



Somewhere between lunch and Runswick Bay, David must have filled his friend in on the events of the night before, and on Fliss's plan for that night. As he passed her seat on the coach, Gary bent down and whispered, 'OK - I'm in. Talk to you later.'

Clouds rolled in after tea, threatening rain. Team games on the beach were cancelled, and everybody went to their rooms to write up the day's activity. Each child was keeping a sort of log or diary of the visit, in which points of interest were to be recorded. Fliss wrote for a while, then got up and looked out of the window. The old woman was there watching the hotel. Fliss resolved to ask Mrs Wilkinson about her. She sat down again on her bunk, chewing the end of her pencil and reading through what she had written.

'Tuesday. Staithes and Runswick Bay. Nothing

happened on coach. Looked at scenery. Staithes old-fashioned and sort of dark with hills and cliffs all round. Mr Hepworth told us about the headless ghost but we didn't see it. We didn't see Captain Cook's shop either because it is under the sea. Crab pots everywhere. I had an ice-lolly and Mrs Marriott took our photo.'

'How d'you spell "excitement"?' asked Marie from her perch on the top bunk.

'Why - what're you writing about?'

'Mrs Evans. I'm putting, "There was a bit of excitement when we thought Mrs Evans had fallen off the cliff, but she'd only fallen behind, which was boring."'

'You're not.'

'I am.'

'I wouldn't be you, then. It's E-X-C-I-T-E-M-E-N-T.'

'Ta.'

Fliss knew she should write more, but she couldn't concentrate. If Lisa and the two boys were to watch with her tonight, they'd have to get together sometime this evening and sort out details, like where they'd meet and at what time.

She listened. Beyond the door, everything seemed quiet. Nobody was on the landing or the stairs. She wondered what the teachers were doing. If they were busy, she and Lisa might be

able to slip down to the next floor and have a quick meeting with the boys. It was strictly forbidden to visit other people's rooms, but they'd have to risk it. She put her book and pencil on the bed and went to the door.

'Where you going?' asked Maureen.

'Toilet,' she lied, opening the door and looking out. The landing was deserted. She slipped out, closed the door and knocked on the door of room eleven.

'Who is it?' Samantha's voice.

'Fliss. Is Lisa there?'

'Yes. Just a minute.'

Voices beyond the door. Fliss glanced towards the cupboard. No number. Door eleven opened and Lisa looked out. 'Come on,' whispered Fliss.

'Where? I'm halfway through my log.'

'Trot's room. Make plans. Quiet.'

'OK.'

They tiptoed down the stairs, listening for teachers. There was nobody on the landing below. Doors seven and eight were closed.

'Which is theirs?' hissed Lisa.

'Seven. Watch the stairs while I knock.'

Lisa watched and listened. Fliss knocked.

'Who's there?' It sounded like Gary's voice.

'Fliss. Open up, quick.'

Footsteps approached the door. It opened a

crack. An eye peered out. 'On your own, are you?'

'Me and Lisa. Hurry up.'

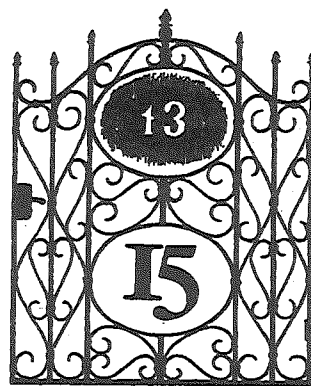
The door opened. Gary and David came out. 'Aren't we using your room?' Fliss asked.

'No chance. Barry and Richard're in there. They know nothing about this. It'll have to be the bathroom.'

They slipped into the bathroom, and Gary pushed the door-catch into place. 'We'll have to make it quick,' he whispered. 'Somebody's bound to want the toilet before long, and anyway I haven't started my log yet.'

They made their plans swiftly. They would go to bed at nine as normal, and wait till their roommates fell asleep. That should be earlier than last night because they'd had a long, tiring walk. At twenty-five past eleven exactly they'd get out of bed. They wouldn't dress for fear of waking somebody. They would leave their rooms and meet in the top-floor bathroom, room twelve, at half-past eleven. From there they would be able to keep watch on the stair-top, landing and cupboard. It would be impossible for anyone to reach the cupboard without being seen, and if anything odd happened to the door itself, like the number thirteen suddenly appearing on it, they'd see that too.

This settled, the four split up and returned to their rooms. It wasn't until Fliss was lying in bed at half-past nine, listening to Marie and the twins, that she realized nobody had thought about what they'd do if Ellie-May did appear. She lay, worrying about this and looking at her watch every minute or two, as her room-mates chattered on.



It was nearly eleven o'clock before the girls in room ten stopped talking and three of them fell asleep. Fliss lay absolutely still, listening to their breathing, and almost drifted off herself. When she realized what was happening she shook her head, blinked rapidly and looked at her watch.

Twenty-three twenty. Ten minutes to zero. Now that it was nearly time she didn't fancy it one bit. The cold, dark landing. The door of the linen cupboard, upon which the number thirteen might at this very moment be materializing. The prospect of footfalls on the stair.

And I was the one who suggested it, she reminded herself. I must have been crazy.

Well, anyway, it was too late now. It was her plan and she was stuck with it. She squinted at her watch again. Twenty-three twenty-seven. Three minutes to zero. What she'd do was, she'd listen for the others arriving. One of the others, at least.

She didn't want to be the first. She knew that if she opened the door and found herself alone on the landing, just a metre or so from that creepy cupboard, she'd have the door shut and be back under the covers so quick her feet wouldn't touch the floor.

Listen. A creak somewhere. Somewhere a tick. The house, settling. Twenty-three twenty-nine, and no footsteps. Perhaps nobody'll turn up. Maybe they've fallen asleep. I nearly did. And if they have, it's off. There's no way I'm watching alone. No way. Please God, let them be asleep.

Zero hour, and listen – somebody's coming. Somebody's right outside the door, breathing. Waiting. And there – there goes a whisper, so there's two of them at least and they're whispering about me – asking where I am.

Asleep, that's where I am, so leave me. Let me sleep. There's three of you. You don't need me. You don't need me, do you? Do you?

Twenty-three thirty-one. Zero plus one. They're listening at the door, and they know you're not asleep. They can hear you breathing – looking at your watch. They can hear your heart.

My idea. My plan. My own stupid fault in other words. OK, OK. I'm coming. Here I come.

She got out of bed, tiptoed across the sandy carpet and stood with her ear to the door, listening to

the sounds of stealthy movement beyond. Behind her, the three girls slept on. She twisted the knob and eased the door open. It squeaked, and somebody outside went, 'Sssh!' She looked across. Three pale figures were watching her from the bathroom doorway.

'Where the heck have you been?' hissed Lisa, as Fliss joined them. 'We've been here ages.'

'Sorry. I think I must have dropped off to sleep. Is anything happening?'

She looked towards the cupboard but there was no number. Trot shook his head. 'Nothing yet. Look, let's get inside and close the door except for a crack to look through. And no more talking, right?'

They stood on the cold plastic tiles, peering over one another's shoulders. The rain which had threatened earlier was now falling. Cloud hid the moon, so that the windows on the half-landings gave almost no light. Fliss shivered, wishing she had her dressing-gown and slippers, or better still, that she was where they were, in her bedroom at home.

Somewhere a clock chimed. 'What time's that?' whispered Gary. 'I forgot my flipping watch.'

Fliss looked at hers. 'Twenty-three forty-five – quarter to twelve.'

'Good grief, is that all? It feels like we've been

here for ever.' He withdrew from the doorway and walked up and down, hugging himself and shivering. Trot and Lisa drew back too, leaving Fliss to watch.

Nothing happened. After a while she said, 'Hey, how about somebody else taking a turn here? I need to get warm too.'

'I'll do it,' volunteered Lisa. Fliss went and stood on one leg beside the bath, resting a cold foot on its rim in order to massage some warmth into it. After a while she swapped over and rubbed the other foot.

Presently they heard the distant chimes again. Midnight. They looked at one another and drifted towards the door. As they did so, Lisa let out a stifled cry and pointed. 'Look.' They looked. The cupboard was room thirteen.

'Oh, wow,' moaned Gary. 'It's real. I thought it was a dream, but it's real.'

'You scared then?' Trot's words carried a challenge, but his voice came out a croak.

'I told you, didn't I?' breathed Fliss. 'I told you it wasn't a dream.'

'Oh, Fliss,' whimpered Lisa. 'Oh, my God, what am I doing here?' Fliss put an arm round her friend and squeezed. 'It's OK, Lisa. Take it easy. It's just a door with a number on it, right? We don't have to go in there or anything. We

don't even have to go near it, for goodness sake.' She looked at the others. 'What now?'

'Listen!' Trot was watching the stairs. 'I think someone's coming.'

'Oh, no!' Gary crammed all of his fingers in his mouth and stood, gazing at the stair-top and shaking his head.

There came the unmistakable sound of footfalls slowly ascending, and a pale shape came into view. Trot grabbed Fliss's arm. 'It's Ellie-May.'

'Sssh!'

'But shouldn't we try to stop her? Look where she's going for heaven's sake.'

'No!' Fliss shook her head. 'She's asleep, I think – sleepwalking, and you're not supposed to wake sleepwalkers. We'll watch what happens and tell the teachers in the morning.'

Lisa looked at her. 'That was part of the plan, was it?'

'Yes.' It wasn't, of course. She hadn't even considered what they might do if events reached this stage. She only knew she couldn't leave this bathroom right now to save her life. Hers, or anybody else's.

They watched. Ellie-May crossed the landing to the cupboard door and reached for the knob. She hesitated for a moment with her hand on it, then twisted and pushed. The watchers peered intently

as the door swung inward, but from where they were they couldn't see anything beyond it except darkness. They watched Ellie-May walk into that darkness and close the door.

'Phew!' Gary moved from the door again, shaking his head. 'I don't get it, Trot. What does she do in there?'

The other boy shrugged. 'I don't know, do I?'

'Does anybody fancy having a look?' whispered Lisa.

Gary looked at her. 'Do you?' She shook her head.

'I think we should wait here till she comes out,' said Fliss.

They waited. Half-past twelve came, and a quarter to one. They didn't take turns now but huddled together, watching the door through eyes that burned, while their feet grew numb. From time to time, faint sounds reached them from beyond the door: sounds which might have made them shiver, even if they had not been cold. It was almost a quarter-past one when the noises ceased, and a few minutes after that when the door opened and Ellie-May reappeared. They watched as she closed the door, crossed the landing and slipped away down the stairs.

'Well,' breathed Gary, 'what now?'

'I vote we go get old Hepworth,' said Trot, 'and

let him have a look in that cupboard.'

'No.' Fliss shook her head. 'What if Ellie-May wasn't sleepwalking at all? What if she's been up to something in there – something she shouldn't? We don't know, do we? If we fetch Mr Hepworth we could land her in serious trouble.'

Lisa gazed at her friend. 'Ellie-May's always getting other kids in trouble,' she said. 'I don't think we should worry too much about that.'

Gary nodded. 'I'm with Lisa,' he said.

'Me too,' growled Trot. 'There's something weird going on here, Fliss. We can't keep it to ourselves. Not when Ellie-May might be in danger.'

Fliss nodded. 'OK. I wasn't suggesting we keep it to ourselves indefinitely – just till morning. I'll have a word with Ellie-May before breakfast. Tell her we saw her. Ask her what she was doing. Then, if she doesn't come up with a satisfactory explanation we bring in the teachers. How's that?'

Gary shrugged. 'Sounds fair enough to me. Give her a chance to explain.'

'All right,' said Lisa.

'OK,' sighed Trot. 'I'm too shattered to argue anyway.'

They left the bathroom and tiptoed away to their beds, but dawn was breaking over the sea before any one of them slept.



'Fliss – hey, Fliss!' Somebody was shaking her roughly. She opened her eyes to find Marie grinning down at her. 'Come on, lazybones – you're going to be late for breakfast and it's the abbey today.'

'Mmm.' She pulled up the covers and turned her head away. 'Leave me here,' she mumbled. 'I just want to sleep for ever.'

'You'll write apologies for ever if you make us late. Everybody else has finished in the bathroom and some have gone downstairs.'

Bathroom. Last night. Something she said she'd do. 'Oh, crikey!' She threw back the covers, leapt out of bed and grabbed her towel. 'Listen, Marie – will you do me a favour?'

'What?'

'Make my bed while I get washed? I'm supposed to see Ellie-May. I wanted to catch her before she went downstairs. Please?'

'OK.' Marie smiled. 'Just this once. Go on.'

Fliss ran across the landing, forgetting in her haste to check the linen cupboard door. She washed rapidly, splashing a lot of water about. It doesn't seem two minutes since I was in here before, she thought.

When she returned to room ten her bed was neatly made and Marie had gone. She pulled on some clothes, dragged a comb through her hair and headed for the stairs. Five past eight. Breakfast was at eight o'clock. Ellie-May would be in the dining-room by now, with no empty place at her table, and Lisa and the boys would be cursing her for being last again.

The third-floor landing was deserted, which meant that Trot and Gary had gone down. The next floor was Ellie-May's. Fliss ran down the stairs and nearly bumped into Mrs Evans and Mr Hepworth, who were talking in the doorway of room four. She slowed down and tried to creep past, but Mrs Evans said, 'Stop, Felicity Morgan. Come here.'

'Yes, Miss?'

'Yes, Miss? I'll give you "yes, Miss". What time do you call this?'

'Five past eight, Miss.'

'Nearly six minutes past, actually. And what time's breakfast?'

'Eight o'clock, Miss.'

'Exactly. So you're six minutes late. And you were running. Why were you running, Felicity?'

'Cause I'm six minutes late, Miss.'

'Don't be cheeky! You've broken two rules already. Mrs Marriott will be in the dining-room. Tell her Ellie-May's not well, and that Mr Hepworth and I will be down in a minute. Have you got that?'

'Yes, Miss.'

'Off you go then. And think on - I'll be watching you, Felicity.'

She hurried on down. She didn't run, but her mind was racing. Ellie-May's not well and there are two teachers outside her room. She's in bed, then. That means I won't get to talk to her, so what do we do - keep quiet about last night, or tell the teachers? Tell, I suppose.

Everybody was eating cornflakes. Trot gave her a dirty look as she walked in. Mrs Marriott was sitting alone at the teachers' table, chewing watchfully.

Fliss delivered her message, and was sent down to the kitchen to apologize to Mrs Wilkinson for being late, and to ask if she might have some cornflakes. As the woman shook cereal into a bowl for her, Fliss said, 'There's an old lady sits in the shelter across the road.

She seems to be there all the time. Who is she?'

Mrs Wilkinson smiled, pouring milk. 'You must mean old Sal,' she said. 'Sally Haggerlythe. She's mad, I'm afraid. Got some sort of bee in her bonnet about this place - mumbles on about fate and doom and dread and I don't know what. I'd steer clear of old Sal if I were you.'

Fliss said nothing, but thought it might be interesting sometime to have a word with mad Sal Haggerlythe.

She carried her cereal bowl to the dining-room and slipped into the only empty place. None of the other three was at her table, but two tables away sat Gary, facing her. He was looking at her with an expression which was angry and questioning at the same time.

She began mouthing at him, voicelessly, exaggerating her lip-movements and pointing to the ceiling. She's in bed, she mouthed. Sick. I didn't get to talk to her. She spread her hands, palms upward, and shrugged. What do we do?

Gary might have been good at all sorts of things, but lip-reading wasn't one of them. He glared at Fliss, scowling and shaking his head. She began again, even more slowly, stretching her lips and jabbing at the ceiling, then bent forward, goggle-



eyed, clutching her throat and shooting out her tongue as if puking into her bowl.

'What on earth's the matter with you, Felicity Morgan?' Mrs Marriott was looking at her as though at a lunatic.

'She's lost her marbles, Miss,' said Gary, and some of the kids sniggered.

'Nobody asked you, Gary Bazzard. Well, Felicity?'

'I had a bit of cornflake stuck in my throat, Miss. It's gone now.'

'I'm glad about that,' said the teacher, acidly, 'because, you see, the rest of us have finished our cornflakes and Mr Wilkinson is waiting to clear, so that Mrs Wilkinson can serve sausages and bacon before they go cold.'

'Yes, Miss.'

She spooned cereal into her mouth and chewed, keeping her head down. Everybody was looking at her. She could feel their eyes. She ate distractedly, thinking about mad Sal and the whispering voice of her dream. It seemed like hours before her bowl was empty.

When everybody had finished breakfast, Mrs Evans stood up and said, 'Now - I want you all to go back to your rooms and get ready for our walk. We're running a bit late, so you haven't got long. I'd like everybody in the lounge, kitted up

and ready to go, by nine o'clock. What time did I say, Felicity Morgan?'

'Nine o'clock, Miss.'

'Right. Table one, off you go.'

Felicity's was the last table to be dismissed, but the others were waiting for her outside Gary and Trot's room on the third landing.

'What was that pantomime you were putting on for me down there?' demanded Gary. 'I couldn't make head nor tail of it.' He was holding the giant stick of rock, which he'd sucked almost to a point at one end. He sucked it now as he gazed at Fliss. She shuddered.

'I don't know how you can,' she said, 'straight after breakfast. Mrs Evans and old Hepworth were by Ellie-May's door when I came down, so I didn't get to see her. That's what I was trying to tell you.'

'The point is, what do we do?' said Lisa.

Trot looked at Fliss. 'There's nobody by Ellie-May's door now, is there? The teachers are all downstairs. You could go and talk to her, like you were going to.'

Fliss shook her head. 'The other kids're there. She wouldn't tell me anything in front of them, would she?'

'I reckon we'll just have to tell about last night,' said Gary. 'She was poorly yesterday, and now

she's worse. Who knows what might happen if we keep it to ourselves? I think you should go to Mr Hepworth, Fliss.'

'Why me?'

Gary grinned. 'He'd never believe me, nobody does, but he'll believe you. And anyway, the whole thing was your idea, wasn't it - keeping watch and that?'

'All right.' Fliss nodded. 'But I still wish we could have talked to Ellie-May first.'

She found Mr Hepworth in the downstairs hallway, handing out packed lunches. There was a queue. Fliss tagged on the end. When she got to the front she took the little packet he offered and said, 'Sir, can I have a word? It's about Ellie-May.'

'What about Ellie-May?' Kids were waiting in line behind her and he was anxious to give out the rest of the lunches.

'It's about what's wrong with her, Sir.'

'And what's that to do with you, Felicity?'

'Sir, I think I know why she's ill.'

'Indeed? It's Doctor Morgan now, is it? Go on then - why is Ellie-May ill?'

'She goes in the cupboard on the top floor, Sir. At night. I heard her on Monday night, and David Trotter saw her. And last night four of us kept watch and she went in again.'

Mr Hepworth looked at her. 'Are you trying to

wind me up, Felicity Morgan? Ellie-May Sunderland's a sensible girl. Why on earth would she be creeping about in the middle of the night, getting into cupboards? I never heard anything so daft in my life.' He smiled thinly. 'Just as a matter of interest, who were the three who kept this watch with you?'

'Lisa Watmough, Sir, And David Trotter and Gary Bazzard.'

'Ah! I thought Gary Bazzard's name might crop up. He put you up to this, didn't he?'

'No, Sir. We saw her, Sir, honestly. There was a thirteenth on the door and it's not there in the daytime.'

The teacher's lips twitched. 'And somebody lives in the cupboard, right? Now let me guess who that might be.' He looked at the ceiling for a moment, then slapped his hands together. 'I know - it's Dracula, isn't it?'

Fliss gazed at him, appalled. 'D'you - d'you think it could be, Sir?'

Mr Hepworth looked at her. The smile faded from his eyes. 'Good heavens, Felicity, I do believe you're serious. Somebody's frightened you half to death, haven't they? Now who's been telling you stories, eh? Gary Bazzard, was it?'

'No, Sir. It's not a story, Sir. Honestly. Will you have a look in the cupboard?'

The teacher sighed, gazing at her now with sympathetic eyes. 'All right, Felicity. I'll have a look, and you'd better look too. A cupboard's just a cupboard, as you'll see.' He looked along the line of waiting children. 'Waseem - come and give out the rest of these lunches, will you?'

'Sir.'

Together they climbed to the top of the house and crossed the landing. Fliss hung back as Mr Hepworth twisted the doorknob and pulled. Nothing happened. 'It's locked,' he said.

'You pulled, Sir,' said Fliss. 'Try pushing.'

'There's no point, Felicity - it opens outwards.'

'Ellie-May pushed it last night, Sir.'

'But that's impossible, Felicity. It's made to open outwards - you can tell by the hinges.'

'Get the key, Sir - please.'

He sighed. 'If it's locked now, it must have been locked last night. I think you had a nightmare, Felicity. You dreamed you were watching, but you were asleep. Dreams can seem very real sometimes, but if it'll set your mind at rest I'll go and ask Mrs Wilkinson for the key. Wait here.'

She waited till he turned on the half-landing and passed from sight, then followed quickly, seizing her chance.

The door of room four was closed. Fliss twisted the knob and pushed gently, praying that neither

Mrs Evans nor Mrs Marriott would be in the room.

They weren't. The room, like her own, contained a double bed and a pair of bunks. Ellie-May was in the bottom bunk. She lay on her back with her eyes closed. Her face was almost as white as the pillow. Fliss knelt down and touched her shoulder.

'Ellie-May. Are you awake? It's Fliss.'

Ellie-May's eyelids fluttered. She rolled her head towards Fliss and mumbled, 'What? Oh, it's you. I thought everybody'd gone out. What d'you want?'

'I want you to tell me what happens in that cupboard, Ellie-May. I want you to tell Mr Hepworth too.'

Ellie-May's brow puckered. 'Cupboard?'

'On the top floor. You went there last night. We saw you.'

'No.' She shook her head. 'Nowhere last night. Here. Not very well. Flu, Mrs Evans says. Tablets make me sleepy. Give me dreams.'

'What sort of dreams?' she tightened her grip on the other girl's shoulder. 'What sort of dreams, Ellie-May?'

Ellie-May grimaced. 'Horrible dreams. Dark house. Empty, I think. Stairs. Lots of stairs, and a room. The room of - oh, I forget. Why don't you bog off and leave me alone? I'm off to sleep.'

She rolled her head towards the wall, and the movement exposed the side of her neck. Fliss's eyes widened and she almost cried out. In the pale skin under Ellie-May's ear were two spots of dried blood.



As she stared at the marks on the sick girl's neck, Fliss heard footfalls on the stair. Mr Hepworth was on his way up with the key. She didn't know whether to rush out and drag him in now, or wait till he'd seen inside the cupboard. The cupboard, she decided. Once he'd had a look in there he surely wouldn't need any dragging.

She waited till he'd passed by, then left the room and followed him up. When she reached the top landing he was there, dangling a key on a piece of thick string. He said, 'Where've you been? I told you to wait here.'

'I had to go to the bathroom, Sir. I was scared to use this one.'

He looked at her and shook his head. 'Silly girl. Now watch.'

He inserted the key in the lock, twisted it and pulled. The door opened. Fliss saw darkness and hung back. The teacher beckoned. 'Come along,