



THEY WALKED THROUGH the old town, up the one hundred and ninety-nine steps and across the graveyard to the abbey. They were in their groups, so Fliss didn't get to talk to Lisa who, with Trot, was in Mrs Marriott's group. She talked to Gary, who these days always smelled of peppermint. She told him how she'd seen inside the cupboard, and that it was just a cupboard. She told him how sick Ellie-May looked, and about the blood on her neck. When she told him about the blood, his cheeks went pale and he whispered, 'Crikey – are you sure, Fliss?'

She assured him she was, absolutely sure.

He told her he'd overheard Mrs Evans and Mr Hepworth talking. Mrs Wilkinson had been there too. They were discussing Ellie-May. Mrs Evans said she thought they should phone Ellie-May's parents. Mr Hepworth was in favour of waiting another day – it was probably just a touch of flu, he said. Mrs Wilkinson mentioned homesickness and the change of water. It happened all the time, she assured them. Children were in and out of The Crow's Nest every week between Easter and October, and in nearly every group there was one child who grew pale and listless and lost its appetite through homesickness and the change of water.

'I didn't hear the end of it,' said Gary, 'but I think they decided to wait till tomorrow.'

Fliss scowled. 'Grown-ups are so stupid,' she muttered. 'They never believe anything you tell them. If Ellie-May goes in that cupboard again tonight it might be too late to call her parents.'

'What're we going to do? Shall I have a go at talking to old Hepworth?'

'No. I told you – he thinks the whole thing's a tale and that it was you who made it up.'

'Yeah,' sighed Gary. 'He would. I always get the blame for everything. It's the same at home.'

'When we're looking round the abbey,' said Fliss, 'they won't keep us

in our groups. Let's talk to Trot and Lisa – see what they think.'

There wasn't much left of the abbey – just some crumbling sections of wall, very high in places, with tidy lawns between. There were a lot of sightseers though, including other school groups, and it was easy for Fliss and the other three to get together behind a chunk of ancient masonry and talk. Fliss told Trot and Lisa her story, and they tossed ideas back and forth. In the end it came to this. None of the teachers would believe them, so they were on their own. They were all agreed that Ellie-May must not be allowed to enter the cupboard again, so they'd watch and if she came they'd stop her, by force if necessary.

'Right,' said Fliss. 'That's settled. Now, d'you think we can forget about Ellie-May and that ghastly cupboard, just for a few hours, and have some fun? We're supposed to be on holiday, you know.'

Gary pulled a wry face. 'It won't be easy, Fliss.'

Trot shrugged. 'I'm scared as a rat thinking about tonight, but what's the point? Fretting isn't going to make it go away, so we might as well enjoy ourselves while we can.'

'Trot's right,' said Lisa. 'We're on holiday. Let's at least explore some of these ruins before the teachers get bored and call us together.'

They split up and wandered about, gazing at the walls and the high, slender windows. Fliss tried to imagine what the place must have

looked like long ago, with a roof, and stained glass, and flagstones where all this grass now grew, but it was impossible. Anyway, she told herself, I like it better as it is now. You can see the sky. There are birds, and grass, and sunlight, and I don't like gloomy places.

She shivered.