

**FICKLING**  
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David Fickling Books

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The Night's Realm  
is a  
DAVID FICKLING BOOK

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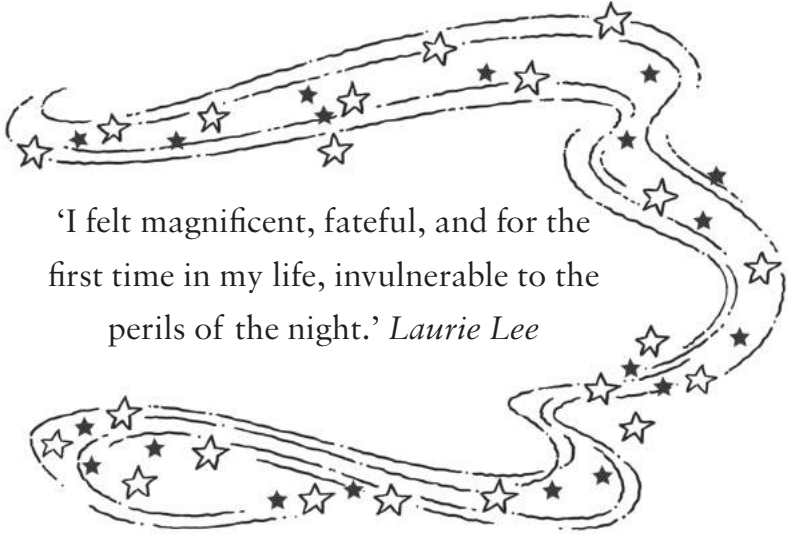


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'I felt magnificent, fateful, and for the first time in my life, invulnerable to the perils of the night.' *Laurie Lee*

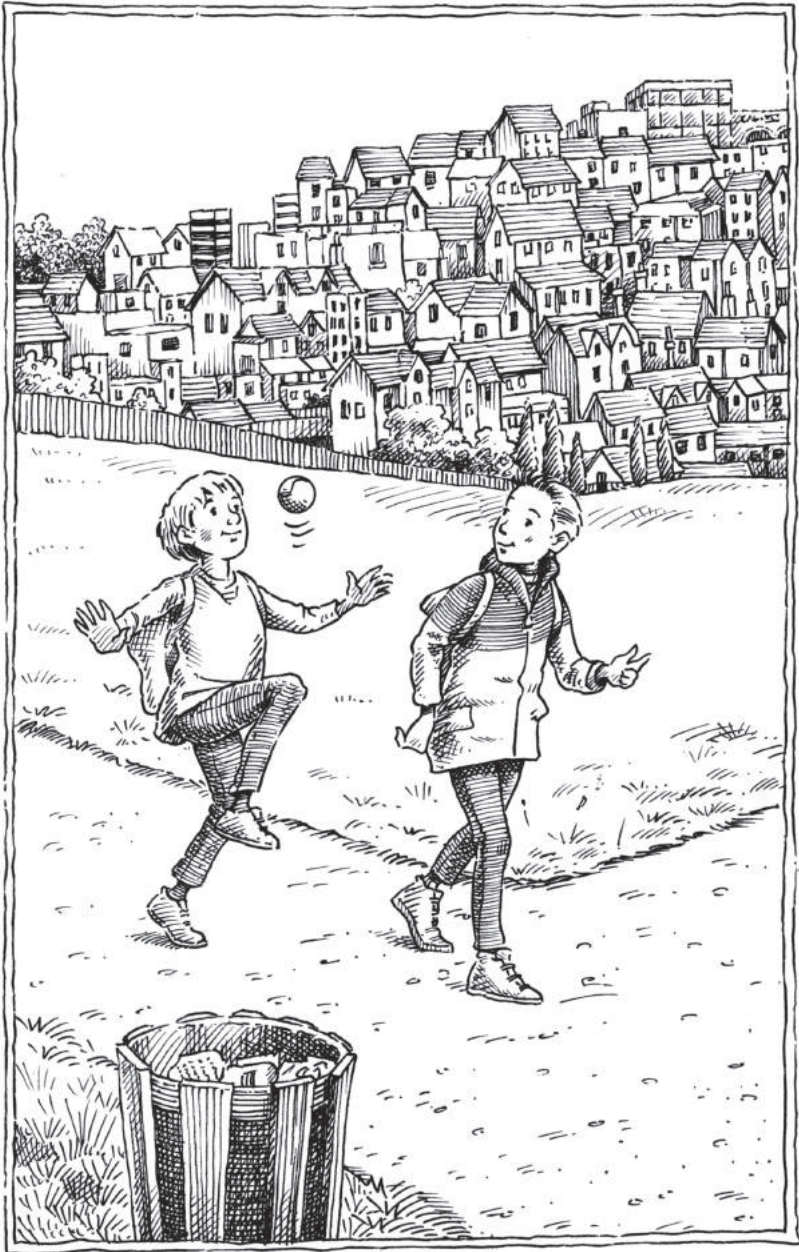




'Are you scared of the dark? Well, you should be. You may think you are immune to the terrors of the night, but you are not. Nobody is.

I am the Magician, ruler of the Night's Realm, and my dark fortress stretches as far as the eye can see. I have hundreds of children working for me, but I need more. Their fear is my lifeblood – it gives me my power.

One of my trusted warlocks tells me there are lots more children ready for the taking. Are you one of them? Soon, when the night is at its darkest, I may come for you. And once I have you here, I will keep you for ever.



# 1

**B**illy Jones was crossing the park on his way home from school, kicking an old tennis ball about with his friend Tom.

‘No way!’ he said, hoofing the ball into the air. ‘Really?’

‘Yep,’ said Tom, heading it back to Billy.

Saturday was Tom’s birthday, and he was getting an X-Station from his mum and dad.

‘So, d-do you f-fancy coming over to my place?’ he asked, stammering slightly as he always did.

‘Definitely,’ said Billy, catching the ball and putting it in his pocket. ‘I’m not going to miss

out on an all-day gaming session.’

They made their way out through the park gates and up the hill to a row of small shops.

‘Hold on a bit,’ said Billy, stopping outside the convenience store on the corner and feeling in his pockets for some change.

He pushed the door open and immediately headed to the sweets. He grabbed a bag of his favourites and took them to the checkout. Mrs Rutland was usually behind the till, but today a crooked elderly man was standing there instead. He was an odd-looking person and Billy had to force himself not to stare. The man’s long nose and curved chin almost touched at their ends, and he was as bald as a coot and as wrinkled as a dried prune. If he believed in such things, Billy might have mistaken him for some sort of evil wizard or warlock.

‘Hi! Where’s Mrs Rutland?’ asked Billy,



trying to stop himself from wrinkling his nose.  
The man gave off a strong, musty odour.



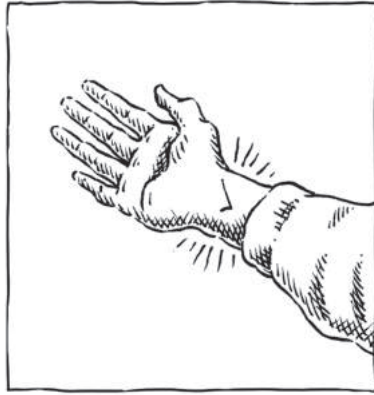
‘She’s not well, I’m afraid,’ said the man. He breathed noisily through his open mouth and sounded like a blocked drain. He scrutinized Billy intently. ‘I’ll be standing in for her until she’s better.’

Tom appeared beside Billy with a can of Coke and waited as the strange man scanned Billy’s sweets.

‘That’ll be one pound twenty,’ the man said, but as Billy went to take the bag, the man held onto it and wouldn’t let go. He stared at Billy with eyes as dark as a bottomless well. It seemed to go on for ages, and an icy shudder ran down Billy’s spine.

Then with a knowing smile, the man let go and Billy paid, snatched the bag up and hurried outside. He felt a slight stinging on his wrist, and saw he’d scratched himself. There was a little red mark, shaped like a tick. Billy felt thoroughly unsettled, and took a few deep breaths to calm down.

Tom followed a few seconds later. ‘W-w-what was all that about?’ he asked, popping open his can and taking great gulps of Coke.



‘No idea,’ said Billy, starting to feel better now he was out in the sunshine. ‘He was really creepy, though!’

Tom frowned and glanced at his own wrist. ‘I’ve been scratched,’ he said, licking the wound.

‘Me too,’ said Billy. ‘I think it was that old man’s fingernails. They were like claws.’

‘Maybe,’ said Tom, draining his drink and lobbing the can into a nearby bin. ‘Anyway, about this Saturday – could you c-c-come over for half ten?’

‘Sure,’ said Billy.

‘Brilliant,’ said Tom. ‘And m-m-my mum said you could stay over, so we can play all night too if we’re quiet!’

‘You mean stay the night?’ asked Billy, his chest feeling suddenly tight.

‘Yeah. What’s the p-problem?’

‘I can’t,’ said Billy. His skin started to prickle and his heart began to race. ‘I – er – I’ve just remembered my cousins are visiting this weekend, and I’ve got to stay and keep them company.’

‘You’re j-joking, aren’t you?’ said Tom.

‘Sorry,’ said Billy, shrugging apologetically but feeling a huge wave of relief. ‘Perhaps I can come another time.’

‘Whatever,’ said Tom, with a disappointed sigh. ‘I’ll see you at s-s-school tomorrow.’

‘Sorry,’ said Billy again, as they parted company to go their different ways home. He wandered past the cinema and up into Merlin Place, his face burning with shame. He hated

lying to his best mate just to wriggle out of a situation he couldn't cope with, but he didn't want to become a laughing stock either.

For the fact was, Billy Jones was afraid of the dark.



Billy had been scared of the dark for as long as he could remember, but lately his fear had become much worse. He'd started seeing things lurking in the shadows of his room – creeping, crawling things that made his muscles freeze in terror and the breath judder in his chest. It made him feel stupid and ashamed. It was why he now kept a night light on in his bedroom, and why he couldn't have stayed over at Tom's house.

'Hi, Mum!' Billy called, as he clattered through the front door and dumped his bag in the hall.

'Good day at school?' asked his mum, as usual.

‘Oh, wonderful!’ said Billy sarcastically. He didn’t mention Tom’s birthday – she would only try and persuade him to go. Although they knew he had a problem with the dark, his mum and dad weren’t aware how bad it had become.

Billy tried not to think about the approaching night, but as he played computer games up in his bedroom the sky outside began to darken, sending shadows stretching and creeping through the streets of the town. The evening seemed to fly by, and all too soon his dad called upstairs with the words he dreaded most.

‘Time for bed, Billy.’

‘OK,’ croaked Billy, his voice a little shaky from a sense of looming peril. It was the same every evening. As soon as bedtime approached, all of his fears started to bubble up inside him. He tried to put it off for as long as possible, but after he’d been called twice

and warned once, Billy got ready and went downstairs. His mum and dad were sat on the settee, watching TV.

‘Night,’ said Billy.

‘Goodnight, sleep tight.’

Billy hung around in the doorway. His heart started to thump as he desperately tried to think of ways to delay the inevitable climb back upstairs.

‘Off you go, Billy,’ said his dad. ‘You’ve got school in the morning.’

‘OK,’ he murmured in a small voice. He gave them each a peck on the cheek and then slowly went up to his room. He felt alone and helpless, and checked beneath his bed to make sure his torch and cricket bat were to hand. Then he climbed under the duvet, hoping beyond hope he wouldn’t get another panic attack in the night. He read until he couldn’t keep his eyes open any more, and finally drifted into a restless sleep.