



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, Felicity – you're the one who thought we should look inside.' She moved forward and looked.

It was just a cupboard. A walk-in cupboard with a narrow gangway between tiers of shelving. Stacked neatly on the shelves were sheets, pillowcases and towels. Two metres from the threshold, the gangway ended in a blank wall. There was nothing else.

'There you are, you see.' Mr Hepworth closed and re-locked the door. 'No bats, no monsters and no number thirteen. Does that make you feel better?'

Fliss shook her head. 'It's different at night, Sir. It changes. Could you keep the key and look tonight?'

'Certainly not!' He gave her an angry look. 'Now see here, Felicity – this nonsense has gone quite far enough. You asked me to come up here. I was busy, but I came. You asked me to fetch the key. I did. You've seen for yourself that this is just an ordinary cupboard. Either you had a nightmare in which it became something else, or this whole thing has been a silly prank dreamed up by Gary Bazzard. Either

way, it stops right here. D'you understand?'

Fliss nodded, looking at the floor. There was an aching lump in her throat and she had to bite her lip to keep from crying. What about Ellie-May? Those marks. What would he do if she mentioned them now? Go out of his tree, probably. Yet she must tell him. She must.

'Sir?'

'What is it now?' He was striding towards the stairs.

She trotted at his heels. 'Ellie-May's got blood on her neck, Sir. Dried blood.'

They began descending, rapidly. Without looking at her he said, 'Rubbish, Felicity Morgan! Absolute rubbish. One more word out of you, and you'll find yourself writing lines this

evening while everybody else goes swimming. Right?'

Right. Miserably, she followed him down. Everybody was out on the pavement, waiting for them, hacking at the flagstones with the toes of their strong boots and scowling into the hallway. All except Ellie-May.

Hallway - Ellie-May - Bed -
Dread.

Dead.