

The Poltergeist

by James Brown

Jeet and I had been sent to collect boxes from the storeroom. I loved the storeroom. It was at the far end of the school, down a long corridor that no one used. I jangled the keys Miss Shroud had given me.

“This is creepy,” I said. “I bet there’s a ghost.”

“Or a poltergeist,” said Jeet.

“A what?” I said, looking for the light switch.

“A poltergeist. It’s a ghost that moves things around.”

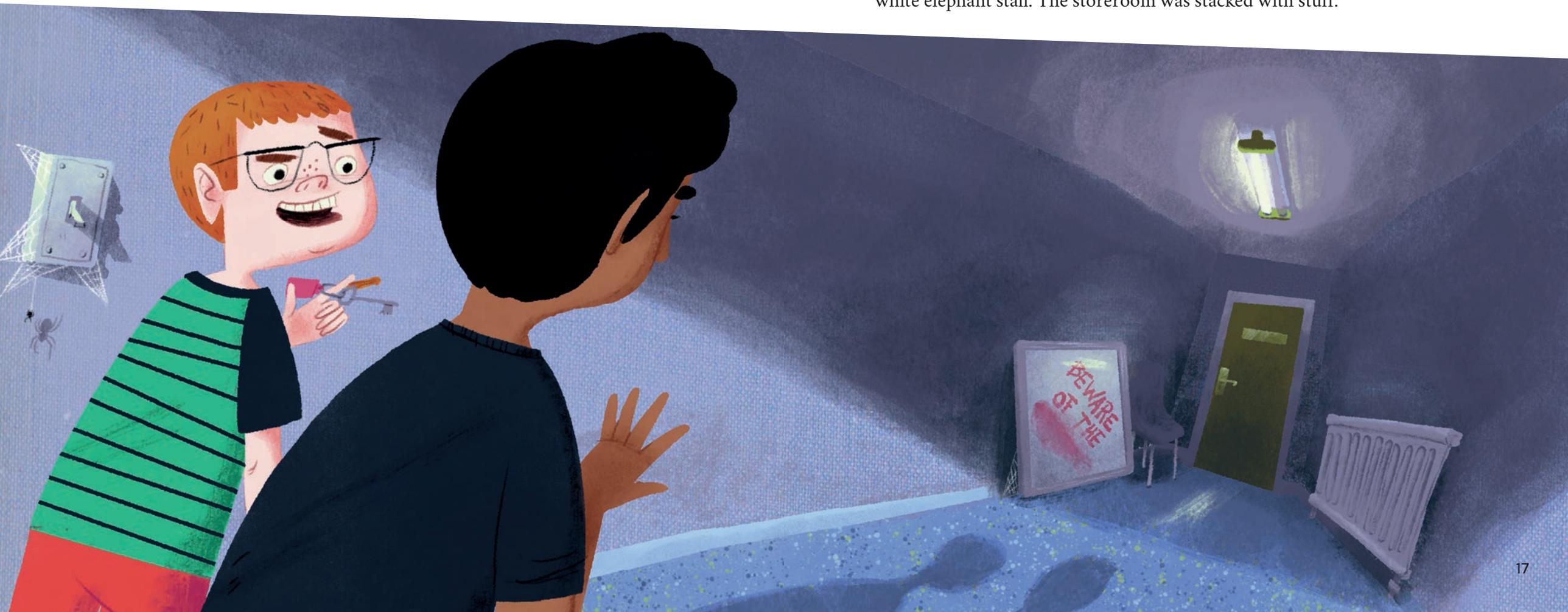
“Oh, yeah. My mum thinks there’s one in our house that’s always moving her keys.”

I found the switch behind the door. Click. A fluorescent light slowly blinked into life. The corridor had an abandoned whiteboard parked to one side. On it, someone had written “Beware of the”. The last word had been smeared out.

“Only one of those tubes is working,” said Jeet, looking at the light. “It’s insufficient.”

I smiled. Jeet was always saying stuff like this.

We reached the door at the end, and I tried the keys until it opened. We had to take things over to the hall for the school fair tomorrow, for the white elephant stall. The storeroom was stacked with stuff.



“Where’s the white elephant?” I joked.

“A white elephant is a useless or troublesome item,” said Jeet. “And white elephant stalls sell those items.”

“I know what a white elephant stall sells,” I said.

“Me too,” said Jeet.

We picked up a box each and headed over to the hall, which was buzzing with activity. The white elephant stall was mostly in one corner, but some of the bigger things like bikes and doll’s houses would be outside under the verandah. We trooped back and forth, carting stuff. “I wish we had a poltergeist,” I said.

“This is our eleventh trip,” said Jeet.

“Is that all? Feels like more.”

“I’m counting there and back as one trip. We’ve travelled between the locations twenty-two times.”



At the stall, Mum was unpacking and arranging. Ms Joy was delegating. “Kitchenware here, crockery here, electronics and bric-a-brac ...”

I caught Mum’s eye. “Looks like I might be a bit longer,” she said, passing me her money card. “Here, get some fish and chips. I’ll see you at home.”

I went to find Jeet. His mum was running the samosa stall. They didn’t have much to do – the food was all being made at home – so Jeet had gone.

Mum’s fish and chips were stone cold by the time she got home. She put them in the microwave and flopped into a chair. “Last year of fairs,” she said.

“Don’t they have fairs at intermediate?” I asked.

“I don’t think so. You’re too old for them. Or maybe us parents are.”

Mum fell asleep, so I went online and played Poltergeist, a game where you try to steal objects using poltergeist skills. Then I talked to Jeet. He had a new occupation to add to his OOO list. OOO stood for Other Occupation Options. His parents wanted him to go into the family business, and the OOO list was part dream jobs, part serious suggestions. The new idea was pataphysicist.

“What?” I said.

“Pataphysics is a branch of philosophy or science that examines imaginary phenomena that exist in a world beyond metaphysics.”

“What?”

“It’s the science of imaginary solutions.”

“Eh?”

“I want to study poltergeists. They operate between the imaginary and the real. That’s pataphysics. If we can figure out how they move things, we could revolutionise transportation.”

“Cool.” Now that I understood, I was on board. “What do we do?”

“Study objects that might move for no discernible reason. I’ve set some cameras up in my room. You keep track of your mum’s keys. Goodnight.” That was Jeet. An ideas person, my mum called him.



We got to our feet. "Let's take that first," the man said. "Might be heavy." He was pointing to some kind of machine I'd been leaning against. I hadn't realised it was part of the deal. It had two wheels at the front, but one was a bit munted, so it needed a few people to manoeuvre it.

Jeet picked up a drying rack. "No. Leave that. Help with this," said the man. "You mean the air compressor?" said Jeet.

The three of us wobbled the compressor out to the man's car and heaved it into his boot.



"Thanks, boys," he said. Then he got in.

"What about the other stuff?" I said.

"Keep it. I just wanted this."

Jeet suddenly came to life. "Don't you need the retractable air hose? It's still there."

The man paused. "OK," he said. "That'd be good. I'll come back in."

Back in the hall, Mum spotted us and came hurrying over. "There's been a mistake," she said. "That thing belongs to the bouncy-castle guy."

"I bought it fair and square," the man said.

"But I shouldn't have sold it. It's worth six hundred dollars!"

The man folded his arms. "Tough," he said – and turned away. Mum's face crumpled. She'd had an early start, and now the bouncy-castle guy was headed our way.



I grabbed the nearest missile I could find and let fly. The swimming pool cake hit the man in the back before squelch-ploding everywhere. He took off. Mum and the bouncy-castle guy stood there, stunned. The crook was getting away. I started after him.

Jeet was one step ahead of everyone. When I got to the street, there he was, leaning coolly against the man's car, blocking the door. "I've got your registration number," he was saying, "and I've deflated your front tyre."

We had him.

Mum and the bouncy-castle guy arrived. Other people were coming, too.

"So," I said as Jeet began explaining air compressors to me, "how did you deflate his tyre exactly?"

"I didn't," Jeet said. "I just imagined it as a solution, and it was."



illustrations by Josh Morgan

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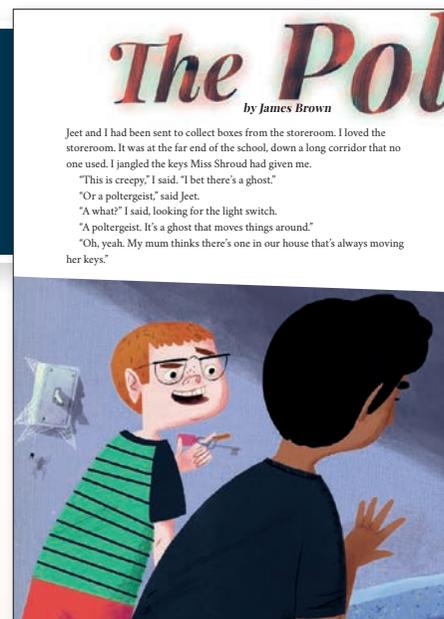
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