



THURSDAY DAWNED CLEAR and sunny after the rain. Ellie-May appeared at breakfast, smiling wanly and saying she was feeling much better. Fliss watched her across the dining-room and wondered if she remembered anything at all about last night. From the way she was behaving, it seemed she did not.

Practically everybody had heard something of the disturbance – even the boys on the first floor – and the talk over breakfast was mostly about sleepwalking. Fliss had told Marie that Ellie-May had been found on the top landing, sleepwalking, and had reacted badly to being woken

up. Trot and Gary, she said, were in trouble because they had done the waking. When Marie asked what the boys were doing on the top landing in the first place, she said they'd seen Ellie-May pass their floor and followed her up. It didn't sound too convincing to Fliss, but it had got around.

Trot and Gary had been interviewed by Mrs Evans before breakfast. When Trot started to tell her what he saw as he reached for the door to pull it closed, she cut him off, saying, 'The door opens outwards, David, and anyway it was locked.' And when Gary said there was a vampire in the hotel, she told him not to be so stupid. 'If I catch you spreading that story among the other children,' she said, 'a letter

will go to your parents the minute we get back to school.'

They were lucky in a way though. Mrs Evans decided they'd gone to the top floor because they were worried about Ellie-May. 'There was absolutely no need for you to worry,' she told them, 'but I can see you were trying to be helpful, so we'll say no more about it.'

So, in spite of the midnight rum-pus, and against all the odds, the four found themselves back in favour, free to join in the day's activities. It was to be a busy day, and Fliss hoped this might help her to forget the horrors of the night. This morning they were taking the coach six miles to Robin Hood's Bay where, according to Mr Hepworth, there was a good beach and quaint, nar-

row streets. At twelve o'clock they would return to Whitby for a fish-and-chip lunch on the seafront, before being turned loose to do their shopping in the afternoon.

Robin Hood's Bay was good. The sun shone all morning and they ran along the sand and played hide-and-seek up and down the little streets. By the time they piled back on to the coach, everybody had worked up an appetite and fish and chips sounded just right.

When they arrived back in Whitby, the teachers got the children settled on some benches not far from the jetty, and Mr Hepworth chose a boy and a girl to go with him to the chippy. Fliss knew he wouldn't pick her – not after last night – and he didn't. He chose John

Phelan and Vicky Holmes, and the three of them went across the road and tagged on the back of the queue. Fliss watched. The service was fast, but the queue didn't get any shorter because people kept joining it. She smiled to herself, wondering what the people behind would say when old Hepworth ordered fish and chips thirty-four times with salt and vinegar.

It took them ten minutes to get served and come staggering back with armfuls of greasy little packets. Mrs Evans and Mrs Marriott gave out the portions, and everybody sat in the sunshine munching, chatting and throwing scraps to a gang of gulls which appeared out of nowhere, on the scrounge.

Gary looked at Fliss. 'Where are you going first when they turn us loose, Fliss?'

She shrugged. 'I don't know. A gift shop, I suppose – I want to get a pressy for my mum.'

'I'm not,' he told her. 'I'm off round that "Dracula Experience" place we saw the other day.'

Fliss pulled a face. 'Haven't you had enough of that sort of thing in real life? I know I have.'

'No! I know what you mean, but this is different – a bit of fun. And anyway, I might find a clue there to the mystery of room thirteen.'

'Will you heck! Anyway, I'm not going – it's the last place I want to be.'

'You're chicken, that's why.'

'Am I hummer! Chicken of some daft show after what we've seen at The Crow's Nest? You must be joking.'

'Come on then – prove it.'

'No way.'

'Like I said – chicken.'

'Naff off, Gary, you div!'

'Chicken!'

'OK then – I'll come, and I bet you're more chicken than me. You were scared spitless Tuesday night – I could tell.'

He scoffed. 'You were, you mean.'

The argument might have continued for ever if Mrs Evans hadn't called everybody together to speak to them. Fish-and-chip wrappers had been gathered up and deposited

in bins, and the place left tidy as always.

'Right. This is it – the moment you've all been waiting for. You are free to go off now with your friends and spend what's left of your pocket-money. You may go into shops or, if you must, into amusement arcades, but you must stay on the seafront, on this side of the bridge. There's to be no crossing into the old town, and nobody is to go wandering off up the streets leading to the West Cliff. Mrs Marriott, Mr Hepworth and I will be keeping our eyes open, and we don't expect to see anybody charging along the pavements, shouting. Remember, there are other people here besides yourselves, and they don't want to be shoved into the roadway

or deafened by children yelling. And please – ' her face changed, so that she looked to be in great pain, 'think before you buy. Seaside shops are full of cheap, tinselly rubbish which looks tempting, but falls apart if you breathe on it. There are nice things – good things – you can take home to your parents, but you have to look for them. Off you go, then.'

Fliss felt like slipping away with Lisa to look in shop windows, but Gary wouldn't let her. 'Come on,' he demanded. 'You said you weren't chicken, so let's go. Last one there's a plonker.'

In spite of Gary's taunting, neither Trot nor Lisa came with them. The only ones who agreed to come were Gemma Carlisle, and Grant Cooper, who arrived last but offered

to break the face of the first person who called him a plonker. They paid their fifty pences and went in.

The first bit was a sort of shop, with mugs, T-shirts and badges for sale. 'Huh!' snorted Gary, 'I don't call this scary.' He bought a badge with a bat on it, and they moved on into a dark tunnel. 'This is more like it,' said Gemma. As she spoke, there was a blood-curdling scream and something brushed Fliss's cheek. She ducked away with a cry, and Grant and Gary laughed at her. They were wading through some sort of smoke or vapour which swirled low down, hiding their feet. In the tunnel walls were windows through which weird scenes could be seen. In one, a coffin-lid was lifted by a ghastly hand. In another, a woman

with bloodstained clothing lay on a bed, while a red-eyed vampire leered at her through her window. While Fliss gazed at this scene, wishing she was somewhere else, a hand came out of the darkness. Shrinking from it, she walked right into another which grabbed at her throat. She recoiled and started walking faster, wanting only to get to the end of the tunnel and out into the sunlight. But now the floor was moving, and she had to walk fast just to stay where she was. It was like her dream. She wanted to go one way, but her feet were taking her another. Sobbing, she broke into a run, and after a moment the moving section was behind her. She looked down, and the floor was glass. Under the glass was soil, and in the soil, half-

embedded, lay the half-rotted heads of corpses.

She hurried on, feeling sick, looking straight in front of her, thinking, I shouldn't have come. I should never have let that idiot Gary persuade me. She was sweating. The screams were getting louder, and there was a sudden gust of wind. She didn't know where the others were, and she didn't care. She rushed along, her hair and face brushed by unseen things. Through her eye-corners she glimpsed spiders and graves and the toothy grins of skeletons.

She blundered on, and then at last she saw a door with a sign on it. WAY OUT.

Thank goodness. Oh, thank goodness! She pushed. It swung

open. No sunlight. No. Darkness, and a standing corpse whose head fell off as she watched.

She swerved and rushed past with her head down, and here was another corpse, blocking the way. She swerved again, and it stuck out a pale, bony hand. Sudden anger rose in her against this ridiculous place, and her own stupidity in coming here. Teeth bared, she struck at the hand, but it caught her wrist and the corpse whispered, 'Wait – I have to talk to you.'

She screamed, snatching back her hand. The corpse made a small, distressed sound like the mew of a kitten, and in that instant Fliss recognized it. It wasn't a corpse. It was the old woman in the shelter. Mad Sal Haggerlythe.

'What – what d'you want?'

'Here – back here where there's nobody.' The old woman took her wrist again, gently this time, and led her through a gap in the tunnel wall. It was dark and cold and seemed to be a sort of storage space, with planks and trestles and paint cans, and a lot of stuff she couldn't quite make out. There was a musty smell.

'Where's this?' She didn't know why she'd allowed herself to be led here – if she'd resisted there'd have been nothing the old hag could have done about it.

'Behind the tunnel,' Sal whispered, 'in the real world.' She chuckled wheezily. 'Folks walk through tunnels all their lives, y'know. All their lives. Gawping in through lighted windows, thinking

what they see's real, but it's not.' She laughed again. 'No, it's not. They're in a tunnel, see. Looking at a show. And all the time, the real world's just inches away through the wall. And now and then, just now and then, somebody finds a hole and goes through and sees what's behind it all, and d'you know what they get called then?'

The old woman paused, and Fliss shook her head.

'Mad, that's what. Barmy. They're the ones who know what really goes on – what it's all made of – and they call 'em mad. Lock 'em away, some of 'em. I 'spect they'll come for me one of these days. D'you know what I'm talking about?'

Fliss shook her head again, in the dark. 'No. Not really. I'm sorry.'

She wondered where Gemma was, and Gary, and Grant. Out by now, probably. She wanted to be with them. 'Look – I've got to go. My friends'll wonder where I am.'

'Listen, then. You've seen something, haven't you, at The Crow's Nest – something strange? And there's a sick child?'

'Yes,' Fliss murmured, 'but how did you know?'

'I know, because I lived in that place a long time ago, before the Great War. It was East View then, not The Crow's Nest. I went there when I was ten, as a scullery maid. It was a grand house then. Turnbull, they called the people who had it. Mr and Mrs Turnbull and their little daughter, Margaret. It wasn't an hotel, you understand – it was a house.

A private residence. You've seen the abbey, haven't you?'

Fliss nodded. 'Yesterday.' She wished the woman would come to the point and let her go. If there was a point. There might not be. That was probably one of the signs of madness. It occurred to her that Sal might be dangerous, and she wondered if she'd find her way back to the tunnel if she had to run.

'Well,' the old woman went on, 'there was a bit more to it when I was your age. A gateway, with a little house. Children kept well away from that gateway after dark, I can tell you. Grown-ups too, come to that. That's where he was, see?'

'Who?'

'Him that's in The Crow's Nest now.'

'Who's in The Crow's Nest? Who is he?'

'I think you know. Anyway, that's where he was. Old gatehouse. Folks who knew, steered clear. Strangers didn't. Not always. Now and then, someone'd vanish. Drowned, we'd say. Fell over the cliff in the dark. We knew better. Anyway, it come nineteen-fourteen, and the Great War. Near Christmas, a German battleship comes and stands off a mile or two and fires on the Coastguard Station. Some of the shells hit the abbey. One gets the gateway, and demolishes the little house. Doesn't demolish him, though, 'cause there's only one way to do that, and you know what that is. Anyhow, he's lost his place and so there he is, in the middle of

the night, seeking another. He's got to find it before first light, and you know why. And out of all the houses in the town, he picks East View, and that's the end of it.'

'End of it – how d'you mean?'

'End of it as a place folks can live in in peace. Listen. Margaret Turnbull – little Meg – the apple of her daddy's eye. She falls sick. All through that winter, paler and paler, thinner and thinner. Calling out in her sleep. Doctors come. Specialists. No improvement. Comes a night in early spring, and there's ever such a bang and a clatter and they find her at the foot of the stair, unconscious. Seven year old. Doctor says she's been walking in her sleep. Anyway, the little mite recovers, though it's touch and go for a while, and the

minute she's strong enough Master Turnbull sells up and moves on, and we're all let go. Later, we hear the child perks up like magic as soon as she's away from that house. And after that the place stands empty, and folks steer clear, same as they used to with the gatehouse. Somebody comes along and buys it eventually – a stranger, but he has no luck and moves out. Place has kept changing hands ever since. Soldiers were billeted there in the last war, and one disappeared. Deserted, says the authorities. Or drowned, we say, but it's neither. And now he's got bairns – a fresh lot practically every week, and he'll be laughing, and it's you've got to stop his laughter, Miss.'

'Me?' Fliss peered at old Sal in the gloom. 'Why me? And anyway, how?'

'Why you?' The old woman poked a bony finger into her middle. 'Because you had the dream, that's why. You know – the Gate of Fate. The Keep of Sleep. The Room of Doom and the Bed of Dread. Remember?'

Fliss nodded, shivering. 'Yes.' Her voice was a croak. 'But how –?'

'How do I know? I told you. I can go through the wall. Leave the tunnel. See what's really what. And as for how, you'll be told. Don't ask me who'll tell you, because I couldn't explain – just like you can't explain any of this to your teachers – but believe me, you'll be told. And if you refuse to do it – if you don't do what

has to be done – your little friend is doomed, together with those who went before her and all who'll follow. Doomed to wander the earth, for ever. Do you understand what I'm saying, Felicity?

'You know my name.'

'Oh, yes. Felicity. It means happiness. Did you know that?'

'No, I didn't.'

'Well, that's what it means. And if you can be very brave tonight, you'll let happiness back into that sad house, and into the hearts of more people than you know. Will you do it, Felicity?'

Fliss hesitated. The old woman's words were whirling around inside her head. Strange words. A mad-woman's words. Yes, Sal Haggerlythe was mad all right – no doubt

about it – completely out of her tree. And yet she knew so many things. The dream. All that stuff in The Crow's Nest. Her name, and what it meant.

She nodded, biting her lip. 'Yes.'

'Good.' A frail hand fell on her shoulder and squeezed. 'You'll succeed, Felicity. I know you will. Off you go now – your friends are worrying.'

Fliss allowed old Sal to take her hand and steer her back to the hole in the wall. Two people passed by, laughing to show they weren't scared. Sal waited till they'd gone by, then whispered, 'Follow them – they're on their way out.' Fliss felt a gentle push in the small of her back. She followed the laughing pair, and

when she looked round a moment later, there was nothing to be seen.