

# SKELETON KEYS



# THE LEGEND OF GAP-TOOTH JACK

WRITTEN BY  
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LITTLE TIGER  
LONDON

To the real Emily ~ Guy Bass  
To Mackenzie G – sorry about the wait  
~ Pete Williamson



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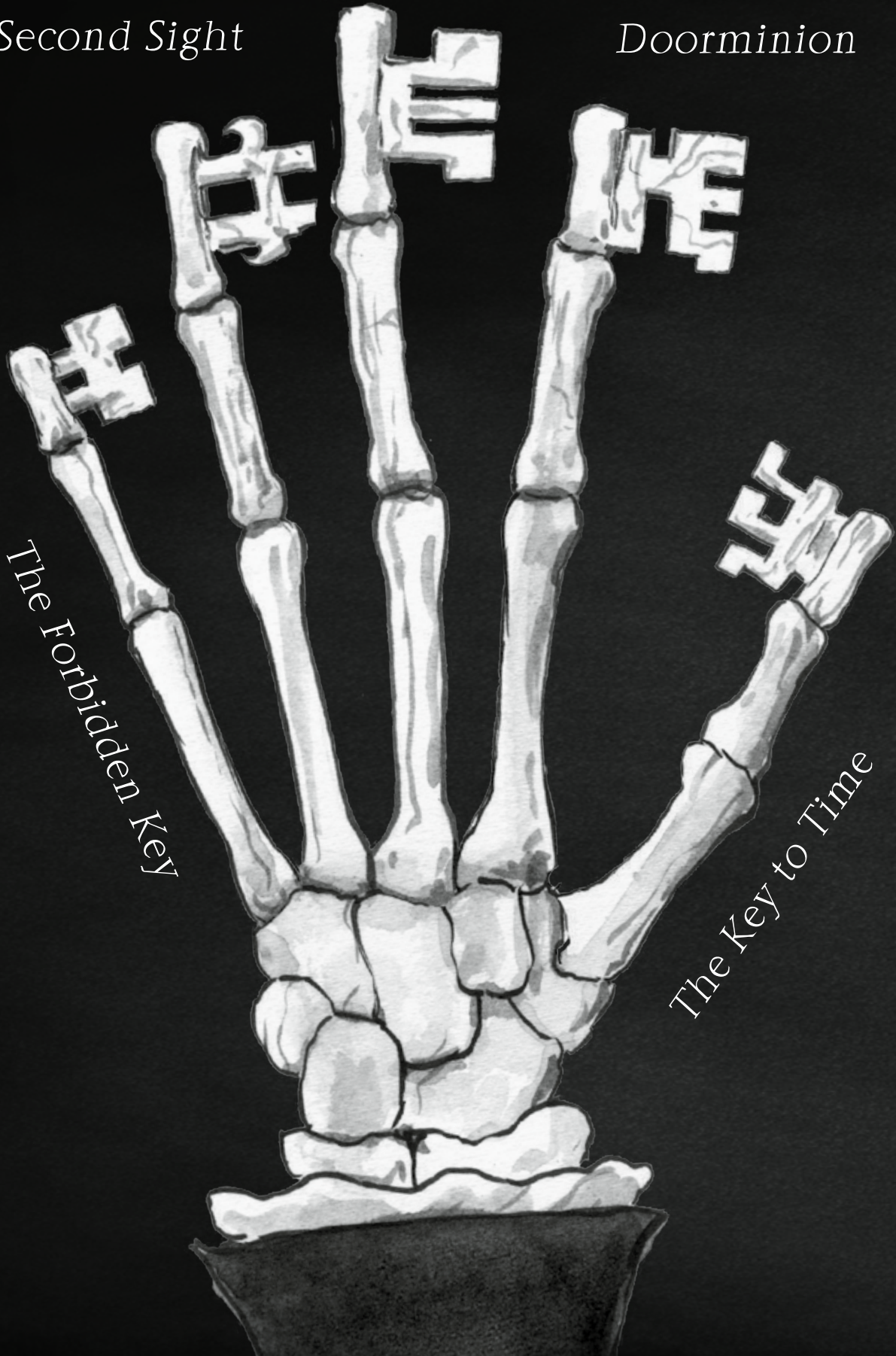
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*The Key to  
Reality*

*The Key to  
Second Sight*

*The Key to  
Doorminion*



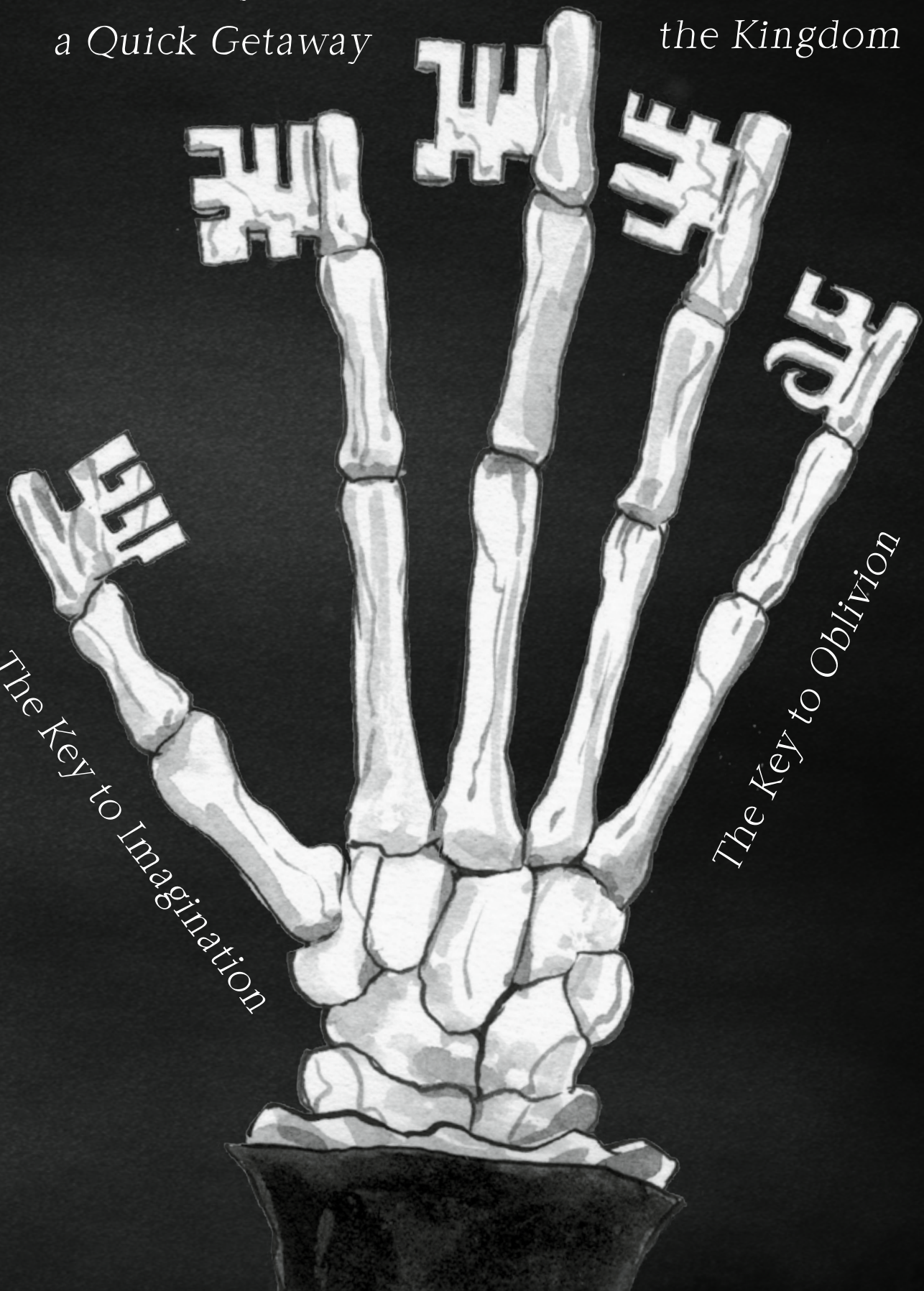
*The Forbidden Key*

*The Key to Time*

*The Key to  
a Quick Getaway*

*The Key to  
Possibility*

*The Key to  
the Kingdom*



*The Key to Imagination*

*The Key to Oblivion*



Greetings! To tick-tockers, swiss-cheesers  
and hurlypots! To the imaginary and  
the unimaginary! To the living, the dead and  
everyone in between, my name is Keys ...  
Skeleton Keys.

Ages or so ago, long before you were even  
thinking about being born, I was an IF – an  
imaginary friend. Then, before I knew what  
was happening, I was suddenly as real as a  
dog's tail! I had become *unimaginary*.

But that was a lifetime or three ago.  
Nowadailies, I concern myself with those  
IFs who have been recently *unimagined*.  
Wherever they may appear, so does Ol' Mr  
Keys! For these fantabulant fingers of mine  
open doors to anywhere and elsewhere ...  
hidden worlds ... secret places ... doors to the  
limitless realm of all imagination.

O, glorious burden! These keys have opened  
more doors than you have had biscuits – and

each door has led to an adventure that would make a head spin from its neck! The stories I could tell you...

But of course you would not be here if you did not want a story! Well, never fear, dallywangers – today I have a hum-dum-dinger of a tale to make even the soundest mind loop-de-loop! Brace your breeches for the truly unbelievable, unbelievably true tale I have called *The Legend of Gap-tooth Jack*.

Ah, Gap-tooth Jack – thief! Adventurer! Champion of imagining! Jack was a friend to some, hero to others, and a right pain in the rumplings for everyfolk else. The flabbergasting fable of Gap-tooth Jack is even older than I, but to find our way to the past we must begin in the present, with a *second* story, and a boy named Kasper.

Kasper has what we in the business of imagining call a *wild imagination*. On the

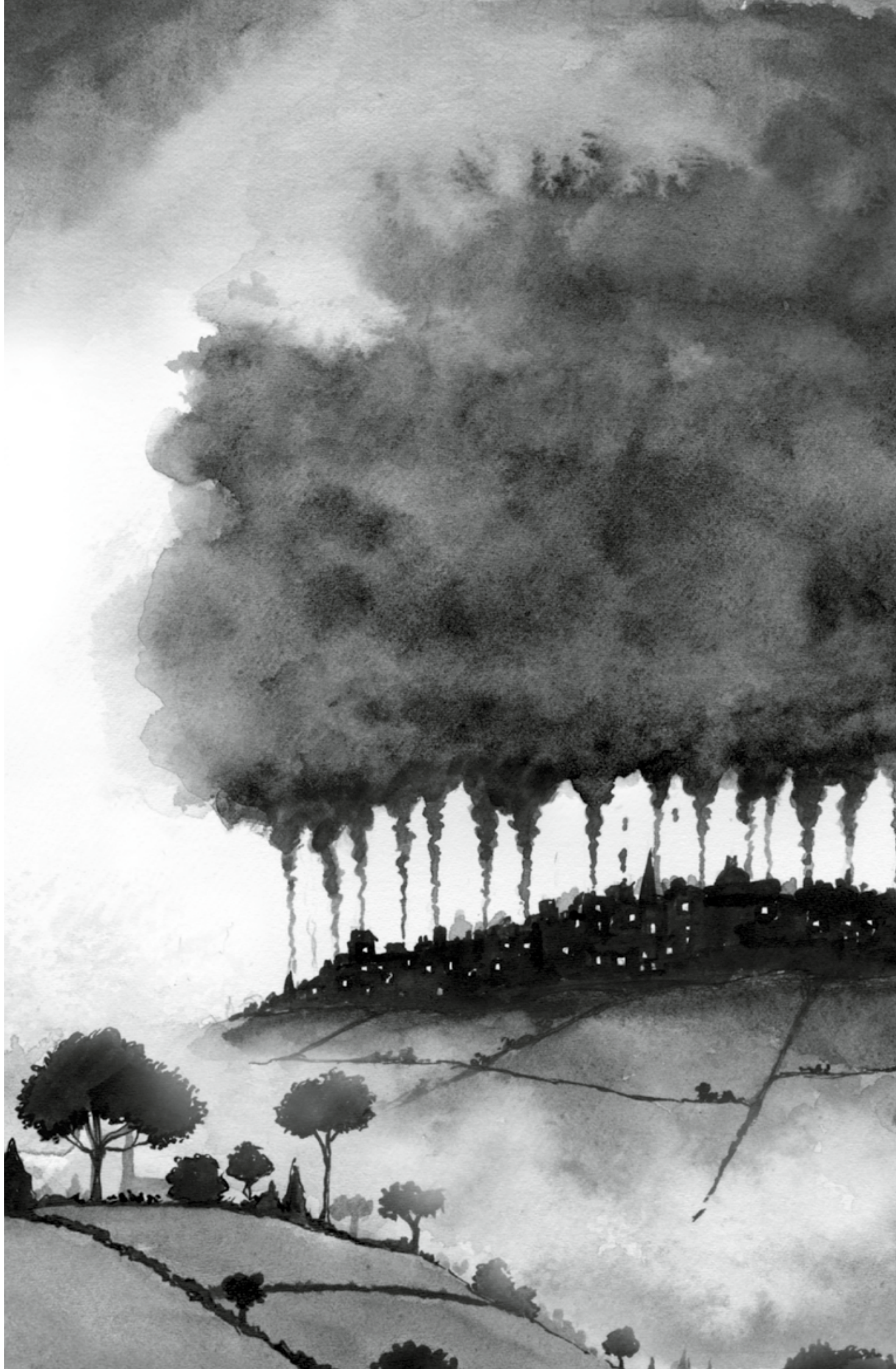
seventh day of his seventh year, Kasper imagined himself a friend. He did not *need* to, perhaps, for he had friends enough. But imaginations are not trussed 'n' tethered by *need* ... imaginations run free! Kasper named his IF *Wordy Gerdy*. Gerdy was a ghost of a girl with a most remarkable ability – with pen in hand she could rewrite the story of life itself. Let us suppose you have a pet dog – if Wordy Gerdy rewrote your story, you might suddenly have a *cat* instead. And, what is more, you would not even know that anything had changed – you would be as sure as shampoo that you had *always* had a cat!





Now imagine if Wordy Gerdy became unimaginary – if her power to rewrite stories became real. What then is to stop chaos, confusion or even calamity? For strange things can happen when imaginations run wild...

Join me as I begin to unravel the mystery of the myth of the legend of Gap-tooth Jack, by first paying a much needed visit to Kasper and his family. Their house, dwarfed by the sprawling city that surrounds it, shuddles 'n' shakes as a thunderstorm rages outside. The story has just begun, and yet it has already been rewritten...



CHAPTER ONE



# REWRITTEN

(MEET THE FAMILY)



*“With the turn of a key, the adventure begins.”*

—SK



**K**NOCK.  
KNOCK.  
KNOCK.

Kasper was lying on the living-room floor, watching his third-favourite episode of *Howie Howzer’s Haunted Trousers*, when the knock came.

“*Mu-um,*” he called, not taking his eyes off the television. The sound of the thunderstorm outside swallowed his call. “*Da-ad,* someone’s at the *doooooooooor...*”

There was no answer from the kitchen. Kasper wasn't about to move – not with the episode reaching its haunting highpoint. He turned up the volume as thunder clapped outside.

Then:

***CLICK CLUNK.***

A key turned in the lock.

Kasper sat up. Everyone was in the kitchen – Mum, Dad, Jakob, the twins.

*So, who was unlocking the front door?*

A cold shiver ran down Kasper's back. He got to his feet and turned to see the door creak slowly open. Rain lashed in as lightning forked in the night sky, illuminating a tall, lean figure standing in the doorway.

"Forgive my intrudings," the figure said. "I fear that if I do not come in, I might drown in this thundersome weather."

The figure took off a wide, three-peaked hat to reveal a grinning, bone-white skull.



Kasper gasped and stumbled backwards until he was pressed against the television.

“Fret not, I am not so spine-chilling as I look,” the skeleton said as he stepped inside. “I am afraid skinless is how I came into this world, so skinless is how I remain.”

Kasper tried to call out but fear caught the cry in his throat.

“My name is Keys ... Skeleton Keys,” the skeleton continued, placing his hat on the nearby sofa and shaking the raindrops from his coat. “And you need to be afeared. After all, you brought me here.”

“I-I did?” Kasper blurted.

“Well, someone did,” replied Skeleton Keys, glancing around. “For although I was far that-a-way in the comfort of my Doorminion, I felt the *twitch*, that most soul-clattering rattle of the bones that alerts me to a new *unimagining*.”



“I-I don’t understand,” Kasper replied.

“Somewhere in this house is an IF – an imaginary friend – that has been brought to life!” the skeleton declared. “Have you not noticed anything oddish or outlandish of late? Unimaginary friends do tend to be accompanied by the most flabbergasting freakery...”

“I don’t know what you— Wait.” Kasper scratched the back of his head, the fog of fear clearing a little. “Like what happened to Wordy Gerdy?” he asked.

“Who?”

“M-my friend – I mean, not my real friend,” Kasper replied. “Except now she is.”

“Now she is your real friend, or now she is *real*?” Skeleton Keys asked, leaning towards him.

“*Really* real,” Kasper explained.

“How real? As real as a vivid dream? As real as a stubbed toe? As real as rock cakes?”

“I was thinking about her and all of a sudden she wasn’t in my head any more – she was right there in front of me. She was—”

“*Unimaginary*,” Skeleton Keys interrupted. “I knew it, my twitch was right on the money! Now tell me, Kasper, where is this Wordy Gerdy?”

Kasper pointed to a door at the far end of the room. “In the kitchen, with everyone else.”

“Then fret not – Ol’ Mr Keys is on the case,” declared Skeleton Keys, taking long, deliberate strides towards the kitchen. He pushed open the door and strode inside to find Kasper’s family sitting around a small, white table.

“Dogs ‘n’ cats!” the skeleton gasped.

“Mum, Dad, this, uh, this is Mr Keys,” said Kasper, following in behind.

“How do you do, Mr Keys?” said Kasper’s mum. “May I offer you a cup of tea?”

“I am afraid it would have nowhere to go,”

replied Skeleton Keys. "Thank you all the same."

"Then something to eat?" added Kasper's mum.

**"CARROTS!"** cried Kasper's dad.

"It's always carrots with you," sighed Kasper's mum.

Skeleton Keys scratched his skull with a key-tipped finger, before ushering Kasper to a corner of the kitchen.

"Forgive me for asking," he whispered. "But are you sure this is your family?"

"What? Yeah," replied Kasper. "What do you mean?"

"It is just that I could not help but notice that your father is a *very large rabbit*."

Kasper looked at his dad. Sure enough, he was a brown-grey rabbit the size of a bear

Kasper shrugged. "What else would he be?" he said.

“CARROTS! CARROTS!”

shouted the enormous rabbit, thumping his great foot against the floor.

“I also note,” Skeleton Keys continued, “that your mother is, well, is—”



“Is what?” Kasper’s mother interrupted. She stood on the kitchen table, her hands on her hips. She was no taller than a teacup. “These are modern times, Mr Keys. Families come in all shapes and sizes.”



“Quite so, but...” uttered the skeleton, gazing in bafflement at a pair of hamster-sized, sky-blue elephants, huddled together in a high chair on the other side of the table.

“That’s Sofie and Ingrid – they’re twins,” Kasper explained as both elephants let out an identical trumpeting sound. Then he pointed to a sock puppet with buttons for eyes, draped lifelessly on the kitchen table. “And that’s my big brother, Jakob.”

“Don’t mind him, you’ll be lucky to get two words out of him all year,” Kasper’s tiny mother tutted as Skeleton Keys leaned in to inspect the sock puppet. “You know what teenagers are like.”



Carrots!

*“Imagination never fails!  
But no one else should write your tales”  
—SK*



“**C**rumcrinkles...” said Skeleton Keys, gazing around the room at Kasper’s decidedly unconventional family. “Who did all this?”

“Did all what?” Kasper asked.

“**CARROTS!**” boomed Kasper’s dad.

“Why, this! And this and this, and, by my buckles, *this*,” Skeleton Keys cried, pointing at each of Kasper’s family members in turn.

“Who transformed, transmogrified and transfigured these poor dallywanglers? You are not trying to tell me that your father has



always been a rabbit?”

“Always...?” replied Kasper as if the word had suddenly illuminated a hidden memory. “I mean, I-I don’t remember him being anything else. But I guess I don’t really remember him being a rabbit either.”

“I do believe you are as confuddled as your family is converted ... and that this is the work of an *unimaginary*,” declared Skeleton Keys, craning low to eyeball Kasper. “Where is your IF, Kasper? Where is—”

“Didn’t do it!”

The cry came from inside a low cupboard at the far end of the kitchen. Skeleton Keys tilted his head with a dry creak, his milk-white eyeballs fixing upon a rattling cupboard door. He reached the cupboard in two long strides. It rattled again as he wrapped his key-tipped fingers around the door handle.

“Wordy Gerdy? Is that—”

## “DIDN'T DO IT!”

The cupboard doors were suddenly flung open from the inside, sending Skeleton Keys flying. A strange, ghostly girl burst from within and hovered, impossibly, in the air. She flitted around the room in panic before finally settling in the far corner of the kitchen, like a bee exhausted from buzzing around a window. Though she was solid enough, the girl was faintly see-through and emitted a greenish-white glow.



“Wordy Gerdy, I presume,” said Skeleton Keys, dusting himself off.

“Gerdy didn’t do it! Gerdy didn’t change a thing! Everything like this already!” The ghoulish girl hovered in the air again, her hair floating above her head as if she was underwater. In her right hand, she held a large, brush-tipped pen.

“Cheese ‘n’ biscuits! She is a *ghost writer*?” Skeleton Keys gasped, a peel of thunder echoing outside. “Well, that explains *everything*.”

“*What explains everything?*” asked Kasper as his unimaginary friend hid her pen behind her back.

“Yours is a wild and wonderfilled mind, Kasper,” he said. “After all, what more fantabulant friend could you wish for, than one who could change everything ... a friend who could *rewrite* the story of your life? Why, you could be anything you want! An explorer ... a swashbuckler ... a run-for-fun, swing-a-sword gadabout who lives only for adventure!”

“But—” Kasper began.

“**CARROTS!**” bellowed Kasper’s dad.

“But then you imagined your IF so wildly and so well that she suddenly became as real as wrapping paper,” continued Skeleton Keys. “You made Wordy Gerdy *unimaginary*, Kasper. And now her ability to rewrite stories is as real as she!”

“Don’t listen!” Wordy Gerdy wailed.

“I-I don’t understand...” Kasper said, hot with panic.

“The pen is the tool for creation – words flow from the mind to the pen like water from a tap ... but your IF’s pen has a peculiar power,” Skeleton Keys explained. “When Wordy Gerdy writes, she rewrites reality itself.”

“Don’t listen!” Gerdy begged. “Gerdy didn’t change! Gerdy stayed things the same!”

“Wordy Gerdy has rewritten your family’s stories, one by one. She turned your father

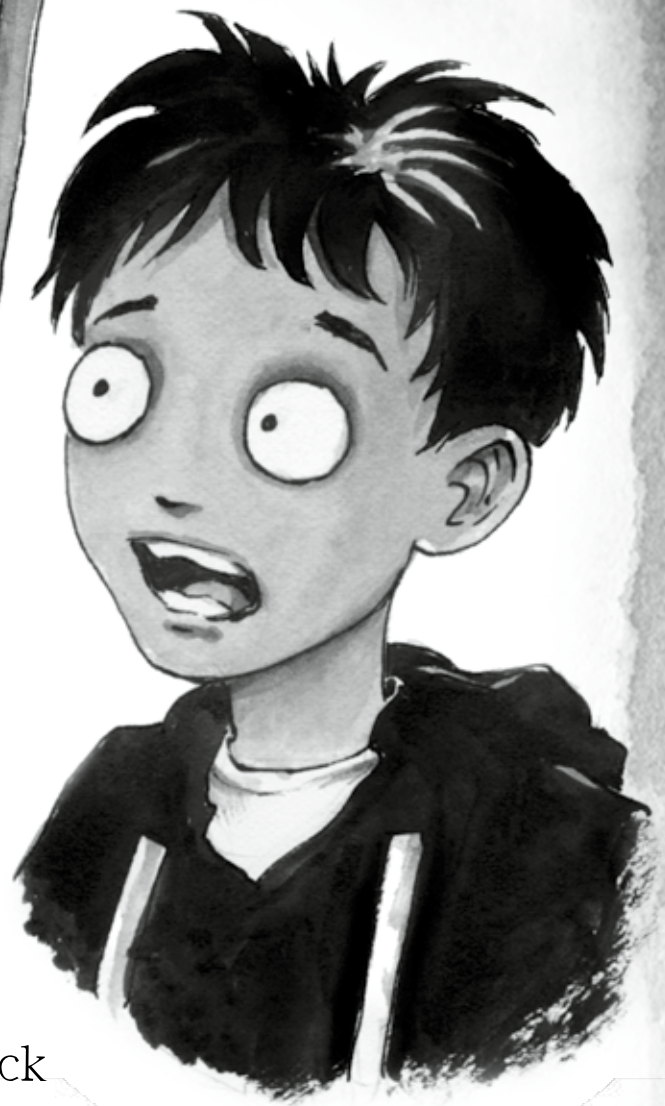
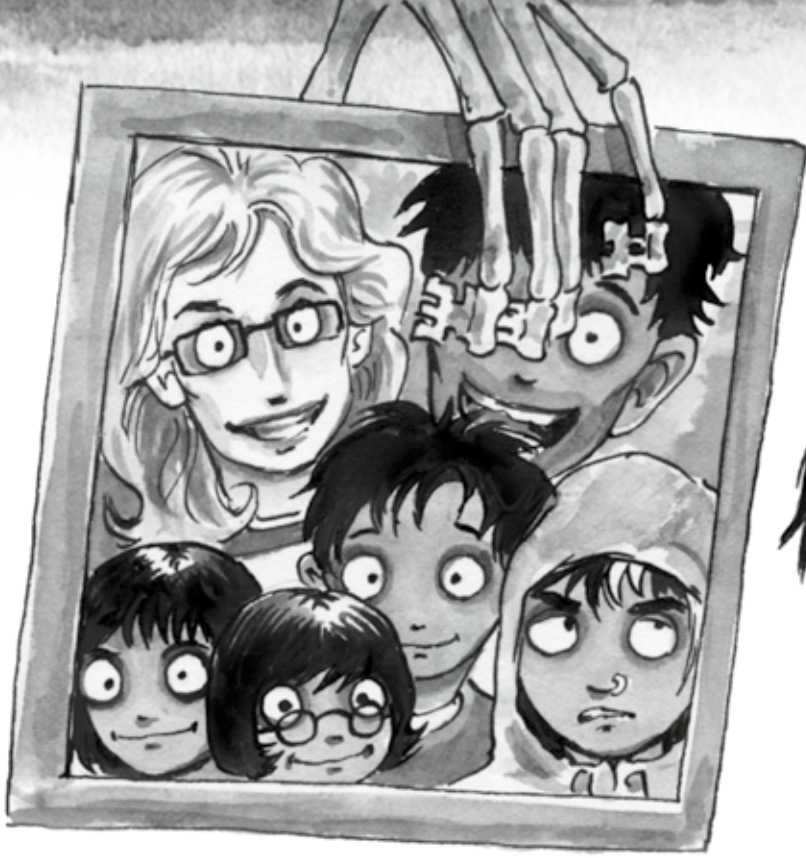
into a rabbit ... your mother is no bigger than a folded handkerchief ... elephants and socks!" Skeleton Keys continued. "Ghost writers do not care to reveal themselves, Kasper – Wordy Gerdy was sure to make her changes so well written that your mind is clouded to the true story. But Ol' Mr Keys knows a *plot hole* when he sees one..."

"Plot hole? Not hole!" Wordy Gerdy shrieked. "Didn't do it!"

Skeleton Keys swept across the kitchen to the fridge. It was covered in photographs, secured with fruit-shaped magnets. The skeleton slipped a photograph from under a magnetic strawberry and held it out to Kasper. "Behold, your *real* family."

Kasper peered at the picture. There he was in the centre, smiling widely, and surrounded by a man, a woman and three more children.

"Didn't do it!" Gerdy squealed.



“M-my family...”  
said Kasper, the realization slapping him in the face like a wet fish. He glanced back at the strange collection of creatures at the table. “I remember.”

“CARROTS!” declared the rabbit.

“Stop! Not real! *This* real!” Wordy Gerdy cried, swooping across the room and snatching the photograph from Skeleton Keys’ bony hand. She came to a halt in front

of the fridge and began tearing off the photographs. “Don’t look!”

“Wordy Gerdy, no sooner were you unimagined than you began transforming this poor family into a bunch of who-knows-whatlies,” declared Skeleton Keys. “Well, Ol’ Mr Keys is here to tell you, you have no right to rewrite – cease your mad modifications this instant!”

The image shows the letters 'T' and 'O' in a large, bold, black, hand-drawn font. The 'T' has a thick vertical stem and a horizontal top bar. The 'O' is a simple, thick-lined circle. The style is reminiscent of a marker or thick pen drawing on a white surface.

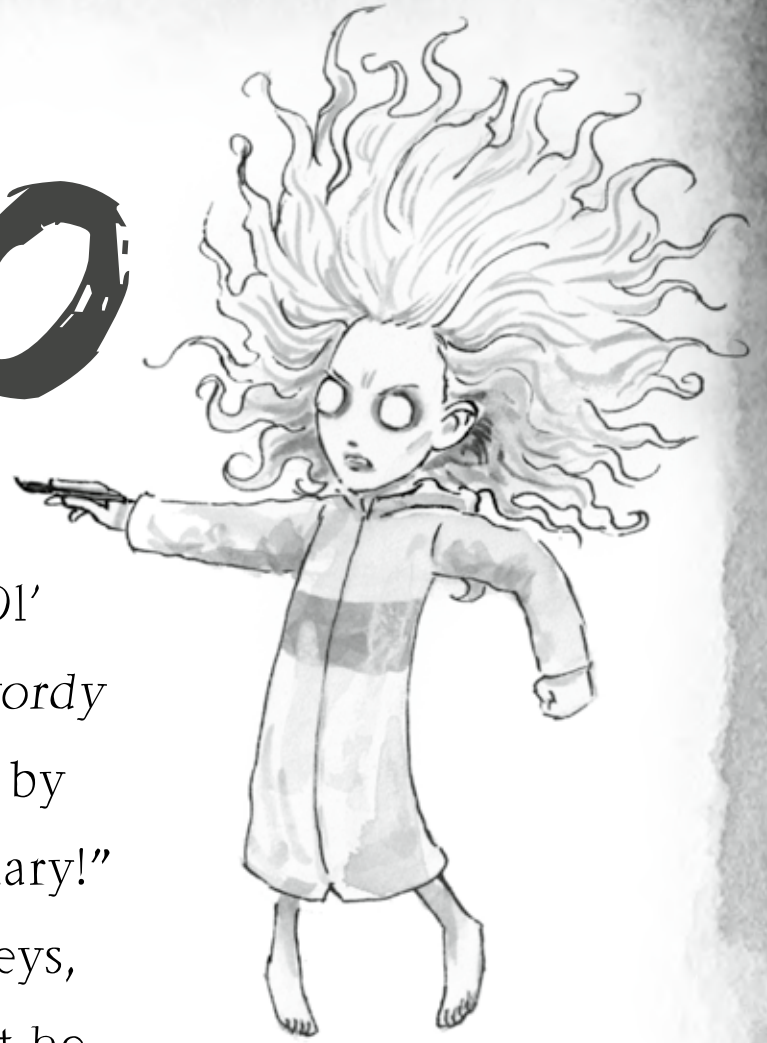
Wordy Gerdy turned slowly and glowered at the skeleton.

“No. Gerdy does what Gerdy does – Gerdy writes,” she hissed. “Gerdy writes you!”

With that, Wordy Gerdy drew her pen swiftly through the air, dragging streaks of green light with each stroke. Up, down, looping and dashing, as if writing on some invisible canvas. In a moment, she had written a word in the air.

The word read ‘TOMATO’.

# MATO



“Naïve creature, Ol’  
Mr Keys is far too *wordy*  
*wise* to be rewritten by  
an unruly unimaginary!”  
declared Skeleton Keys,  
failing to notice that he  
suddenly had a bright red tomato in place of a  
head. “No revision you envision will affect me!  
Now surrender that paranormal pen at once!”

“Never! Gerdy writes! It is what Gerdy does  
... it is what Gerdy *is*,” Gerdy cried again, her  
pen darting left and right, round and round.  
“Gerdy will rewrite *everything*.”

“Daisy, I do believe that is your cue,” said  
Skeleton Keys. “Now!”







Guy Bass is an award-winning author and semi-professional geek. He has written over thirty books, including the best-selling *Stitch Head* series (which has been translated into sixteen languages) *Dinkin Dings* and the *Frightening Things* (winner of a 2010 Blue Peter Book Award) *Spyinosaur*, *Laura Norder: Sheriff of Butts Canyon*, *Noah Scape* *Can't Stop Repeating Himself*, *Atomic!* and *The Legend of Frog*.

Guy has previously written plays for both adults and children.

He lives in London with his wife and imaginary dog.

Find out more at [guybass.com](http://guybass.com)



Pete Williamson is a self-taught artist and illustrator. He is best known for the much-loved *Stitch Head* series by Guy Bass, and the award-winning *The Raven Mysteries* by Marcus Sedgwick.

Pete has illustrated over sixty-five books by authors including Francesca Simon, Matt Haig and Charles Dickens. Before that he worked as a designer in an animation company (while daydreaming about being a children's book illustrator).

Pete now lives in rural Kent with a big piano, a writer wife and a dancing daughter. Find out more at [petewilliamson.co.uk](http://petewilliamson.co.uk)

READ ABOUT SKELETON KEYS'  
OTHER ADVENTURES...



When Ben's imaginary friend, the Gorblimey, suddenly becomes real, Skeleton Keys is convinced the little monster is dangerous. But someone far more monstrous is out there, waiting to take revenge on Ben...



When Luna's family members start disappearing before her very eyes she thinks her ghostly granddad is to blame. But Skeleton Keys isn't so sure – he's certain something even more mysterious lurks in the shadows – something UNIMAGINARY.