



'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 Bazard. 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 thirteen on the door and it's not there in the day-time.'

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 chil-

dren. '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.