



1

ONE STORMY NIGHT

It was almost dark when Riley heard the screams.

They whipped across the fields, carried on the wind, towards the treehouse where she was working on her latest invention.

Riley moved away from her bench to the window, her skin turning cold. Had she imagined the noises? Or had she *really* heard someone screaming?

A moment later the sounds came again, echoing from somewhere in the distance. But now that Riley listened more closely, she realised that there were other noises too, yells

and laughter, rising over the low rumble of thunder in the distance.

Riley rubbed her eyes, stared out into the dusk, and tried to work out where the sounds were coming from. Her grandad's house backed onto fields, miles and miles of them, stretching away as far as she could see. A storm was forecast for tonight, a big one, and with the dark skies that loomed overhead it was hard to make out anything at all.

Riley's curiosity took over and she moved back towards her bench, digging through a mass of wires and screwdrivers and circuit boards until she found what she was looking for: an old set of binoculars she'd boosted one night when she was bored, improving their magnification while also amplifying the light so they could work in the dark. Switching them on, Riley studied the scene out of the window again.

There.

Five small figures making their way through the empty fields.

But why?

Riley fiddled with her binoculars, zooming in so that the grainy silhouettes took shape. The

group were all kids, around the same age as Riley, laughing and joking as they crossed the fields. Their torches were fixed on a shadowy outline in the distance – an old farm that had sat abandoned for as long as Riley could remember. Slowly, Riley moved her binoculars from one figure to the next, trying to work out what they were doing. Why were they out so late? She couldn't see their faces, but there was something familiar about them. She shifted her focus to the leader of the group, who had a quick, confident walk and instantly recognisable long blonde hair tied up in pigtails.

Riley felt her breath catch in her throat.

It was Bethany Blight, Shiver Point's local bully.

But why was she heading towards Darkraven Farm?

From a distance, the silhouette of the main house looked like a skull, its shattered windows resembling empty eye sockets, the boarded-up door a toothless mouth. Deserted fields surrounded the farm and its outbuildings: bare, barren stretches of land dotted with skeletal trees. It certainly wasn't a place Riley had ever wanted to visit.

There were whispers about Darkraven – silly stories that Riley had heard in the playground for years. Rumours that if you listened closely enough on dark winter nights, you could hear ghostly cries and wails from somewhere inside the old farmhouse. That the farm was cursed, and anyone who set foot on the land would suffer a terrible fate. That there was a reason the family who'd once lived there had vanished, and no one new had ever moved in.

But they were just stories, weren't they?

Riley felt a chill prickle her skin, slowly fading as she remembered where she lived.

Shiver Point.

And nothing remotely exciting or interesting ever happened here.

At least, that used to be the case.

Riley glanced at her phone, sitting on the edge of the workbench, and at the small yellow sticker glued onto the case, the one designed by Alex.

Two S's and a wide, toothy grin.

Shiver Squad.

It still felt strange to be part of something, to have friends, after so long on her own. Riley felt like she finally fitted in somewhere, like she'd

found people who really understood her, who helped her to forget her problems.

And with everything going on in her life right now, she needed that.

Riley's eyes drifted towards the bulky shape on the workbench – the invention she'd been working on when she'd been distracted by the noises from outside. If she was honest, she was happy to have an excuse to take a break. She'd been fiddling away on her new project since she'd got home from school, and tonight was one of those times when she just couldn't get things right. Inventing normally came easily to her, but not with this, and Riley knew why. Her new invention mattered, it *really* mattered. Maybe that was why she was finding it so hard.

The air was growing colder now, flecks of rain darting through the treehouse windows and making goosebumps rise on Riley's bare arms. She flinched at another rumble of thunder from above, threw on a hoodie then checked the time on her watch.

Almost eight. Time to go and help her grandad get ready for bed.

Riley jumped as a flash of lightning lit up the night sky. Nervous about the ferocity of the

storm, she crept back to the treehouse window, checking on Bethany and her little group one last time. They were inside Darkraven's farmhouse now, the telltale flicker of a torch beam just visible through gaps in the boarded-up windows.

Riley felt an edge of uncertainty, pattering across her scalp like tiny footsteps.

What were they doing in there?

And what if the old farm wasn't as empty as everyone thought?

The place was probably littered with cobwebs, spiders as big as dinner plates hanging in the centre. Riley wouldn't be surprised if there were rats too, nests of them waiting to scurry in the direction of any visitors in a squeaky, bristling wave. But what if there was something worse in there?

Riley gripped the windowsill, her eyes locked on the distant farm. Something just didn't feel right about this, about Bethany and her friends exploring the abandoned house, about the storm that was raging above her head. She had an odd conviction that something very bad was about to happen.

Suddenly the torches reappeared. The beams darted left and right, jerking frantically as

Bethany and her little gang sprinted away from Darkraven Farm, back towards Shiver Point. But there was something strange about the torch beams now, the way they blinked and sputtered and flashed on and off, as if they'd all developed some weird malfunction. There were more screams, although this time they were *definitely* scared, as if all the fun Bethany's gang had been having earlier had abruptly drained away.

Riley wondered if this time Bethany had bitten off more than she could chew, and there really were giant rats and spiders living in the old farm. With a bit of luck, one of them had dug its fangs into Bethany. Despite herself, Riley felt a mischievous smile pull at her lips.

Lightning lit up the sky again, and Riley noticed that Bethany and her gang didn't look quite as clean as they had minutes before. Their clothes and faces seemed to be covered in something thick and dark and gloopy. Riley wasn't sure what it was, but as the group passed her grandad's house and the wind changed, she was sure she could smell something, and it wasn't good.

Riley lowered her binoculars and turned away. Whatever had spooked Bethany and her friends at the farm, Riley had bigger problems.

She switched off the heater, turned off the light, and took one last look at her new invention before she climbed down the ladder.

Tomorrow, she promised herself, she'd fix all the things that were wrong with it.

Tomorrow, everything would feel a little brighter.

In the distance, Darkraven Farm sat alone once more. Overhead, the storm rumbled on, rain trickling through the broken windows and shattered tiles. With its visitors gone, the old farm was still and lifeless.

But not for long.

A figure crept out from the shadows, hunched and bedraggled, like a rotten corpse pulling itself out of the grave. A rusty pitchfork lay forgotten by the doorway, its three sharp prongs buried in the soil, and the figure reached down, pulling the old tool free.

Then it turned and shuffled towards the open fields.

Towards Shiver Point.



2

WE NEED A MYSTERY

The country lanes flashed by in a blur, the air filled with screams and yells. Paper planes sailed back and forth like drunken wasps, swooping from one end of the coach to the other. As school trips went, Riley reckoned a careers visit to the *Shivering Post* offices wasn't the most exciting day out, but the Point Academy pupils were so excited they might as well have been on their way to a theme park.

Outside, the sky was still dark and gloomy, last night's storm not quite finished with Shiver Point. The rain and the wind gave the town a grim, foreboding feel, and Riley's mind slid back

to the night before – and the figures she'd seen running away from Darkraven Farm.

It was no surprise that Bethany and her little gang had commandeered the back seats. From where Riley was sitting halfway down the coach, she could see them tapping on the windows, jeering at the cars below and pulling faces when any driver was unwise enough to look in their direction. Whatever had happened to them at the farm seemed well and truly forgotten. Oddly, though, Riley was sure she could smell that strange stink again, the one that had drifted on the wind as Bethany and her gang sprinted back towards town.

Whatever it was, it didn't seem to have made them any less annoying.

'What *is* that thing?' asked a voice, shattering Riley's thoughts. She turned round in her seat to see Oli's face jammed between the gap in the seats. He was staring at the diagram in Riley's lap – a messy sketch of wires, leads and circuit boards. If there was a joker among Riley's friends, it was Oli, although not everyone found him amusing. With his inability to sit still combined with his habit of constantly saying

the wrong thing, he found himself in trouble on a regular basis.

‘Is it a new kind of bin?’ he asked, washing her in a breath heavy with the smell of Monster Munch.

Riley looked back at her diagram and felt a stab of annoyance, but she had to admit it actually *did* look a little like a bin.

On the other side of Oli, Mo pulled down his binoculars, turning his attention towards Riley’s diagram. If Oli was the wild, spontaneous member of the squad, Mo was the opposite, so cautious that he reminded Riley of a turtle in a nature programme on TV, peering out timidly from inside its shell.

‘Is it . . . is it a giant food mixer?’ Mo asked doubtfully.

Riley let out a long, weary sigh. ‘No. It isn’t a bin, or a food mixer.’

‘What is it then?’ piped up Sophia from the seat in front. She’d been busy flicking through this week’s edition of the *Shivering Post*, but now she was staring at Riley’s plans too. Sophia was the sensible member of the group, the one who always followed the rules, as her pristine school

uniform and the impressive array of badges on her blazer testified.

Reluctantly, Riley reached into her pocket and pulled out the poster she'd seen stuck to the wall of the DT lab three weeks ago. 'It's for the science and engineering competition. I want to . . . I want to win it, I guess.'

That wasn't the whole reason, but Riley kept the other bit quiet . . . for now.

'So they accept bins, then?' asked Oli innocently.

'It *isn't* a bin,' Riley insisted. 'It's a . . . a robot.'

Next to Riley, Alex looked up from his art book, his pen pausing for a moment while he studied the diagram. Sophia followed the rules, but Alex bent them as far as he could. He always seemed to arrive at school a millisecond before the bell went, and flaunted the school dress code with his trainers and the hoodie he wore under his blazer. 'It looks a little like that one from the first *Star Wars* films,' Alex observed, no trace of sarcasm in his voice for once. 'The one that breaks down all the time.'

Suddenly, Riley started to wish she was sitting alone after all.

‘But I’m sure yours won’t break down,’ added Alex quickly.

‘So what can it do?’ asked Oli, scrabbling through his bag for more food. It was only nine-fifteen, and he’d already eaten everything he’d brought for lunch. Riley wondered how long it would be until he started trying to barter for what the others had packed for theirs.

‘Lots of things,’ Riley answered, trying to inject some confidence into her voice. ‘When it’s finished, it’ll be able to open doors, turn on lights, bring things, carry things, make a phone call if someone needs help . . .’ Her words dried up as she stared down at the mess on her page. Right now, her invention was a long way away from being able to do any of those things.

‘Cool,’ Alex said. ‘Is it to help your grandad out?’

‘Yeah. I’ve still got lots to do on it, though,’ Riley answered, then turned away from the others, making a show of busily annotating one of the diagrams in the hope that they’d stop asking her questions.

On the seat behind, Mo went back to his birdwatching, staring up into the sky with his binoculars, occasionally calling out ‘Pigeon!’

or ‘Crow!’, although no one nearby seemed interested in what he’d spotted.

Meanwhile, Sophia let out a loud, theatrical tut and tossed the newspaper to one side. ‘There’s *nothing*,’ she announced, an air of defeat to the words. ‘Nothing at all. It’s been weeks now since our last mystery, and I’m getting seriously frustrated.’

Mo lowered his binoculars and chewed his bottom lip thoughtfully. ‘You might be seriously frustrated, but I’m seriously relieved.’

Sophia rolled her eyes. ‘How are the Shiver Squad supposed to solve mysteries if there *aren’t* any?’

‘Maybe we should change the name of our gang to something else? Or change what we do? How about the Safety Squad?’

Sophia gave a disgusted snort. ‘What we need is some *action*.’

‘Careful what you wish for,’ replied Alex quietly.

Oli opened his mouth to reply but just then a paper plane soared past him, straight into Mo’s ear. Mo responded with a squeal of alarm, jerking in fright as if it had been a giant bat

that had attempted to pierce his eardrum. His reaction was rewarded by a chorus of jeers and heckles from the back seat of the coach.

‘Some things never change,’ Mo grumbled, probing his ear with a finger. Next to him, Oli was already scrunching up a banana skin, ready to use in retaliation.

‘Just ignore her,’ Alex advised. ‘If you throw that, you’ll probably be the one who ends up getting in trouble. And if you don’t, she’ll get bored and move on to another target.’

Riley put down her pen and nodded towards the back of the coach. ‘I saw her last night, you know.’

‘Who?’ asked Sophia. ‘Bethany?’

‘What was she doing?’ demanded Oli. ‘Hanging around the graveyard like a ghoul, scaring people?’

Riley pictured the scene from the night before, and the five torch beams flickering in the darkness. ‘No. She was out in the fields, heading towards that old farm on the outskirts of town. Darkraven.’

At the mention of the infamous farm, Sophia’s gaze turned inquisitive. ‘What, on her own?’

‘No, she was with that gang of hers. Except it looked like they got a little too scared for their own good. Whatever they saw, it –’

Riley was suddenly interrupted by Mo jabbing his index finger against the window. ‘Hey, what’s happening out there?’ he blurted.

Mo’s words made them all snap round. They were just pulling up outside the *Shivering Post* now, but that wasn’t what had caught his attention.

‘Blue lights,’ Sophia narrated for them all, a hopeful tone to her voice. ‘Police cars. Maybe there’s . . . trouble.’

‘Let’s hope not,’ Mo mumbled.

‘I agree with what Sophia was saying before,’ Oli announced. ‘I think we could do with a little adventure.’

The coach groaned to a halt, and their teacher, Mr Prickett, stumbled up from his seat and turned to face the pupils. ‘This doesn’t look good,’ he announced to a chorus of boos and protests. ‘I’m going to go and see what’s happening. You lot, stay in your seats and wait for me to come back.’

Riley tried to get a closer look at what was happening as he got off the coach, but the

surge of disobedient pupils that rushed towards the windows meant it was impossible to see anything any more.

Sophia edged out into the aisle, pausing to look back at the others. 'You think we should . . .' she began, then her words faded away as she glanced down at the badges on her lapel. Prefect. Library monitor. Tuck-shop helper. Reading mentor. It was as if she was weighing up how much she stood to lose if things went wrong.

Alex glanced at her and nodded, his voice dropping to a secretive whisper as he finished what Sophia had been about to say. 'Yeah, I think we should take a look.'



3

BREAKING AND ENTERING

Mo didn't really want to know what the trouble was, but it no longer looked like he had a choice. Before he could stop them, the others were ushering him out of his seat, along the aisle, and towards the emergency exit of the coach.

'But what if the coach leaves and we get left behind?' Mo protested, trying to come up with a reason they should stay aboard.

Oli shrugged. 'Spending the day walking home is still better than a day in lessons if the trip gets cancelled.'

Mo was torn. On one hand, he wanted to be part of the group, but on the other, he didn't

want to go near anything that had the potential to be dangerous. Before he could decide either way, he found himself forced to descend the steps that led to the emergency exit, where they huddled by the coach's toilet as Sophia pressed the stubby red button that controlled the doors.

For a moment nothing happened, and Mo clung on to a shred of hope, one that quickly disintegrated as the door rattled open.

'What if what's happened inside is ... something really bad?' he muttered.

Sophia leaned her head out into the open, checking the coast was clear. 'If it was something bad, there would be an ambulance here,' she announced. 'Don't worry, I don't think we're about to stumble onto a gory murder scene.'

From the frown that fell over Oli's face, Mo thought he looked almost disappointed.

'How are we going to do this?' Alex asked, balancing by Sophia on the bottom step.

'Over there,' Sophia replied smoothly, like she already had the whole thing figured out. 'See those wide doors? They must be used for delivery vans. There's a smaller pedestrian door to the side, and it's open. Maybe whoever got

here first today opened it and forgot about it in all the confusion.'

They dropped down to the tarmac, one after another, and darted towards the delivery doors. Mo chanced a look over his shoulder as he ran. By the main entrance, the crowd had grown. It was a combination of police, teachers and *Shivering Post* staff, all so engrossed in whatever was happening that none of them spotted the group of kids sneaking into the building.

Sophia reached the door first, slipping inside, and Mo followed, glad to be out of the rain and wind. He emerged into a huge, high-ceilinged space, a factory floor where Mo guessed the *Shivering Post* was printed every day. Close to where they stood, several long, bulky machines sat motionless, while rows of towering shelves crammed with boxes of paper stretched into the distance.

Mo tried to keep calm, but there was no doubt that the morning had taken an unexpected turn and where he'd now found himself was . . . kind of creepy. The factory was drenched in shadows, pools of darkness where Mo's overactive imagination started to tell him anything could

be lurking. Dust coated the surfaces, hanging heavy in the air and reminding Mo of a huge, deserted tomb.

‘What now?’ Riley asked, the echo of her voice drifting away into the gloom.

Sophia pulled out her phone and switched on the torch. ‘We look for clues,’ she whispered. ‘We try to figure out what’s happening, and why all those people outside are –’

A voice from just outside the warehouse door made her fall silent.

‘Offices up there have been vandalised, but it doesn’t look like anything’s been taken. The intruder might still be inside, so we’re searching the top floors before we let anyone –’

The voice trailed off, the footsteps of the policeman who Mo guessed was speaking moving away. Now all Mo could hear was the moan of the wind and the low rumble of thunder from outside the factory walls.

‘Did you hear that?’ Mo stuttered. ‘There’s an intruder, and they might . . . they might still be *inside*.’

‘Good,’ answered Sophia. ‘Maybe we can catch them.’

‘And do what?’ Mo asked, his voice getting higher. ‘Ask them nicely to hand themselves in? What if they . . . what if they take us hostage?’

Oli rolled his eyes and took up position alongside Sophia. ‘Trust me,’ he muttered, ‘five minutes in your company and they’d be begging to give you back.’

There was no more time for complaining. The others set off towards the aisles and the darkness beyond, and Mo had no choice but to follow.

‘Keep your eyes open,’ Alex instructed. ‘Shiver Point’s police force aren’t exactly the most observant, and maybe they’ve missed something we won’t.’

The Shiver Squad made their way through the darkness. The printing machines sat silent, like huge mechanical beasts, waiting to roar into life if someone got too close. Mo made sure he stayed in the middle of the pack, the safest place, while his eyes darted towards the shadows. With the lights off and the gloomy skies outside, it was impossible to see what lurked up ahead. What if that policeman was right, and there really *was* an intruder in here, like in one of those awful horror films Oli was always going on about?

They'd just reached the end of the aisle when Riley came to a sudden halt. 'What . . . what is that smell?' she asked.

'Smelt it, dealt it,' Oli chanted predictably.

Mo took a deep breath through his nose, trying to ignore the aroma of machinery and dust. Riley was right: there was something else in the air, a sour, pungent smell, like . . .

'Like the Year 7 toilets,' Oli announced thoughtfully.

'You mean wee?' Mo queried.

'I'm pretty sure that isn't the technical term for it,' Sophia interjected, 'but yes, it does smell a little like –'

'Over here,' Alex hissed, interrupting them. 'I think I've found something.'

Sophia's torch beam veered towards Alex's discovery: a solitary door at the end of the aisle. But it wasn't the door that had caught Alex's eye. It was the broken glass of the door's window on the ground, and the forced lock.

'What if the intruder's through there?' Mo hissed.

Sophia's torch beam lingered on the word above the door.

Archives.

‘Isn’t that a pizza topping?’ Oli asked.

Sophia let out a long, weary sigh, the kind of sound a deflating football might make. ‘No. You’re thinking of *anchovies*. Anchovies are fish. Archives refers to old records from the past. So I’m guessing down there is where they keep past issues of the *Shivering Post*.’

‘And hopefully not a serial killer,’ Mo mumbled.

‘There’s something else,’ Riley interrupted, her own torch out now, the beam focused on the floor. Mo peered closer, noticing the small, golden threads that lay alongside the broken glass.

‘What is that?’ Alex asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Sophia replied. ‘But I think we need to see what’s through that door.’

Riley shone her torch through the broken glass, revealing a set of stairs leading down into a basement. Mo was the closest, right next to the door, and for an instant, just as the torch beam shone inside, he could have sworn he saw something move down in the basement: an odd silhouette, stooped and crooked.

Mo opened his mouth, ready to tell the others, then stopped. He decided he’d had more than enough fear for one day. So instead he started to

edge backwards, towards the daylight, and the exit, and the sanctuary of the coach. He'd rather spend the whole journey back to school getting paper aeroplanes hurled at him by Bethany Blight than go anywhere near that basement. He kept moving, away from the others, back towards safety.

And straight into one of the printing machines.

It immediately burst into life, its flashing yellow lights banishing the shadows.

'How do we turn it off?' Mo shrieked, stumbling away.

Riley pushed past him, searching the control panel for whatever Mo had accidentally pushed. 'I think it's this one,' she said. 'Just let me –'

Riley never got to finish what she was saying. Instead, a loud, commanding voice boomed through the aisles.

Mo spun round, holding his breath in terror. But it wasn't the intruder who was waiting for them.

It was worse. It was their teacher.



4

TROUBLE

Somewhere in the distance, Sophia could hear the sounds of the school playground.

Sadly, there was no such fun in the waiting room outside the headteacher's office.

Sophia folded her arms, scrunched down lower in her chair and wondered where it had all gone wrong. Her dreams of sneaking into the *Shivering Post*, helping the police with whatever mystery they were trying to solve, and securing another win for the Shiver Squad were in tatters. Now the only mystery was what kind of punishment Mrs Cawley was going to dish out.

She took a deep breath, her gaze drifting around the small waiting room towards the rest of the squad. Oli looked bored, like he'd sat in this exact position a hundred times before, which he probably had. Mo looked terrified, like he might burst into tears any second, which he probably would. Alex looked defiant, a little too cool to care about how many detentions might be heading his way. And Riley was her usual calm and composed self, her gaze fixed on the clock on the wall – she was probably figuring out how it worked.

While she waited, Sophia tried to put the events of that morning together. Someone had broken into the *Shivering Post*, that much was for sure. From what they'd overheard the policeman say, someone had vandalised the reporters' offices on the upper floors. And based on the broken glass and shattered lock, they'd also headed downstairs to the newspaper's archives, although the gang hadn't had the chance to find out what they'd got up to down there.

Then there'd been that *smell* as well – sour, pungent, so strong it had made Sophia's eyes water. The pieces didn't make sense, not yet,

but they were the only thing close to interesting that she had stumbled across recently.

Sophia loved having a puzzle to solve, but she didn't like where this one had landed her. The most trouble she'd ever been in before was for going over the word count for a story she'd written in English, and she'd *never* been called to the headteacher's office for breaking rules. On reflection, maybe it would have been better if she'd stayed on the coach and watched from the window like everyone else. Her mums were going to blow a fuse when they heard about today's incident.

The receptionist's phone rang, shattering Sophia's thoughts, and she watched the lady pick up the receiver and shoot an unhappy look in the direction of the pupils in the waiting room.

'Mrs Cawley will see you now,' she announced ominously, gesturing towards the door in the corner.

Mo stole a frightened look at the others then rose to his feet, straightening his creased blazer before trudging after the others. Sophia guessed this kind of trouble was a first for Mo, just like it was for her.

Mrs Cawley's office looked different in these new, threatening circumstances. The pictures of the Point Academy pupils from years gone by that were displayed on the walls didn't look friendly any more. Now their smiles took on a smug, excited look, like they'd sat in on dozens of these tellings-off before, and they couldn't wait to see what happened next.

Mrs Cawley didn't let Sophia and the others sit, though; instead they stood in front of her desk, like prisoners in a firing line.

'Mr Prickett came to see me this morning,' Mrs Cawley began, glancing down at the typed report on her desk. 'He burst into my office as soon as your year group returned. It's unfortunate that the trip was cancelled, but there's no excusing what the five of you did when Mr Prickett's back was turned. You absconded from the coach without permission. You trespassed into the printworks, ignoring the danger signs. And then you activated one of the machines inside the building. To say that I'm disappointed is a *huge* understatement. What do you have to say for yourselves?'

There was an uncomfortable pause while Mrs Cawley waited for an answer. Sophia's eyes

darted towards the others, only to find them looking back at her helplessly. Alex opened his mouth to speak, and Sophia braced herself. As usual, he was wearing his hoodie under his blazer, something he'd been told not to do dozens of times, and Sophia had the feeling that whatever Alex came out with wouldn't make things any better.

'It was my fault,' announced Oli, taking a step closer to the desk before Alex had the chance to begin.

Mrs Cawley nodded, like she'd suspected that all along. 'I see. This isn't the first time we've spoken this term, Mr Foster, but I was hoping you were starting to turn over a new leaf. I'm going to have to ring home, *again*, and you're going to –'

Before she knew what she was doing, Sophia found herself stepping forward and interrupting the headteacher mid-sentence. 'It wasn't him, Mrs Cawley. It was *me*. I wanted to see what was happening, and I forced the rest of them to come with me.'

Mrs Cawley paused, staring at Sophia as if she couldn't quite believe what she was hearing.

The truth was, Sophia could barely believe it herself. But it *had* been her fault – at least, she had been the one who'd suggested going into the factory. And more than that, Oli was her friend, and she wasn't going to let him take all the blame, no matter how much he irritated her sometimes.

Mrs Cawley shook her head and leaned back in her chair. 'In view of what an exemplary record most of you have, I'm tempted to be lenient here. However, what you did today was not only foolish, it –'

The phone rang, cutting off the rest of what Mrs Cawley had been about to say. She looked at it accusingly for a moment, then lifted the receiver to her ear. 'Yes?' she answered, her expression slowly changing as she absorbed whatever she was being told. '*Really?* I see. I'll be right there.'

She looked puzzled as she replaced the handset, and she turned back towards Sophia and the others. 'Unfortunately, it appears that a herd of cows have invaded the school's relaxation garden and are eating the flowers and plants there. I'm not sure where they've

come from, but I'm going to have to go and deal with them.' She paused, like an executioner preparing to drop the guillotine. 'All of you will have an after-school detention tomorrow night. *And* I'll be ringing your parents and carers to make sure punishment is meted out at home, too. Now, off you go to period four. And if you so much as put a foot out of line for the rest of the day, you'll be spending every evening until the end of term with me.'

Sophia winced as she followed her friends out. A phone call home? She'd never had one of those before – not unless it was to congratulate her for extra effort in lessons.

'One more thing, Sophia,' Mrs Cawley called, freezing her like a statue. Sophia turned slowly, wondering if the headteacher had changed her mind in view of her spotless record.

Mrs Cawley rose from her desk, pointing towards the spread of badges on Sophia's lapel. 'Until you've proven you can be trusted, I'm afraid that some of your privileges will have to go. And that means your prefect, library monitor, tuck-shop helper and reading-mentor badges are all revoked until further notice.'

Sophia wasn't sure if the tears that stung her eyes were from rage or indignation, but she fought them back as she unclipped the badges and placed them on Mrs Cawley's desk.

Maybe Mo had been right. Maybe the Shiver Squad wasn't such a great idea after all.