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Freddie Fernortner

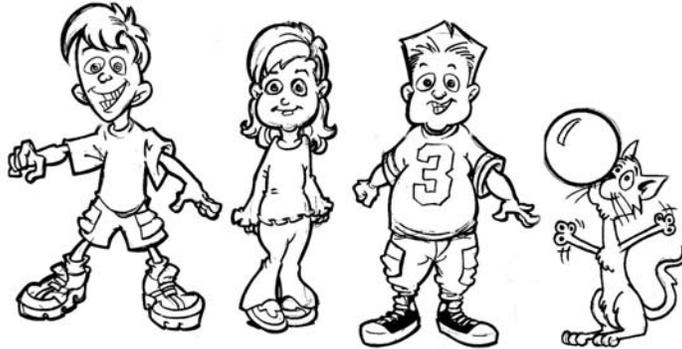
FEARLESS FIRST GRADER[®]

Freddie

Darla

Chipper

Mr. Chewy



THE SUPER-SCARY NIGHT THINGY
BY JOHNATHAN RAND



1

“Help me get this tent into the back yard,” Freddie Fernortner said to his two friends, Darla and Chipper. The three first graders were in Freddie’s garage, where they had just found the Fernortner’s small tent. Sometimes, Freddie and his family used it when they went camping.

Tonight, however, the three children were going to use the tent for a different reason.

They were going to set up the tent in

Freddie's back yard.

Then, they would wait until it got dark.

Until the shadows grew long.

Until the crickets started chirping, and bats flitted through the sky.

Until the big silvery moon gazed down upon them.

Then, they were going to go into the tent and read scary stories from a book that Freddie had checked out from the local library.

In the dark, with only a flashlight.

“Gosh, this thing is heavy,” Chipper said as he helped Freddie with the tent. Darla was carrying the long, wooden stakes. Mr. Chewy, Freddie's cat, was sitting near the garage door, chewing on a wad of gum and blowing bubbles. He was the only cat in the world who could do that, and

Freddie was quite proud of himself for teaching the animal how to do it.

And that's how the cat got its name.

Mr. Chewy.

The three kids carried the tent and the stakes into the back yard.

“We need to set it up in a place that will be spooky,” Freddie said.

“How can a back yard be spooky?” Darla said, looking around. “There's nothing scary here.”

For sure, Freddie's back yard looked a lot like any other back yard. There were several trees, a cement birdbath, and a small inflatable wading pool that Freddie sometimes used during the hot summer days. Near the fence was a picnic table and a barbeque grill, where Freddie's dad often grilled hamburgers and hot dogs on the weekends.



But there wasn't anything that was scary.

"Let's set it up under that tree over there," Chipper said.

"Good idea," Freddie agreed. "It might be even darker under the tree, because the leaves will block out the

moon.”

It didn't take long to set up the tent. Freddie had helped his father with it many times, and he knew exactly how to put it together. It was dark green and was held up by two wooden stakes and a few small ropes that were fastened to smaller stakes that were pushed into the ground.

“There,” Freddie said as the last stake was set. “Now we're ready.”

“Now what?” Darla said.

“Let's meet here just before dark,” Freddie said. “I'll get our flashlight that Mom keeps in the kitchen drawer. And I'll bring the scary book that I checked out from the library.”

“This is going to be spooky!” Chipper said.

“I can't wait!” said Darla.

“It's going to be fun, that's for sure,”

Freddie said.

But Freddie, Darla, and Chipper had no idea just how scary the night would turn out to be.

2

The sun went down.

The moon came up.

Bats whirled through the night sky.

Crickets chirped.

And Freddie, Darla, Chipper, and Mr. Chewy were huddled together in the small tent. The only light came from the beam of the flashlight Freddie held in his hand.

“This is so cool!” Darla whispered.

“Yeah,” Chipper said. “I like to read

stories in bed, under the covers, with a flashlight. But being out in a tent is going to be a lot more fun!”

Somewhere in the distance, an owl hooted.

“I’ll bet it’s a great horned owl,” Chipper said. “My dad saw it a few nights ago. He said it was huge!”

“I’d like to see that sometime,” Freddie said.

“Dad says that you don’t see them very often,” Chipper continued, “because they only come out at night.”

Freddie picked up his library book. “What story should we read first?” he asked.

“A good one,” Chipper said.

“A scary one,” Darla said. “One that will give me the shivers.”

“There are lots of good ones in the

book,” Freddie said. “Stories about ghosts and haunted houses and werewolves.”

“Just don’t read any stories about super-scary night thingys,” Darla warned. Her eyes grew wide. “That would be *too* scary.”

Chipper frowned. “Super-scary night thingys?” he asked. “What are super-scary night thingys?”

“Yeah,” Freddie said. “What are super-scary night thingys?”

“Super-scary night thingys are just terrible,” Darla said. Her eyes grew wide. “My older brother told me all about them. He’s in fourth grade, so he’s really smart. He says that super-scary night thingys can be anywhere . . . in a closet, under the bed, outside in the bushes, anywhere.”

“But what are they?” Freddie prodded.

“Super-scary night thingys are weird creatures that can disappear and appear whenever they want to,” Darla said. “Some of them are very big, and some of them are very small. But they’re very scary.”

“What do they look like?” Chipper asked.

Darla shrugged. “I don’t really know,” she said. “My brother says that they are so scary looking that he couldn’t even talk about it.”

“There is no such thing as super-scary night thingys,” Freddie said. “Your brother was just trying to scare you because you’re in first grade, and he’s in fourth.”

“No, they’re real,” Darla insisted. “I heard one once. Under my bed.”

“Did you see it?” Chipper asked.

“When I looked, it was already gone. They can disappear whenever they want,

you know.”

Outside, a gentle breeze rustled the tree branches above. The moon shone down, brightening the sides of the tent.

“Well, I say we start reading right at the beginning of the book,” Freddie said.

“That way, we won’t miss anything.”

“You start,” said Chipper.

“Yeah,” Darla agreed. “Start reading, Freddie.”

“Okay,” Freddie said. “Here goes.”

But Freddie didn’t even get a chance to read.

Because right at that moment, there was a noise from outside.

The three first graders turned—and saw the shadow of a huge monster on the tent!



3

All three children shrieked.

They huddled close.

Freddie pointed the flashlight at the tent flap.

The tent flap began to open.

The three screamed again.

The monster tossed back the flap and said:

“What’s going on out here?”

Freddie, Darla, and Chipper breathed

sighs of relief. It wasn't a monster, after all!
It was Freddie's mom!

"I brought you some popcorn," she said. "I didn't mean to scare you."

"I love popcorn!" Darla said.

"Yeah!" Chipper said. "Thanks, Mrs. Fernortner!"

Mrs. Fernortner knelt down and handed Freddie a big bowl filled with hot, buttery popcorn. Then she handed each child a napkin.

"Have fun," she said. "And don't scare yourselves silly."

"We won't, Mom," Freddie said.

"She's a cool mom," Chipper said, after Mrs. Fernortner had left.

"Yeah, I think I'm going to keep her around," Freddie said. "Sometimes, she even lets me eat cookies in bed while I read."

“I wish my mom let me do that,”
Darla said, crossing her arms.

Freddie placed the bowl of popcorn in
the middle, and the three kids ate hungrily.

“Okay,” Freddie said, still munching
on a mouthful of popcorn. “Let’s get
started. Here we go.”

And Freddie read.

The story was good.

It was creepy.

It was scary.

But it was a story . . . and that’s why
Freddie, Darla, and Chipper didn’t get
scared.

But they were about to.

Because something scary was about to
happen . . . for real.

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