



‘RIGHT, LISTEN!’

Lunch over, they had crammed themselves into the lounge with all their baggage, squeezing into chairs and settees, perching on the edges of tables, sitting on bags and cases on the floor while the three teachers sorted out room allocations and other matters with the Wilkinsons in the hallway. They had taken in the view from the bay window, looked at the prints round the walls and were starting to get restless when Mr Hepworth stuck his head through the doorway.

‘I’m waiting, Andrew Roberts.’  
The noise faded as Andrew Roberts

stopped using the top of his suitcase as a drum and everybody looked towards the teacher. ‘There are bedrooms on four floors in this hotel, and two rooms to a floor. I’m going to give you your room numbers now, and tell you which floor your room is on. As soon as you know your floor and number, I want you to pick up your luggage and walk quietly up to your room. What do I want you to do, Gemma Carlisle?’

‘Sir, go up to our room, Sir.’

‘And how do I want you to go?’

‘Walking quietly, Sir.’

‘Right.’ Mr Hepworth glared about the crowded room from under dark, bushy eyebrows. ‘Walking quietly. Not charging up the stairs like a crazed rhinoceros, swinging your case, smashing vases and

screaming at the top of your voice. And when you find your room, go in and wait. Don’t touch anything, and don’t start fighting about whose bed is which, or who’s going to have this wardrobe or that drawer. The teacher responsible for your floor will come and sort all that out as soon as possible.’ He put on his spectacles and began reading from a list.

‘Joanne O’Connor, Maureen O’Connor, Felicity Morgan and Marie Nero, top floor, room ten.’

‘Aw, Sir –’

‘Moaning already, Felicity?’

‘Me and Lisa wanted to be together, Sir.’

‘Well you’re not, are you? We’d be here all day if we started trying to put everybody with their best

friend. Off you go.' He scanned his list again. 'Vicky Holmes, Samantha Storey and Lisa Watmough, top floor, room eleven.'

Fliss carried her case up the stairs. There were brown photographs in frames all the way up. Ships and boats with sails. Old-time fisherfolk in bulky clothes. A wave breaking over a jetty.

Room ten contained a pair of bunk-beds and a double bed. There were two wardrobes, a chest of drawers and a dressing-table. The carpet was green and thin. A small washbasin stood in one corner. A brown photograph on the wall showed two children playing with a toy boat in a rock-pool.

Maureen went to the window. 'Hey! We're ever so high. You can see

the sea from here.' Joanne and Marie went to look. Fliss put her case down and joined them. Beyond the road an expanse of close-mown grass, bisected by a footpath, stretched almost to the clifftop. There were wooden seats at intervals along the footpath. Away to the left was something which might be a crazy-golf course, while to the right stood a shelter with benches and large windows, and a telephone kiosk. In the shelter an old woman sat. She was dressed in black, and seemed to be looking straight at them. Beyond all this, glinting blue-grey under the sun, lay the sea.

'Isn't it lovely?' breathed Marie.

'Hmm.' Maureen's eyes followed a gull that swooped and soared along the line of the cliff. Joanne

peered towards the horizon and thought she could make out the long, low shape of a ship – a tanker, perhaps.

Fliss gazed out to sea too, but she wasn't looking for a ship. She was thinking, Marie's right. It is lovely, but not nearly so beautiful as at night, when the moon makes a silver path across the water.

Behind them somebody knocked loudly on the door and flung it open. 'Hey, Fliss!' It was Lisa. 'We're right next door – come and see our room.'

Fliss was starting towards the door when Mrs Marriott's voice sounded on the landing. 'What are you doing there, Lisa Watmough? Didn't you hear Mr Hepworth say you were to wait in your room?'

‘Yes, Miss.’ There was a scampering noise. Lisa’s face disappeared. Fliss waited a moment then looked out. There was nobody on the landing. The door of number eleven was half-open, and she heard Mrs Marriott asking Lisa if she didn’t think she’d caused enough trouble for one day.

There were two other doors. One had twelve on it, and Fliss guessed that was the bathroom. The other had no number, but she knew what number it would have if it had. She was gazing at it, wondering what sort of room it concealed when Mrs Marriott came out of number eleven.

‘Why are you standing there, Felicity Morgan?’ she enquired.

‘Please, Miss, I was just wondering what sort of room that is.’ She pointed to the numberless door.

The teacher glanced at it. ‘Linen cupboard, I should think.’

‘It’s big for a cupboard, Miss.’

The teacher nodded. ‘Hotels need big cupboards, Felicity. All those sheets. Or it could be a broom cupboard, I suppose. Anyway, let’s get your room organized.’

Felicity got the bottom bunk. She was glad. She hadn’t fancied sharing the double bed. Mrs Marriott put Joanne and Maureen in that. They were twins, so that was all right. Marie had the top bunk. They had half an hour to unpack, put their things away and tidy up, then everybody was going down to the seafront for a look around.

Excited, anxious to be off, Fliss’s three companions worked quickly. They chattered and giggled, but Fliss was silent. She was wondering when it was that she’d seen the sea under the moon, and noticing how broom rhymes with room, and also with doom.