

CHAPTER NINE THE PLAN

'Blimey!' Norman gawped as Lucy tried to explain about the backwards world beneath their beds. 'So you think that's where our parents are, in that Woleb?'

'Yep!' Lucy said. 'That's what the Creakers said! They *snatched* them!'

'And they want your dad's jacket?'

'Uh-huh. Although I have no idea why.'

'And they're coming back to snatch you tonight?'

Lucy looked at him and nodded.

'Blimey,' Norman said again.

'Double blimey!' Lucy added with a worried frown.

THE PLAN

Norman rustled up a Scout's breakfast of egg and beans on his camping stove, but by the time they sat down to eat they were both so full of worry that neither of them had much of an appetite.

'Shall we go for a walk, clear our heads?' Norman suggested, noticing that Lucy hadn't eaten a single baked bean.

Lucy smiled and nodded again. But, as they wandered into the street, it soon became clear that Whiffington no longer looked like Whiffington at all. The kids had been alone for approximately forty-nine hours and things had started to get a little . . .

Well, let's take a look at the chaos Lucy and Norman saw.

Billy Noshling had put his head inside the crisp



THE CREAKERS

vending-machine and munched all two hundred packets of crisps (even the prawn-cocktail-flavoured ones). Unfortunately, he now couldn't get his head back out again. The only way to free him would be to put some money in the machine and buy him, but, since there were no grown-ups around to give the children pocket money, he had no choice but to stay there.

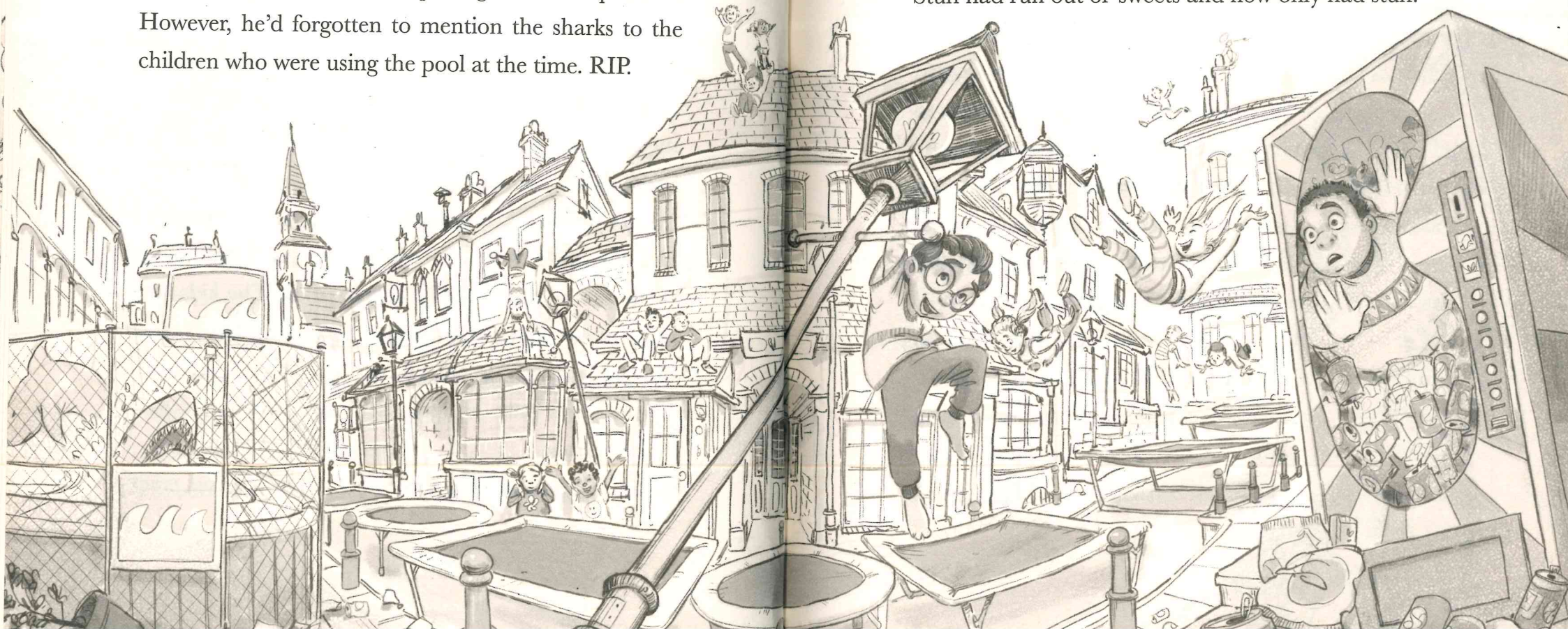
Jackson Gilly had released three sharks into the public swimming pool and tried opening a small aquarium. However, he'd forgotten to mention the sharks to the children who were using the pool at the time. RIP.

THE PLAN

One whole street had had its pavements replaced with trampolines, and the leisure centre had its trampolines replaced with pavement. Neither arrangement worked out very well.

Four children had accidentally flushed themselves down the toilet, clogging the pipes for the rest of the town.

And, worst of all, Scrummy McScroodles Sweets 'n' Stuff had run out of sweets and now only had stuff.



THE CREAKERS

'We need to do something!' Lucy said, looking around at the chaos surrounding them – when suddenly they heard a whisper.

'It's her!' hissed the voice excitedly. 'It's the girl who knows what to do!'

There was a rustle, and the leaves on the tree above them parted. A group of children emerged, clambering down from the branches like wild monkeys.

Lucy counted six of them, all so dirty, and their clothes so ragged and torn, that it was difficult to tell if they were boys or girls.

As they swung down from the branches to the pavement, one of the wild children nudged another and said, 'Ask her! Go on!'

The boy was shoved closer to Lucy and Norman.

'We want our mummies and daddies back. P-p-please help us,' the filthy child

THE PLAN

said, his wild eyes suddenly large and worried so that he looked like a sad kitten.

'Food . . .' another one whispered while crouching beside the tree.

'And food,' added the first child. 'Do you have any food?'

Lucy looked at Norman. Things had turned from bad to worse. It wasn't fun any more. The novelty of having no grown-ups around was wearing off fast. These kids were tired and hungry.

'I've got some eggs and beans you can have,' offered Norman. 'They're still in the pan in my –'

Before Norman could finish his sentence, the wild children scurried down the street in the direction Norman and Lucy had come from, in search of his food.

'OK, you're right. We need to do something!' Norman admitted. 'But *what*?'

'I need to go to the Woleb and get the grown-ups back,' Lucy said, staring after the wild kids.

'I was afraid you were going to say that,' said Norman, wiping the sweat from his forehead with his yellow

THE CREAKERS

Scout scarf. 'But how are you going to do it? You don't know your way around the Woleb. You've got no idea how big it is or where it leads or whereabouts they're keeping our parents. It's impossible.' He sighed. 'Unless . . .'

'Unless what?' Lucy asked hopefully.

'Unless we somehow manage to get one of those Creakers to take us to the grown-ups.' Norman gazed into the distance, deep in thought.

Lucy grabbed his arm. 'Norman. That's a brilliant idea! But – how are we going to do it?'

'Whatcha doin'?' squeaked Ella Noying, popping out suddenly from behind them, making them both jump.

'ELLA!' Norman gasped.

Lucy cried, 'Have you been following us?'

'Maybe,' said Ella.

Norman and Lucy looked at each other.

'How much did you hear?' Lucy asked.

'Only ALL OF IT!' sang Ella in an awful, over-the-top operatic voice, flinging her arms around like a diva. 'I heard it all! I heard it AAALL! **AAALL!**' she wailed in a painful, screeching voice.

THE PLAN

'Ella, you can't tell anyone what you heard!' Lucy shouted, cupping her hand over Ella's mouth to shut her up. 'It's a secret. Er, yuck! She licked my hand!' she cried, snatching it away from Ella's grinning mouth.

'Puh-lease, I'm six years old,' Ella said with a dismissive wave of her hand. 'I know there's no such thing as monsters under the bed. Your silly stories don't scare me, you know.'

'Stories . . . right,' said Norman with a naughty little twinkle in his eye. 'Hey, Ella, if you're so brave, why don't you come to our ghost-story sleepover tonight at Lucy's house?'

'What?!' cried Lucy.

Norman quickly shot her a look that said, *Play along.*

' . . . right! Yeah, I forgot! A sleepover . . .' Lucy said as she realized what Norman was up to. She bit her lip to hide a smile. Norman really wasn't so bad after all.

'It'll be fun! We'll stay up past midnight and everything,' Norman added.

'Midnight? Really! Come on, Norm. That's, like, *sooooo* early. Millie Butkins was awake until one a.m. last night. You gotta do better than that.'

THE CREAKERS

'OK, fine. One a.m.!' Norman agreed. 'Are you in?'

Ella looked suspiciously at them both for a moment before shrugging her shoulders. 'If you throw in a full packet of marshmallows, then you can count me in.'

'Deal!' Norman said, and they shook hands.

Ella skipped merrily off towards Trampoline Avenue, leaving Norman and Lucy alone.

'Two words,' Norman said as they watched Ella disappearing into the distance. 'Live bait.'

Almond milk

Butter

Eggs

Toilet rolls

Toothpaste

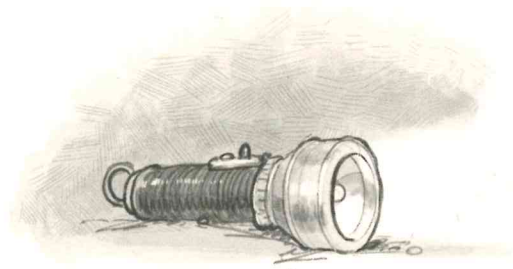
AA batteries

Dark chocolate

Oh sorry! I needed somewhere to write my shopping list.

Back to the story . . .





CHAPTER TEN

THE CREAKER TRAP

The plan was simple. Lucy needed to get down into the Woleb and find the grown-ups – and, to do that, she needed to catch a Creaker. It was going to be a bit like fishing, Norman had explained to her, which was one of his favourite things to do with his dad – and Ella Noying was the bait.

Not just Ella, in fact – but Ella wearing Lucy's dad's stinking work coat.

'It's perfect!' said Norman. 'We'll make Ella wear your dad's pongy jacket, the Creakers will sniff it out, see a little girl wearing it in the middle of your bedroom, think that Ella is you and then try to snatch you – and, when they do, that's when we'll trap them!'

THE CREAKER TRAP

Now it's not very nice to use little girls as live bait to catch monsters, but, if you do ever have to, then it's always best to use an annoying little sprog like Ella, just in case they do actually end up getting snatched. That way at least you won't have to put up with them any more.

'Don't worry!' Norman added quickly, seeing that Lucy was looking uncertain about this plan. 'I'm about eighty-seven per cent confident that we'll catch a Creaker before it gets anywhere near Ella.'

Norman and Lucy agreed that this was an acceptable risk in such extreme circumstances, and so they went straight back to Lucy's house to lay Creaker traps. But, to Lucy's surprise, her house wasn't quite as she had left it.

'It's . . . clean?!' she said as she looked around at the mess-free house. The night before, she'd been too scared to tidy up. She'd just leapt into bed, leaving the house in a right state. But today it was spotless.

'How odd!' Lucy said. 'The house was a complete pigsty yesterday. There was rubbish everywhere! I didn't clean it up, and no one else has been in here except . . .'

THE CREAKERS

She paused for a moment, and her eyes opened wide.

'The Creakers!' they both shouted at the same time.

Norman shook his head. 'Wait a minute. Are you saying that the monsters under your bed, the ones that snatched away all the grown-ups and live in that creepy world beneath us, decided to have a quick spring-clean before chasing you down that hole last night?'

'Looks like it!' Lucy said, shrugging.

'I wonder why . . .' Norman pondered, scratching his neatly combed hair thoughtfully.

'What are you thinking?' asked Lucy, intrigued by Norman's pensive silence.

'Well, any half-decent Scout knows that the best way to catch something is to work out what it wants. The Creakers are coming back for your dad's disgusting coat, right?'

'Yeah . . .'

'You said you left the house like a complete dump?'

'Yep . . .'

'And when you came back, all the mess had gone?'

'Right!'

THE CREAKER TRAP

'So, maybe –' Norman thought for a moment – 'maybe that tells us something about these Creakers. Maybe they love **RUBBISH!**'

'What?!' said Lucy, finding that a little weird.

'Think about it! You said yourself that the Woleb was all disgusting and stinky. Well, maybe they take all our dirty, mucky stuff down there,' Norman said.

Lucy opened her mouth to argue, but found that nothing came out. Sometimes that's how you realize that someone else is right.

'Let's make a Creaker trap!' Norman grinned.

They spent the rest of the afternoon cobbling together the craftiest Creaker trap they could think of. Lucy was pretty good at it, but Norman, with his scouting expertise, was amazing!

He rolled out a large sheet of paper and drew a map of Lucy's room.

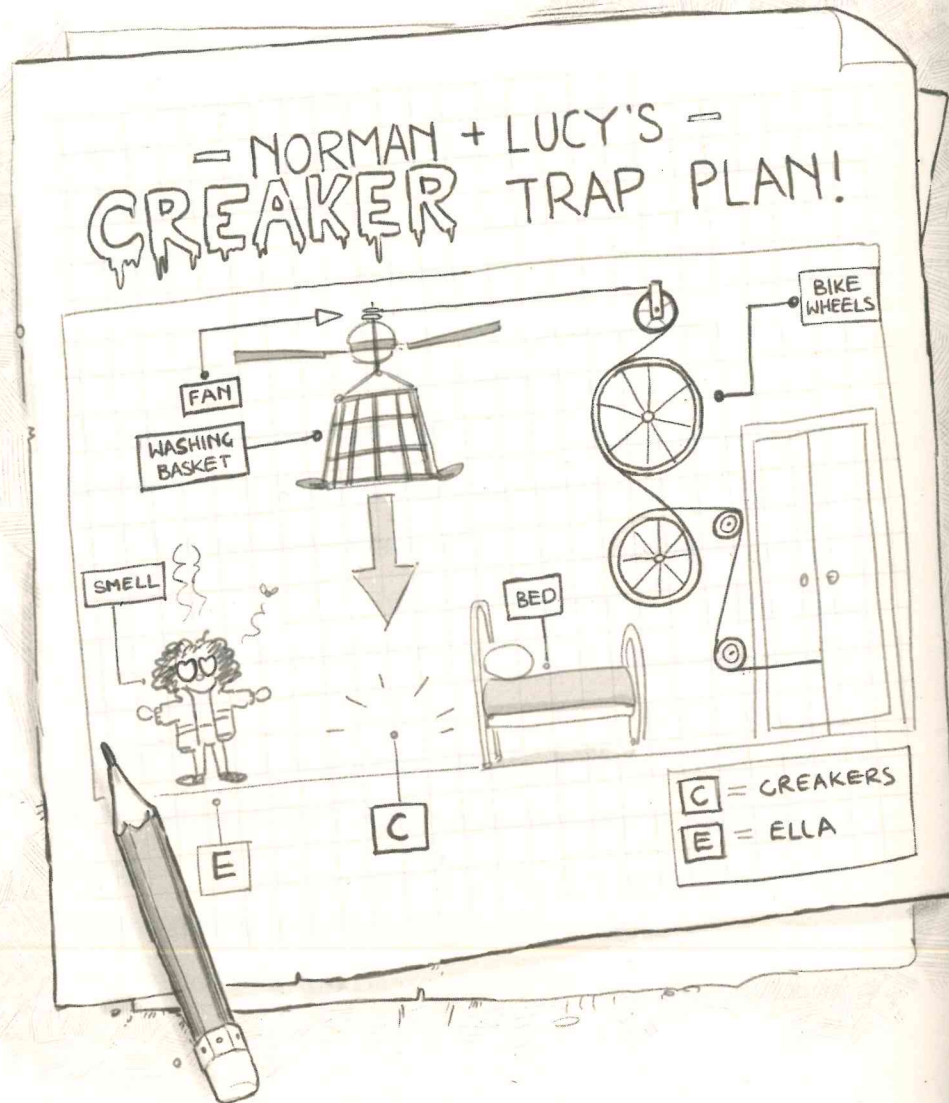
'This is only rough. If I'd had more time, I would have drawn a more accurate plan . . .' Norman said apologetically.

'Norman, it looks amazing!' said Lucy, staring at the incredibly detailed drawing spread out in front of her,

THE CREAKERS

on which Norman had written **NORMAN + LUCY'S CREAKER TRAP PLAN** in big letters.

Here's a copy of the plan:



THE CREAKER TRAP

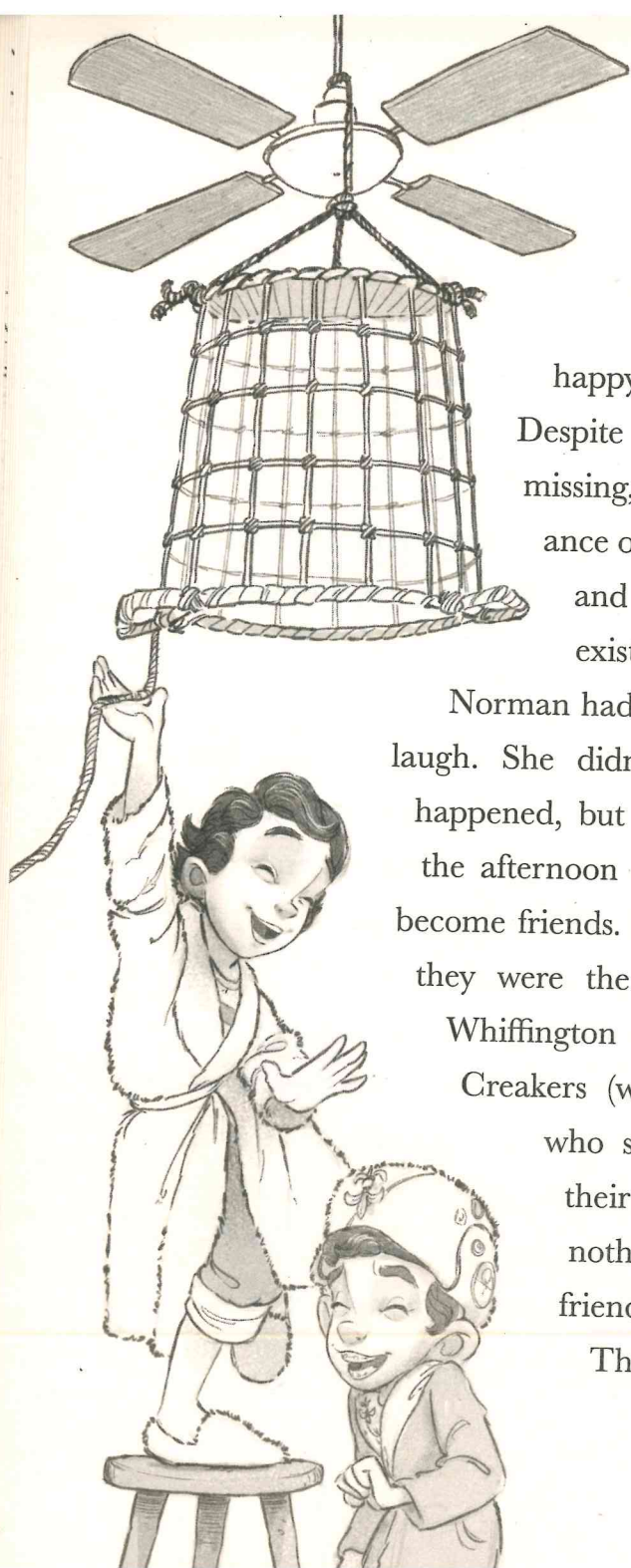
Together, they set to work collecting the most horrid, stinking leftovers from the back of Lucy's dad's rubbish truck. Norman showed Lucy how to lay out a trail of the rotten stuff leading from the shadows of her bed to the centre of the room. At the end of the trail, they marked an **E** with a piece of chalk. That would be Ella's spot. Next to it, Norman wrote a **C** for *Creaker*, over which they hung Lucy's mum's extra-large washing basket.

'That'll drop down and catch 'em!' Norman explained as he rigged the basket to a complicated pulley system of skipping ropes, which wound around the room and finished inside Lucy's wardrobe. 'That's where you'll hide, ready to release the basket,' he added.

'Where will you be?' Lucy asked.

'I'll wait on the bed, ready to jump on the basket once it lands on them,' Norman said, sounding surprisingly brave. 'What are we going to do once we've got them?'

'I'm going to make Ella sing to them until they tell me where they're keeping the grown-ups,' Lucy said, and they both laughed as they admired their masterpiece.



Somewhere in that laughter, Lucy realized she hadn't felt this happy since her dad left. Despite the grown-ups going missing, the sudden appearance of monsters in her room and a backwards world existing beneath her bed, Norman had managed to make her laugh. She didn't know how it had happened, but at some point during the afternoon she and Norman had become friends. Maybe it was because they were the only two people in Whiffington who knew about the Creakers (well, apart from Ella, who sort of knew). It was their secret, after all, and nothing makes stronger friends than a secret.

The house was ready.

THE CREAKER TRAP

The trap was set. Now they just needed to wait for the Creakers to return . . .

'Why do I have to wear this rotten thing?' Ella whined as they sat her down in the middle of Lucy's room, right on the **E** marked on the floor.

'Oh, it just makes the ghost stories scarier. You know, the bad smell and all that . . .' Norman lied.

'Yeah, erm . . . it adds to the effect!' Lucy added.

'OK,' said Ella uncertainly as the massive stinking coat swamped her shoulders, covering up her silky pink pyjamas. Norman and Lucy both had their dressing-gowns on to hide their clothes underneath. Norman was wearing his full Scout uniform, and Lucy was in her favourite pair of dungarees, so, although they looked ready for a sleepover, they were fully prepared for adventure.

'Why is your room so messy?' asked Ella, looking around.

'Because Mum's not here to tidy it up!' lied Lucy, feeling the butterflies fluttering in her tummy. She hated lying, even to Ella Noying.

THE CREAKERS

'So where are they?' Ella said, holding out her hands expectantly.

'Here you go. A full packet of marshmallows, as requested,' Lucy said, plonking the sweets into Ella's open hands.

'Ooooooh, goodie-goodie, nom-nom!' said Ella, ripping open the packet at once and beginning to munch on them, picking out all her favourite pink ones.

They switched off Lucy's bedroom light, huddled round Norman's torchlight and spent the rest of the night sharing spooky stories like 'The Haunted Treehouse', 'Night of the Living Dead Goldfish' and, Norman's personal favourite, 'The Campsite Critters of Cold Creek'.

'Those stories weren't scary at all!' Ella whined. 'You two are rubbish! I thought we were going to tell *really* scary ones. You two are big scaredy-cats!'

All of a sudden a bell chimed from the church across the other side of Whiffington Town, echoing through the darkness of the night outside Lucy's window.

'Oh, listen to that! It's midnight,' Ella said, looking a little excited.

THE CREAKER TRAP

'That's right, Ella, and do you know what happens at midnight?' asked Lucy.

'Norman's head turns back into a pumpkin?' Ella giggled.

'No. It's when the Creakers come out . . .' Lucy said.

Ella fell silent and stopped chewing her mouthful of pink marshmallows.

'The *what*?'

'Creakers. You *have* heard of the Creakers, haven't you?' Norman said.



THE CREAKERS

'Yeah . . . oh, Creakers, of course! Sure, I know all about Creakers. I probably know more than both of you actually,' Ella replied. Lucy could tell she was fibbing. 'But maybe you could just remind me . . .'

'Creakers are the things that hide under your bed,' said Lucy.

'Creakers are the things that put nasty dreams inside your head,' added Norman.

'I'm not scared of those silly things. It's just a story,' lied Ella.

'That's what most children think, Ella, but there's only one way to be sure a Creaker doesn't get you in the night,' Norman said, making his voice as spooky as he could (which wasn't very).

'What's that?' asked Ella.

'To stay up *all* night,' Norman said.

'And not go to bed,' added Lucy.

Ella started to look a little uneasy, like she wanted to go back to telling the not-so-scary stories.

'Right, I'm off to sleep!' said Norman chirpily, switching off his torch and climbing into Lucy's bed.

'Nighty night!'

THE CREAKER TRAP

'Wait, you're actually going to bed? What if a Creaker comes?!' whined Ella.

'It's just a story, like you said!' Norman yawned, rolling over and pulling the covers over his head.

'You know, I'm feeling sleepy too!' said Lucy, climbing into the wardrobe, which she'd lined with a duvet and pillow. She closed the door until she could just see Ella through a small crack.

'Are you both bonkers?' Ella cried. 'If these Creaky things creak out and you're both fast asleep, you'll both be goners! We've got to stay up all night!' She huddled on the floor, keeping a careful eye on the shadows underneath the bed.

Right on the spot marked with an **E**.

'OK, we'll take it in turns. You take first watch, Ella,' Lucy said, smiling to herself as she settled into her little snug inside the wardrobe. Even though she couldn't see him, she knew that Norman was smiling too. Their plan was working.

For now . . .