

**TAKESHITA  
DEMONS**

*To adventurous children everywhere, with  
monster-loads of thanks to my family – C.B*



The publishers and the author would like to thank Mrs Keiko Holt  
for checking the Japanese language and traditions

JANETTA OTTER-BARRY BOOKS

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# TAKESHITA DEMONS



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FRANCES LINCOLN  
CHILDREN'S BOOKS



# CHAPTER ONE



Are you afraid of ghosts and evil spirits, or the black space under your bed? If you are, then put this book down right away and choose another. If I were you, I would choose a book about teddy bears and bunny rabbits, because then there's a good chance that you won't be reading about floating heads or evil spirits or any of the other things you'll find inside this book. If I were you, I'd do that. But for me, it's already too late.

I was born in a small town near Osaka, in Japan. My family moved to England just over a year ago, after my grandmother died. But our troubles started long before that. Looking back, I should have realised earlier.

My father worked long hours for his office job, so he didn't realise either. He was never at home to

see what was happening. My brother Kazu was too little even to notice; he was still a baby back then. And my mother was always busy with Kazu or her English class, plus she didn't really believe. That just left my grandmother, Baba. She understood better than all of them.

Baba knew all there was to know about spirits and demons, good and evil, and she took care to protect our family from them. She kept a cedar leaf over our front door to ward off evil, she always left toys and games out for our house ghost, she even kept a pair of shiisa lion-dogs on the mantelpiece, bought during a beach holiday to Okinawa when my dad was just a boy. She never got sick or forgetful or even caught a cold, not in the whole time I'd known her, which was all my life. But towards the end, when she got really old, she walked with a stick and her hands shook like leaves whenever she used her chopsticks. She died when I was only eleven.

I cried and cried at her funeral, I didn't care who saw me. People from all over Kawanishi sent in envelopes of money and wreaths of flowers. The entire room was filled with light, and the priest was ringing his bell to keep out the bad spirits and bid farewell to my grandmother on her journey to her new place. Afterwards my family served a feast



of noodles and tempura upstairs, but nobody ate. Instead the rows of guests, all dressed in black, just knelt on the tatami mats and made smalltalk about the seasons. The noodles went cold and the tempura went soggy. Baba would have thought it an awful waste.

But what does all this have to do with floating heads and evil spirits? I didn't know myself, not back then. But Baba knew. So just remember: it's not too late to close this book and read about something safe instead, like teddy bears and bunny rabbits. Don't say I didn't warn you.



Until we moved to London I'd lived in the same house all my life, the same house Baba had lived in when she was just a girl. It was the oldest house in our street, wooden and two stories high. Its floors were polished smooth from generations of feet, and you could skid the entire length of the hallway if you got up enough speed in your socks. It creaked in the wind and was cold in the night, but it hid a thousand secrets, most of which my Baba knew. The biggest secret was our sakabashira pillar.

That was the reason we had a house ghost watching over us, the reason that nothing horrible had ever happened to our family. Not yet.

A sakabashira pillar is basically a mix-up. Ours happened more than a hundred years ago, when the men who were building our living room accidentally stuck the top end of a huge wooden column into the ground, so that its bottom end was pointing at the roof. It didn't change the shape of our house, and we couldn't tell that the pillar was upside-down, but none of that mattered. The damage was done. Our house was doomed to be haunted.

You can never tell what sort of ghost a sakabashira pillar will attract. Luckily, my Baba's Baba was as wise as my Baba; she managed to attract the attention of a zashiki-warashi, a child-ghost. Ours was a little girl, about five years old, and Baba called her Zashiko. I never saw her, but sometimes I'd wake in the night to find my pillow down by my feet instead of under my head. Other times I'd wake to see the light above me swaying in the ceiling, silent and watching, gently rocking, like a swing. But I was never scared. Being haunted by Zashiko was the best thing that could have happened to our family. She played tricks, but she

also brought good luck and kept us safe from the other spirits and demons, the ones Baba always warned me about.

When we left our house, we left Zashiko behind. With Baba gone and Zashiko back in Japan, we were truly alone when we arrived in England. I thought we'd be safe, that the spirits wouldn't find us. I was wrong.