ‘The Invisible Emporium’ with a logo that looked like a large key over an open door. Below it was a grid of several boxes with labels such as ‘Ingredients’, ‘Likenesses’, ‘Potions’, ‘Talismans’ and ‘Tools’.

Dad scrolled down again. “I mean, ignore all the ancient statues, enchanted stones and bottles of frogs’ eyes and so on. It’s all just hocus pocus cooked up for gullible wannabe witches. Here’s what we’re looking for.” He clicked on a box labelled ‘Machines’ and the screen changed to reveal rows and rows of odd-looking gadgets. Some resembled complicated musical instruments while others were just plain black cubes.

“I was beginning to think a Spectral Etheritector was just something I made up,” said Dad. “But it actually exists.” He clicked again and enlarged a picture of a slim, brown rectangle with spots of gold across its surface and two prongs jutting out from one end. “It’s like I thought about it and there it was. Fantastic.”

Cameron screwed his face up at the laptop. “Doesn’t look like much.”

“It’s just the sensor. I’ll need to interface it with the rest of the device, but it’s exactly what we need.”

Cameron nodded. “So we’ll be able to see the traces of the ghost’s bodies? Or what they leave in the air?”

“Yes. At least, I hope so. Only one way to find out.”

Cameron clicked back to the main 'Machines' screen and felt his head spin at the sheer number and variety of bizarre contraptions and objects on show. He scrolled and scrolled. "An 'Any-door Key'? This site's brilliant. How did you find it?"

Dad shrugged. "Just searching online. One day it wasn't there, then the next day it was. Just an algorithm thing. I must have typed the right words in, for once."

"Cool. When does it arrive?"

"They say within twenty-four hours. But I'll need to buy it first!" He pulled out his wallet and clicked the purchase button. "You get back inside now."

"Can I look at that website some more?"

"Another time. Oh – I think I hear Mum calling you. Quick, better go!"

The next day, Cameron was nearly home from school when he spotted two strange children stroll out of his gate and head towards a little red car parked over the road. Except, as he got closer, he saw they weren't children. They were two very small men with big white beards, long brown coats and pointy hats. One of them gave a cheerful wave and pointed towards the front door as they got into the car.

Cameron jogged up to the porch. Sitting on the step was a small square package, wrapped in brown paper and tied with string. His

dad's name and their address were written in curly handwriting on a white label neatly stuck to the top. As Cameron bent down to pick it up, the door opened.

"I thought I heard the bell go..." It was Mum. "Oh, we've had a delivery."

Cameron waved the package around. "Yeah, something for Dad."

Mum rolled her eyes. "More bits and pieces for his hobbies, I expect. Where's the postman?"

Cameron turned around. "It was some delivery guys..." he said, but his voice trailed away as he looked over the road. The little red car was no longer there. "They must have just left."

"Never mind," said Mum. "Now, come in and wash your hands."

Cameron peered into the garage that night. "Have you done it yet?"

Dad glanced around with a slight smile. "What?"

"You know." Cameron stepped in and closed the door. "Put the new part in."

"Nearly. Just working on it." Dad grabbed the old t-shirt he used as a rag and laid it over the collection of bits and pieces arranged neatly on the bench.

"Why did you do that? Can't I look?"

"Nope."

"Why not?"

Dad's face still held its soft smile. "Just can't. It's not ready yet."

“Oh, but –”

“No buts. I’ll let you see it when it’s finished, not before. Just be patient.”

Cameron sighed dramatically. “When will that be, though?”

“Soon enough. Now, let me get on with it, OK?” Dad winked at him.

“But...” Cameron was about to protest but thought better of it. “Oh, all right then.”

“Good chap. Go and build me something in Minecraft.”

Cameron shuffled into the living room the next evening while Mum was reading Connie her bedtime story. Dad was scrolling through the streaming options, trying to decide on a new series to watch.

“Is it done yet?” Cameron whispered.

Dad looked sideways at Cameron without turning his head. “What?”

“The thing. The device.”

“Shh,” said Dad. He glanced upwards to the ceiling and paused long enough to hear Mum’s voice reading a page of ‘I Want My Hat Back’ before looking back at Cameron. “Nearly ready.”

“Nearly?” Cameron screwed up his nose. “How long?”

“Couple more days.”

Cameron slumped back onto the sofa. “Argh. I can’t handle all this waiting.”

The next night, Cameron was lurking outside the shower room as Dad stepped out. "Is it done yet?" he said.

Dad rolled his eyes, then glanced left and right before leaning down to whisper to Cameron. "One more day. I'm just waiting for one last component to come through the post."

"One more day!" howled Cameron.

"Shhh!" said Dad. "Keep it down."

"But I just can't stand it," Cameron said through gritted teeth.

"You'll just have to! In the meantime, keep quiet."

Mum's voice wafted through from the living room. "Is everything all right there?"

"Fine!" they both said at the same time.

Dad opened the living room door so quickly that Cameron missed his shot on Mechanoids and had to go back to level one.

"I've finished it," said Dad, eyes wide.

Cameron's face was blank. "What, dinner?"

"No, you numbskull. The device."

"Oh!" A smile sprang across Cameron's face and he went to shout out, but Dad put a finger on his lips.

"Not now."

Cameron hunched his shoulders and clenched his fists. “Why not?” he said in a hiss. “You can’t just say that and not let me see it!”

Dad thought about it for a second. “OK then. In the garage.”

Together, they tramped through the hallway and the kitchen towards the door through to the garage. Mum glanced up from her laptop.

“Don’t start anything big now. Tea’s in a minute and then I’ve got to go to yoga.”

Dad chuckled. “Don’t worry, just a bit of scooter repair.”

They went through and Cameron pulled the door shut behind them. Dad opened a cupboard door under the work surface, brought out a shoebox and placed it on the bench top.

“Here it is, matey.” He grinned and lifted the lid.

Cameron pressed his chest against the edge of the high bench and peered into the box. Inside he saw a long rectangle of brushed steel about the size of a small, thick book, with a black screen filling most of the flat upper side. It was blank. Along the bottom edge were a few small plug sockets. Up one of the longer sides were small panels that looked like they folded out and extra attachments stuck onto the main block. A large, black camera lens hogged the top right corner of the device.

“It looks like a big phone with bits added on,” said Cameron.

Dad snorted. “That’s because basically it is.” He lifted the device out of the box and handed it gently to Cameron. “I still need to make some kind of case or cover for it, so be careful.”

“I will.” He turned it over and found extra panels, a row of shiny glass bumps and a speaker section.

Dad watched Cameron inspect the device. "I really think this could be the one, Cam."

"The one what?"

"The one thing that makes us rich."

Cameron stopped toying with it and looked up. "Really?"

"Yup." Dad didn't look back at him, just kept staring at the device. "Nothing else like this on the planet. Combines detectors for electric charges, infrared, temperature, microwaves and ultrasound, and takes high definition pictures in low light. Also has a Geiger counter, alarm, flash, microphone, radio, timer, and can emit a tiny laser beam as a range finder. You could even use it as a phone, if you wanted to."

Cameron's eyes nearly boggled out of his head. "That's amazing!" His hands suddenly felt rather wobbly and he handed the device slowly back to Dad. "But don't people have all those things already?"

"Not all in one machine. And definitely not this small."

"Wow..." Cameron blinked at the device as it rested in Dad's hands. "How on earth does it all fit?"

"You'd be amazed at how tiny they can make things these days. I'm going to call it The Complete Ultra Resonance Spirit Element Detector!"

Cameron stifled a snigger. "I think it needs a better name!"

Dad's eyes widened in mock astonishment. "What do you mean?" he said with a laugh. "The initials spell out CURSED!"

Cameron chuckled again. "The CURSED device! I like it."

Dad looked towards the back door. "Hey, grab your scooter for a second and make some clanking noises, will you?"

Cameron started bouncing his scooter's wheels on the floor. "How did you know how to make it?"

"The internet. It's a wonderful thing."

Cameron stopped and looked up in surprise. "Really? You just found out everything online?"

"Well, not entirely. I had to make some bits up. But yes, most of it's there somewhere if you know where to look."

Cameron looked back at the device. "Wow. Cool."

Dad slipped the device back into the shoebox. "Like I said, I need to make a case for it and then we can take it out."

The door from the kitchen opened and Mum's head appeared around the corner. "Scooter all good?"

"Yup," said Dad. In a smooth, quick motion he slipped the shoe box back into the cupboard and closed the door. "All good."

A quick note for readers...

This book was originally a stand-alone story. But then I realised that of course Cameron's dad would order his new parts for the CURSED device from the Invisible Emporium, the gnomes would deliver them and that Enoch would be on hand at the end. And they would live in Netherden, just like James and Archie. So it all suddenly all fitted in together and connected nicely back to **Archie & The Invisible Emporium**. I hope you enjoy this one as much as those!

ONE MORE QUICK NOTE...

Sign up for my mailing list and get PDF posters of the original cover artwork for the first four Our Weird World books, as well as a newsletter every week or two containing book tips, story-writing insights, a peek at works-in-progress, opportunities to become part of my advance reader team, updates about events and occasionally other

emails with info about new releases and offers. Phew! I almost ran out of breath just typing that. Here's the link:

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