



NOBODY CALLED ELLIE-MAY'S parents, or took her home. The word was that she was a little better, and might even be with them on the coach to Robin Hood's Bay the following day.

Fliss wasn't fooled. At ten o'clock she was lying on her back, staring at the wire mesh under Marie's mattress, waiting for half-past eleven. Her hands were folded across her chest, and under them was the pebble from Saltwick Bay. She felt its weight when she breathed, and her fingers caressed its perfect, soothing smoothness.

She was tired. Not from swimming – neither she nor the other three had swum – but from the exertions of the day and a sleepless night before. The swimming must have finished off Marie and the twins, because they were zonked out already. She listened to their breathing and wondered if she could stay awake.

She didn't. Not completely. At least twice she drifted off and woke with a start, thinking she'd missed the witching hour, but there was to be no such luck. When the town clock chimed for eleven-thirty she was wide awake, and scared.

This time she got to the bathroom first. Trot and Gary came nearly straightaway, but it was nineteen minutes to twelve when the

door of room eleven opened and Lisa slipped out.

'Sorry I'm late,' she whispered. 'I fell asleep.'

'It's OK,' Fliss told her. 'I fell asleep too – twice.'

'I was spark-out,' admitted Trot. 'This div had to shake me like a madman to wake me up.' He looked at Gary. 'Didn't you, Gaz?'

Gary nodded. 'You should've got yourself a stick of rock like mine. I sucked that from ten o'clock and didn't nod off once.'

'Dirty pig!' shuddered Lisa. 'I don't know how you can.'

Gary grinned. 'You should see it – it's getting a really good point on it now.'

'Tell you what I do want to see tonight,' said Fliss. 'I want to see

how the thirteen gets on that door. I want to be watching when the clock starts striking midnight – see the exact moment the number appears.’

‘Yeah.’ Trot nodded. ‘Good idea. Let’s do that.’

‘I’ve brought my torch,’ said Lisa. ‘We can shine it on the door – right where the number will be. We’ll see really clearly then.’

They waited. Gary, sitting on the rim of the bath, looked at his watch every few seconds. Fliss went to the hand basin, ran a trickle of cold water into her cupped hand and sucked it up, watching herself in the mirror. Trot stood by the window, gazing out. The patterned glass splintered the light from a street-lamp. Lisa leaned on the wall by the door, switching her torch on and off.

After a while Fliss whispered, ‘Maybe she won’t come.’

‘It’s only five to,’ Gary told her. ‘Plenty of time yet.’ He hoped Fliss was right.

When his watch told him it was a minute to midnight, Gary got up and went over to the door. The others joined him, jostling quietly till they could all see and Lisa was at the front with her torch. ‘Thirteen seconds,’ he hissed, and began counting down. At fifteen seconds Lisa switched on and steadied the disc of light on the right spot.

It was not spectacular. As Gary whispered, ‘Zero,’ they heard the town clock chime, then strike. At about the fourth stroke they noticed a small shapeless mark on the door, and Lisa moved the torch slightly to

get it in the centre of her beam. It was like a stain, lighter than the surrounding woodwork. As stroke followed stroke, the stain seemed to shrink and become paler, and then to divide, becoming two whitish blobs whose shapes altered until, by the twelfth stroke, they formed the figures one and three. As the echo died, they heard a door close somewhere below.

‘I think she’s coming,’ warned Fliss. ‘Switch the torch off, Lisa.’ She did so, plunging the landing into darkness. They withdrew and half closed the door again.

‘Did you see that?’ breathed Trot. ‘It just came out of nowhere. I can’t believe it.’

Fliss snorted. ‘You’ve got to believe it, you div – you saw it. The

point is, what do we do when Ellie-May gets here?’

‘We stop her,’ hissed Gary. ‘By force if we have to. We agreed.’

‘OK, but which of us actually goes out there and grabs her – or do we all go?’

Lisa shook her head. ‘We can’t all go. It’d scare her to death. It should be a girl, Fliss – you or me. But I think we should try calling her first – from here.’

‘Sssh!’ Trot pressed a finger to his lips. ‘She’s here.’

They looked out. Ellie-May was standing on the top step, looking at the door to room thirteen. She hesitated for a moment, then moved forward. Lisa nudged Fliss. ‘You, or me?’

‘Me.’ As Ellie-May drew level with the bathroom, Fliss cupped her mouth with her hands and hissed, ‘Ellie-May!’

The girl didn’t turn or pause, but continued walking slowly towards the cupboard. Using her full voice this time, Fliss called out, ‘Ellie-May – over here!’

It made no difference. The girl was standing before the door now, reaching for the knob. Fliss felt a push in the small of her back and Lisa hissed, ‘Go on, for heaven’s sake – before she opens that door!’

She left the bathroom and moved across the landing, approaching Ellie-May from the rear. As the girl’s hand closed round the knob, Fliss took a gentle grip on her

shoulder and said, ‘Ellie-May – You don’t want to go in there.’

She felt the thin shoulder stiffen under her hand. Ellie-May’s head turned, slowly, and Fliss found herself gazing into eyes which were dead as a shark’s. The girl’s lips twitched. ‘Let go of me,’ she hissed. ‘Leave me alone.’

‘Ellie-May!’ Fliss swung her round and held her by both shoulders. ‘Listen. We’re trying to help you. If you go in that room, you’ll die!’

Ellie-May snarled, shaking her head. ‘Never die. Never. You, not me.’ She tore herself from Fliss’s grip and turned, scrabbling for the door-knob.

‘Gary!’ cried Fliss. ‘Lisa. Quick – I can’t hold her!’ There was a

scampering of bare feet on carpet and they were with her, the three of them. Hands reached out, snatching fistfuls of Ellie-May's clothing, circling her wrists. She hissed and fought, amazingly strong, freeing one hand to twist the doorknob and push.

The door swung inward. Fliss, one arm crooked round Ellie-May's neck, glanced inside and saw not a cupboard, but the room of her dream. There was the table with the long, pale box upon it and beyond, a small, curtained window. A window which wasn't there in the daytime. The eye that sleeps by day! She dug her heels into the carpet, threw her weight backwards and fell with Ellie-May on top of her.

'Quick, one of you – close that door!' She flung both arms round Ellie-May's waist and held on as the girl bucked and writhed. Lisa dropped to her knees, grabbed Ellie-May's legs and fell forward, pinning them under her. Fliss heard the door slam, and then the boys were there, catching the girl's wildly flailing arms. Ellie-May fought on for a moment but they were too many for her. Fliss felt the thin body go limp, and the girl began to cry. When they let go of her she lay curled on her side with a thumb in her mouth, moaning softly.

They got up and stood, looking down at her. 'What do we do now?' asked Lisa.

As she spoke, they heard voices below and footsteps on the stair. 'It

won't be up to us,' said Gary. 'Here comes the cavalry.'