



WHEN FLISS AND Lisa got back, the teachers had already called everybody together for the return journey. It was only a quarter-past three, but the mist had thickened and there was a hint of drizzle in it. Some of the kids were sitting on rocks, drying their feet with gritty towels, pulling on socks and boots. Others stood waiting with their hoods up and bags of pebbles dangling at their sides. A small party, supervised by Mrs Evans, was picking up the last scraps of litter. Bottomtop Middle prided itself on the fact that whenever a group of its children vacated a

site, they left no evidence that they had ever been there.

As they trudged up towards the path in the cliff, Fliss saw a large, slate-coloured pebble lying on the sand. Something about it appealed to her – its perfect oval shape perhaps, or its wonderful smoothness. She bent and picked it up. It was thick, and far heavier than she'd expected, and when she tried to add it to the collection in her polythene bag, it wouldn't fit. She was cramming it in her anorak pocket when Mrs Evans, who was bringing up the rear, said, 'Felicity – you don't really want that, dear. It's far too big. You'll be crippled by the time you've carried it all the way back to Whitby, not to mention the fact that it'll

probably tear your pocket. Throw it away.'

Fliss was a quiet girl who never argued with her teachers, and so she surprised herself as well as Mrs Evans when she said, 'I like it, Miss. I want to keep it.'

It was lucky for Fliss that Richard Varley chose that moment to leap on Barry Tune's back. As the two boys fell on to the sand, Mrs Evans called sharply and hurried to separate them, and by the time she had done so the line of children was toiling up the cliff path. She had to put on a spurt to catch up, and the pebble incident was forgotten.

The rest of the walk back was uneventful, except that it started to rain in earnest which made the duckboards slippery. Several chil-

dren fell, to the delight of the rest, who laughed and cheered their classmates' misfortune.

By twenty to five they were back at The Crow's Nest, drenched and happy. They were sent to their rooms to change and to write up their journals. It was during this interlude that Fliss and Lisa, Trot and Gary met briefly on the fourth-floor landing.

'We all set for tonight?' asked Fliss. She felt tense, and was amazed that for a few hours today she'd actually succeeded in forgetting about all of this.

The others nodded. 'Same time, same place,' said Trot. 'And let's hope nothing happens.'

'Any news of Ellie-May?' asked Lisa.

Gary shrugged. 'I saw Mrs Marriott going into her room as I came up. Maybe they'll call her parents to take her home or something.'

'Oh, I wish they would,' sighed Fliss. 'I'm fed up of feeling scared.'

Trot nodded. 'Me too.'

'We all are,' said Lisa. 'Who wouldn't be?'

After tea, everybody had to rest quietly for an hour in their rooms to let their food settle before Mrs Evans took them swimming. Fliss couldn't rest. There was something she had to do. She looked out of the window. Yes, old Sal was there as usual. Mumbling something about going to the toilet, Fliss left the room, slipped down the stairs and let herself out. It was still raining.

The old woman looked up as the girl reached the shelter. Fliss smiled. 'Hello.'

Sal nodded. 'Evenin'.'

Fliss blushed, looking down at her feet. She didn't know what to say.

'I - I'm staying at The Crow's Nest.'

'Aye, I know.'

'I've seen you lots of times. Through the window.'

The crone nodded. 'Windows is the eyes of a house.'

Fliss smiled. 'Yes. Eyes, watching the sea. Lucky old house.'

'Lucky?' Something rattled in Sal's throat. 'You're wrong, child. It's got the other eye, see. The eye that sleeps by day.'

'Oh, has it?' Fliss smiled, not sure whether she ought to. The eye that sleeps by day. Sounds barmy but then, so does room thirteen. Should she mention room thirteen to Sal? No. There wasn't time. It only needed a teacher to look in room ten and she'd be in more trouble. She looked at the old woman. 'I'd better get back. They'll be wondering -' She let the sentence hang, turned and ran through the rain with her head down.

Nobody had missed her, and when the swimming party set out twenty minutes later old Sal had gone. The rain-lashed streets were practically deserted, and when they got to the pool they found that they had it almost to themselves. They made the most of it, leaping

and splashing and whooping in the warm, clear water under Mrs Evans' watchful gaze. A puzzled frown settled for a moment on the teacher's face when she noticed four of the children standing by the steps at the shallow end, taking no part in the revelry. Odd, she mused. Very odd. You'd think they were non-swimmers or something, but they're not. Still, it's up to them, isn't it? Perhaps they're tired from the walk today. Her eyes moved on, and the frown dissolved.