



It wasn't a long walk to the little house by the lake. It took them ten minutes to reach it.

The house—it was more of a cabin, really—stood deep in the shadow of the trees that surrounded it. It was made of logs and was small — once inside, there was little room to move around. There was one advantage it had over the Town Hall: there was only one tiny window, far too small for the bat to get through. The cabin also appeared to be well-built and they felt pretty sure that it could withstand any number of attacks from the monster—if it ever discovered they were inside.

Once they had made camp in the cabin, Measle led the way to the lake. It was nothing more than a mirror, cleverly cut in a random shape so as to

resemble a small body of water set deep in the forest. It was fixed into the plywood surface of the table and surrounded by low banks of green-painted sandpaper, which looked remarkably like grass.

Kip, Frank, and William set to work. Using crowbars from the tool kits, they began to loosen the mirror from its setting, being careful all the while not to crack the thin glass. It took a long time, pushing the bladed ends of the crowbars under the lip of the glass, bit by bit, and gently easing it out of its setting. Shortly before it got dark, Kip and Frank gave one last heave and, with a crackling sound, they lifted one edge of the mirror, tilting the whole thing up at a narrow angle. Then the rest of them, except for Measle, ran forward and took hold of a section of the mirror.

‘All right,’ shouted Kip. ‘All together now! Lift!’

Everybody strained their muscles and one side of the mirror lifted clear from its setting—a whole half a centimetre.

It was enough. Measle quickly crawled forward and fitted his thin body in the narrow gap between the underside of the mirror and the plywood table



top. Tinker, thinking this was some new kind of game, crawled in beside him and Measle gently pushed him away. ‘No, Tinker,’ he said. ‘Go away, there’s a good dog.’

Then he crawled backwards onto the sandpaper bank and, with a collective sigh of relief, the rest of the group lowered the mirror back in place.

‘Well, it ought to work,’ said Frank.

‘But it’s a terrible risk, Measle dear,’ said Prudence. ‘Remember, it’s only a theory. It could all go badly wrong.’

Measle grinned at her, pretending to be brave. He was, in fact, very frightened by his idea—but it seemed that there was nothing else they could try. He busied himself helping the men to cut some short lengths of wood. Kip cut down a small tree with his chainsaw and they chopped the trunk into centimetre pieces. Then they took the sections of timber to the lake side. Once again, the men levered the mirror up. Once again, Lady Grant and Prudence joined in, to hold the side of the mirror clear, while Measle and Kitty propped the lengths of wood under the glass. Once they’d set the first three in place, Kip said, ‘OK—lower away.’

Slowly, gently, they lowered the mirror onto the props. Then they set the remaining sections of timber around the edge of the glass, until Kip was satisfied that the thing was steady and firm.

‘Do you think Basil will notice?’ asked Prudence.

‘He’d have to look pretty close to see it’s not flat,’ said Kip.

‘Let’s hope he doesn’t look close,’ said William.

‘Let’s hope he’ll be looking at me,’ said Measle.

‘Oh dear,’ said Prudence. ‘I do worry about this.’

They returned to the cabin, just as the light from the broken attic window began to fade. They all went inside the cramped area, closed the door and settled down on the floor.

William said, 'I've had a tiny thought. To match my tiny brain.' He turned to Prudence and Lady Grant. 'Do either of you two ladies have any perfume in your handbags?'

Prudence shook her head. 'Never use the stuff.'

Lady Grant said, 'I've got some. Why?'

'I want to try something,' said William. 'I want to mask our smells with something else. I read in my books that, if you make yourself smell of something else, then animals that rely on their sense of smell sometimes get confused. It seems to me that, if we spray ourselves—and this room—with some good, strong perfume, then perhaps the bat might leave us alone.'

'It's worth a try,' said Frank.

Lady Grant rummaged in her handbag and pulled out a small square bottle, with a spray cap. She dusted some doughnut crumbs off it and said, 'This is very expensive. It's called *Jolie Femme*. It's my favourite scent. I do hope you're not going to use all of it?'

William smiled. 'Lady Grant,' he said, 'if we ever get out of this mess, I'll buy you a case of the stuff.'

Lady Grant smiled faintly. 'That is terribly sweet of you,' she murmured. 'But I'm afraid you wouldn't be able to afford a whole case. I don't know

*anybody*—except me, of course—who could afford a whole case.’

William grinned and took the bottle and began spraying everything in the room—the walls, the little window, the door, and Tinker, who sneezed and wiped his eyes with his paws. *That’s the kind of stink*—he thought to himself—*that a self-respectin’ dog can do without, thank you very much!*

Next, William used what was left in the bottle to spray everybody’s clothes—Measle most of all, because Measle seemed to have the strongest smell of all of them.

‘You ever hear of a bathtub, kiddo?’ he said, grinning, as he squirted Measle’s dirty old shirt.

‘Have you ever seen my bathtub?’ said Measle, wrinkling his nose against the strong scent. ‘If you had, then you wouldn’t take a bath either.’

Soon, the darkness came and, with it, the *crack, crack, crack* of the great bat wings. They heard it flying over the cabin, the sound getting closer and closer. Then there was a thump as the bat landed—and a rustling noise as it pushed its way through the trees.

‘It’s coming,’ whispered Kitty.



They all huddled together, holding their breath.

There was a snuffling sound, right outside the door—then, in quick succession, three short, sharp sneezes. A moment later, they heard a sudden whoosh of wind and then *crack, crack, crack* as the bat took off.

‘It didn’t like that,’ said Frank. ‘Good idea, William.’

‘Yes, a *very* good idea, Mr Durham,’ said Lady Grant. ‘A rather *expensive* idea—but a very good one all the same.’

‘With any luck, it won’t be back,’ said Frank.

They slept that night, some more soundly than others. Measle lay awake for most of the hours of darkness, thinking about the next day. It wasn’t very comforting, the three fates that lay ahead. Death by freezing. A short life as a cockroach. Or, with a great deal of luck, the one remaining possibility—

He fell asleep at last, an hour before dawn. A moment later (or so it seemed) Frank shook him awake.

‘It’s time, Measle. Are you sure you want to go through with this?’

Measle nodded. He wasn’t sure at all, but he knew he had no choice. Prudence hugged him, Lady Grant kissed the air somewhere near his cheek, and Kitty began to cry. The three men solemnly shook his hand.

‘However this comes out, Measle,’ said Frank, ‘we want you to know that we think a lot of you.’

‘You’re a brave kid,’ said Kip.

‘Knock ’em dead,’ said William.

Measle gulped. Suddenly, it seemed like a terrible idea. He looked round at all the worried faces. They were relying on him. This was no time to back down.

‘OK,’ he said, his voice strong. ‘Here I go.’

He walked out of the cabin and heard the door close behind him. He made his way through the trees to the edge of the mirror lake. It was just as they’d left it the night before—tilted up on one edge, leaving a gap of half a centimetre between it and the plywood base. Measle tried to imagine how it would look from above. The angle of the tilt was very small—with luck, Basil wouldn’t notice it.

He sat down on the sandpaper bank to wait. He felt very lonely and very nervous—and horribly exposed. A whole mob of butterflies seemed to be having a party in his stomach and his mouth felt as dry as dust.

The seconds ticked by—then the minutes—then a whole hour had come and gone, and still no Basil. Measle began to hope that perhaps he’d never come. Perhaps he’d decided to leave the house for ever? Perhaps he’d conveniently died in his sleep? Perhaps he’d—

*Thump, thump, thump.* Basil was coming up the stairs. Measle stood up, trembling. His knees

started to knock together and he felt suddenly weak. He forced his unwilling legs to take him to the edge of the mirror, so that his hips were pressed against it—and he looked towards the distant door, waiting for the terror that was approaching.

The door opened and Basil was there—huge and towering, his white face whiter than usual, his eyes more staring than ever, and strands of his lank, greasy black hair hanging over his high white forehead as if—in his hurry to get his revenge—he'd forgotten to use a comb. Measle watched as Basil walked slowly to the edge of the table. He stood quite still, waiting for Basil to see him.

And then Basil did see him. His great round eyes narrowed and he smiled his terrible smile. He moved round the table, to the point closest to Measle, and he leaned both his waxy hands on the surface and lowered his massive head.

'Ssso—there you are, Measle. Taking a little sss stroll in the woods, are we? Fresh air and exercise—ssso good for the lungs, aren't they? Now—let me try to remember—what were we going to do with you? Ah, yesss—we were going to freeze you sssolid, weren't we?'

Measle blinked. *What about the other spell—the cockroach threat?* He thought as fast as he'd ever thought.

'I don't care if you freeze me solid!' he shouted. 'Just don't turn me into a cockroach!'

‘*Don’t* turn you into a cockroach? What do you mean “*don’t*”? We don’t sssay “*don’t*” to Basil, surely?’

‘I don’t care what you do to me—just, please, *please* don’t turn me into a cockroach!’

‘There’s that “*don’t*” again, Measle.’

‘And I mean it!’ shouted Measle, at the top of his lungs. ‘Don’t, don’t, *don’t* turn me into a cockroach!’

‘Ah—ssso, that’s what we fear the mosst, is it?’

‘Yes! I couldn’t bear being a cockroach!’

‘Very well, dear boy. Then—a cockroach it shall be! Sstand quite sstill, Measle.’

Even through his fear, Measle couldn’t help feeling a small satisfaction at the success of his ruse and it occurred to him that, perhaps, Basil’s madness had a shrinking effect on his intelligence. Basil leaned forward on his hands and lowered his head closer to where Measle was standing. Then, he narrowed his round fish eyes. Measle tensed, concentrating on Basil’s dark pupils. The moment he saw the glint of green fire in those fishy orbs, he dived—in one smooth movement—under the tilted mirror.

Basil followed the sudden, unexpected movement of the boy and, at the precise moment when the twin beams of green light flashed from his eyes, he found himself looking directly into the reflecting surface of the mirror. The lime green rays hit the mirror and bounced—at the speed



of light—right back into Basil's eyes. He screamed—whether from pain or fear, Measle didn't know—and there was the sound of sizzling, like

bacon frying in a hot pan. Measle huddled under the edge of the mirror. Something was happening out there—but what?

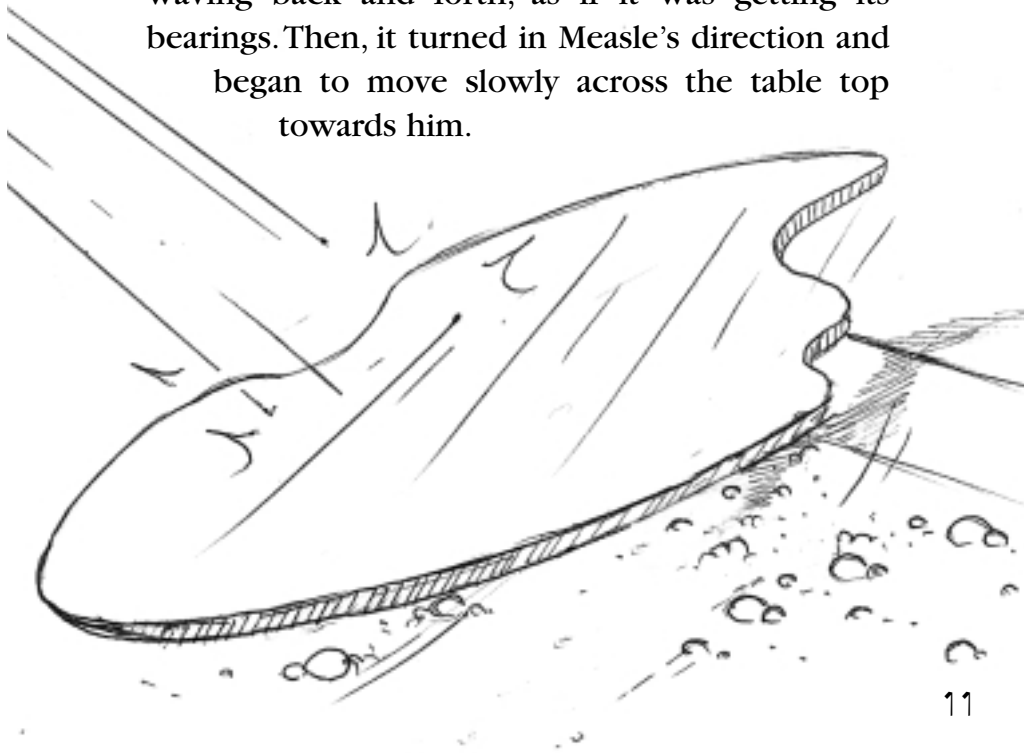
The sizzling noise stopped.

Silence—then an odd scrabbling, clicking sort of sound, coming from a long way away. Measle cautiously crawled out from beneath the mirror and looked up. Basil had gone—disappeared. It was as though he'd never been there and all was quiet—apart from the scrabbling, clicking sound in the distance.

There were too many trees between Measle and the noise. There was only one way to find out what was making it: Measle picked a nearby pine tree, with lots of strong branches at regular intervals all

the way up the trunk. He began to climb it. It was lucky he'd chosen a tall one—quite near the top, he found himself looking out over the canopy of the forest. He could see all the way to the edge of the table—and what he saw made his blood run cold.

There, far in the distance, clinging to the edge of the table with its two front legs, was a gigantic, jet black cockroach. It was at least ten centimetres long. Its antennae were waving frantically and it was trying desperately to heave the rest of its body up onto the table. As Measle watched in horror, the creature made one last effort and slowly pulled its huge body over the edge. Once it was safe, on level ground, it paused for a moment, its antennae waving back and forth, as if it was getting its bearings. Then, it turned in Measle's direction and began to move slowly across the table top towards him.



Measle shinned down the pine tree as fast as he could. When he reached the bottom, he raced back to the cabin and threw open the door.

‘Quick, everybody! We’ve got to get out of here! It’s coming!’

‘What’s coming?’ said Frank. ‘Did it work?’

Measle gasped, ‘It worked OK. It worked really well. That’s the trouble. Come on! There’s no time to lose!’

‘Where are we going now?’ said Lady Grant, not moving from her corner of the cabin.

‘We’ve got to get back to the tunnel!’ shouted Measle. ‘It’s the only safe place, now! Come *on!*’

‘But I prefer it here,’ said Lady Grant, still not moving.

‘Better do as Measle says,’ said Frank. ‘And, looking at his face, we’d better do it fast.’

There was such authority in Frank’s voice that everybody got to their feet without another word. Together, they crowded out of the cabin and, with Measle leading the way, they began to run through the forest. Frank drew level with Measle.

‘What are we running from, Measle?’ he panted.

Measle, panting as hard as Frank, told him. Frank nodded, then, turning his head to the others, he shouted, ‘As fast as we can, everybody!’

They made it with only millimetres to spare. The giant insect was delayed momentarily by the thick forest between it and the cabin, but it skirted the trees and headed fast towards the town. Measle

and the rest of them raced through the trees, burst out of the wood and made for the outskirts of the town. As the group neared the buildings, they could hear scrabbling footsteps close behind them. Nobody dared to look backwards—the sound of the creature was terrifying enough to keep them all running as fast as they could. They tore along the empty streets, with Prudence huffing and puffing in the rear. At one point, she stumbled and almost fell—but Kip put out one big hand and steadied her. Too tired to speak, Prudence nodded her thanks and they ran on, dodging round corners, their breath rasping in their throats. At last they reached the square, with the Town Hall on the far side. They dodged past a small group of plastic townspeople, then on past the statue, hearing the clicking, scrabbling noise coming closer and closer. Measle glanced back—and saw the cockroach just turning the corner. He saw the creature barge straight through the group of plastic figures, sending them flying right and left. It grabbed one of the figures in its jaws—the figure was of a boy, about Measle’s age and size—and with a crunch the great jaws slammed together. The cockroach shook the whole front section of its body, like a wet dog emerging from a bath—and the two halves of the plastic boy flew to either side of the monster, the neatly cut sections skittering and sliding across the sandpaper grass.

Measle gulped in horror. It was as if the cockroach had meant to demonstrate its power to Measle and had chosen the figure of a boy of Measle's stature to drive the point fully home. It seemed to be saying, *That's what I shall do to you—when I catch you, Measle!*

'Come on, Measle!' screamed Frank and Measle turned away from the terrible sight and raced for the Town Hall. At the great open doors, friendly hands grabbed him and pulled him into the safety of the room—then those same hands heaved the doors shut with a bang.

'What is that revolting thing?' panted Lady Grant, staring in horror through the tall window at the approaching monster.

'That's Basil,' gasped Measle. 'And he's really, *really* angry.'

'Come on, everybody,' said Frank, herding them all towards the pit in the corner of the room. 'It's not safe out here. We've got to get into the tunnel.'

They hurried down into the pit, just as the giant cockroach reached the front door of the Town Hall. They crawled into the tunnel and huddled together at the far end.

'What happened back there?' said Frank, when he'd caught his breath.

'Basil was leaning on the table,' said Measle. 'So he didn't end up on the floor like we'd hoped. When the spell got directed back at him, I think his hands turned into insect claws and he managed to

hang on to the edge of the table and then pull himself up.' He looked around at the frightened faces. 'I'm sorry—I guess we're in even worse trouble now.'

'I don't think so,' wheezed Prudence. 'I'd rather have to deal with an oversize insect than with Basil.'

'Me too,' said William. 'Apart from anything else, there's the size difference. A ten centimetre cockroach is bad—but a full-size Basil is worse. As bad as my boss.'

'At least we know that your theory was right,' Frank said, smiling at Prudence.

Prudence didn't look happy. 'I've just remembered something,' she said, quietly. 'You see, there's a second part to that theory.'

'A second part?' said Frank.

'Yes. It's generally believed that a spell that's turned back on itself loses a certain amount of power.'

'It doesn't seem to have lost anything,' said Frank. 'Basil tried to turn Measle into a cockroach, and now he's one himself. I think it worked fine. Of course, it's much bigger than we'd hoped—'

'It's not the effectiveness of the spell that's changed,' said Prudence, shaking her head. 'It's the duration. A weakened spell has a time limit. Twenty-four hours—or so it's believed—and then the thing wears off.'

'Well, OK,' said Frank, smiling. 'That gives us some time to come up with something—'

Then he stopped smiling—because, overhead, there was the sound of wood splintering, and plaster crumbling, and bricks falling—

‘What’s happening now?’ said Lady Grant. There was a trace of panic in her voice.

‘I think it just pushed its way into the Town Hall,’ said Frank.

‘Like a bulldozer,’ said William. ‘A battering ram.’

‘It can’t get at us, can it?’ said Lady Grant.

‘I don’t think so,’ said Kip. ‘Plywood is strong stuff.’

There was the sound of something scraping over the floor above their heads. Then, a shaft of light appeared at the end of the tunnel.

‘It’s pulled away my trapdoor,’ said Kip.

A shadow fell over the pit. Then a long, black, bristly, stick-like object descended into the hole. It moved backwards and forwards, its tip searching for the tunnel entrance—

‘What is *that*?’ gasped Lady Grant.

‘That’s one of its legs,’ said Frank. ‘Everybody—squeeze up tight against the wall!’

They huddled together, pressing themselves against the wall at the tunnel’s end. The tip of the leg found the tunnel entrance and began to move slowly towards them, like a huge, hairy snake—and, with it, came the smell. A rancid, bitter smell of cockroach. There was a hooked claw on the end of the leg, and it scraped against the tunnel floor as it advanced.

Kitty screamed.

‘It’s all right,’ said Prudence, putting a motherly arm round the girl’s shoulders. ‘It can’t reach us.’

Measle wished he could believe that. There didn’t seem any stopping the thing. The claw came closer and closer, weaving from side to side. Then, when it was only a centimetre from the huddled bodies, it stopped. Slowly, carefully, it explored the sides, the floor, and the ceiling of the tunnel. Then, suddenly, it retreated quickly. As the cockroach pulled its leg out of the tunnel, it scraped it hard against the corner, where the tunnel met the pit, and a shower of wood splinters fell from the roof.

‘That was too close for comfort,’ said Frank.

‘You’re right,’ said Kip. ‘We’ve got to dig some more.’

The three men attacked the wooden face of the wall with every tool they had and soon there was a growing pile of wood chips and sawdust on the floor. Measle, Prudence, and Kitty pushed it all through the nearest hole. Lady Grant did nothing to help them; she just stared with wide eyes towards the pit at the far end of the tunnel.

They dug for hours, lengthening the passage by a few centimetres.

‘That’ll do for the moment,’ said Kip, his face streaming with sweat and his hair grey from sawdust.

‘We’d better cut another hole in the floor,’ said Frank. ‘We’re going to need all the air we can get.’

Cutting down through the remaining half centimetre of plywood took another five minutes. It was Kip who broke through and he widened the hole until it was big enough.

‘Hey—look at this,’ he said, peering down at the opening he’d made.

‘What is it?’ said Frank.

‘Looks like an electric cable. But you’re the expert, Frank. You tell me.’

Kip moved aside to let Frank take a look.

‘You’re right,’ said Frank. ‘That’s one of mine. I think it’s the main power line that connects the control centre to the tracks. I reckon I can reach it.’ He lay down and pushed his arm through the hole. ‘Yup. It’s right under us.’

Kip tapped him on the shoulder. ‘You say it leads to the control box?’ he said.

‘Yup. Right up inside.’

‘And it’s made of steel? The control box?’

‘Yup. It’s a steel box, screwed down into the plywood.’

Kip thought for a moment. Then he looked sombrely round at the group. ‘I think that’s where we ought to be,’ he said. ‘Inside a steel box. Nothing—not the bat or the roach—can get at us there.’

‘All this running about. Surely we’re safe enough here?’ said Lady Grant, not taking her eyes off the far end of the tunnel.

As she spoke, the black leg appeared again in the pit. This time, it made no effort to approach them. Instead, it manoeuvred its hooked claw to the angle where the tunnel and the pit met. The claw dug deep into the tunnel ceiling and then pulled hard. It strained for a moment—and then there was a splintering sound as a section of the tunnel ceiling was ripped away. The claw withdrew, dragging the ragged piece of plywood with it. A moment later, it reappeared. Once again, the claw dug into the roof of the tunnel, strained, and then yanked another section away.

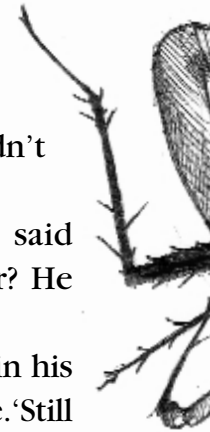
‘It’s trying to dig us out,’ said Frank. ‘I didn’t know roaches were so clever.’

‘That’s no ordinary cockroach, Frank,’ said Prudence. ‘Basil’s brain is in there, remember? He may be mad, but he can still think.’

Kip took Lady Grant’s small, smooth hands in his huge, rough, black ones and stared into her face. ‘Still believe we’re safe enough here?’ he said, quietly.

‘No, Mr Lovell,’ whispered Lady Grant. ‘No, I don’t.’

They dug downwards, enlarging the hole at their feet and trying to ignore the sounds of splintering wood behind them. The cable was directly beneath them, perhaps two centimetres below the level of the bottom of the hole. When the hole was big enough, Frank said, ‘I installed it—I guess I get the right to go first?’



There was no argument. Frank lowered himself into the hole, until only his head and shoulders were showing. 'Got it,' he said. 'I'm touching it with my toes. If you men could grab my hands and lower me down a little further—'

Kip and William took hold of Frank's arms and slowly let him down further into the hole.

'OK—I'm standing on it now,' said Frank. 'You can let me go. I'm going to drop down on my hands and knees.'

Kip and William let go of Frank's hands and Frank disappeared from view. 'It's good,' he called. 'Let me have the kids next.'

William and Kip lifted Measle into the hole and slowly lowered him. Measle felt his ankles grabbed from below and then Frank's reassuring voice. 'I got you—you're almost there—just a little bit further.'

Measle's toes touched down on a solid surface and, a moment later, he was lying face down on a curved section of black rubber. Frank was kneeling beside him. He said, 'Whatever you do, Measle, just don't look down. You're safe if you don't look down.'

Measle looked down. He couldn't help it—his curiosity overcame his fear and he turned his head and looked over the edge of the cable. Then he brought his head back quickly and closed his eyes. The floor was so far away and his position on the rounded top of the cable seemed so precarious

that he felt suddenly dizzy. He dug his fingers into the hard black rubber surface and pressed his body as flat as it would go.

‘Crawl along a little way, Measle,’ said Frank. ‘We’ve got to make room for the others.’

Slowly, Measle inched himself forward along the cable. He knew, logically, that if he was careful, there was little danger of his falling. The cable was thick and strong and as wide as a double bed—but the fact that it curved away downwards on



either side of him was very disturbing and he was careful to stay in the exact centre of the cable—and equally careful to hold on very tight.

It took some doing—and a lot of terrified squealing from Lady Grant—but eventually everybody was lying prone along the cable. Prudence stuffed Tinker into the front of her old anorak and did up the zip, so that only his head

was protruding. Kip was the last to lower himself down the hole and join them. He brought with him both tool kits and his chainsaw, all hanging from his broad leather belt. 'Stupid to leave them behind,' he said. 'We might need them again. OK, Frank, lead the way.'

Frank looked back over his shoulder. 'Everybody take hold of the person's ankle in front of you and go really slowly.'

They inched along the wire that stretched over the dizzying drop. Behind them, the sound of splintering wood grew fainter as they put distance between it and themselves. The underside of the table was close above their heads and, as they moved forward, it gradually got closer and closer —until Measle could feel the smooth plywood scraping on his back. In front of him, Frank stopped.

'Hold it,' he said. 'There's a staple up ahead. I remember putting it in to stop the cable from dangling. We've got to get round it somehow.'

Measle lifted his head and peered over Frank's body. Just in front of Frank, the cable was fixed tight to the underside of the table with a steel staple. There seemed to be no way of getting past it. Frank crawled forward, his head bumping on the ceiling. Measle watched as Frank reached forward and grabbed the side of the staple. Then he did a very brave thing: he let his body slide to one side, so that he was hanging by his hands, his chest and

thighs dangling against the curved side of the cable.

‘Oh—do be careful, Mr Hunter,’ called Prudence, from somewhere behind Measle.

Frank grunted. Then he began to swing his body from side to side. Each swing was wider than the last until, with one huge effort, he managed to pivot his legs past the staple and back up onto the cable on the far side. Still holding tight to the steel bar, he pulled the rest of his body up until he was once again lying flat on the curved rubber surface.

‘OK—here’s what we’re going to do,’ he called. ‘I’m going to help each one of you past this thing. You’ve just got to trust me—I won’t let go. Kip—if you could come up to the front and help me with the heavier ones? Measle—you first. Grab my hand.’

The dizzy feeling swept over Measle again and, for a moment, he couldn’t move. ‘Come on, Measle,’ said Frank, quietly. ‘Any kid who can do what you did out there by the lake can do this. Give me your hand.’

Measle took a deep, shuddering breath and reached out his hand. He felt the cold metal of the staple—and then Frank’s strong grip on his wrist. ‘Good boy,’ said Frank. ‘Now, just let yourself slide sideways. Don’t worry—I’ve got you.’

Measle swallowed hard, took another deep breath, closed his eyes and then shuffled his body to the right. He felt himself slipping over the edge

—but Frank’s grip on his wrist was like a bracelet of iron and, even as he started to slide down the curved surface of the cable, he felt himself being pulled upwards. He kept his eyes tight shut, until he was sure he was back on solid rubber—then, cautiously, he opened them. Frank was grinning at him.

‘There—that wasn’t so bad, was it?’

Kitty came next. Measle noticed that she seemed to have little fear and never closed her eyes for a second. She even smiled when she was dangling from Frank’s hands and seemed almost to enjoy the whole experience which Measle had found so frightening.

‘Weren’t you scared?’ he whispered, when she crawled next to him.

Kitty pointed to a badge on her uniform. ‘It’s a climbing badge,’ she said. ‘I’ve always been good at climbing.’

One by one they all made it past the staple. Lady Grant screamed several times and Prudence (who was carrying the added weight of Tinker) had to be swung past the obstacle by both Frank and Kip, both men holding tight to her wrists—but neither she nor Tinker made any fuss at all and soon she was sitting safely on the other side of the staple, patting her grey hair back into place.

Kip was the last to come over and he needed no help—even with the heavy tool kits dangling from his belt. He imitated Frank and swung himself past

the obstacle, using his great strength to haul himself up to safety.

Ahead of them, the cable looped down at a shallow angle and then looped up again, disappearing in the distance through a neat, circular hole cut in the plywood ceiling. The party dragged themselves forward, each person clutching the ankle of the one in front of them. It took them a long time and, when they at last reached the opening, they were all tired. On the final stretch, the upwards slope of the cable meant that they had to pull themselves hand over hand, hauling themselves up the long black rubber hill until their arms ached with the effort. Prudence was the most exhausted of all of them and Kip, bringing up the rear, had to push against her feet to help her up the incline.

At last, they made it. One by one, they crawled up through the round hole and, once safely inside, they dropped off the cable and stood thankfully on solid ground.

The inside of the control box was a strange place. It was dark, apart from a few narrow beams of light that streamed through a wide mesh grille on one wall. Everywhere there were wires—in different colours—running to connections over their heads. There was the smell of oil and a faint scent of ozone in the still air. Kip knocked on one wall. ‘Solid steel,’ he said. ‘Nothing can get in here.’

Lady Grant sat dejectedly in a corner, her head

in her hands. 'But we can't stay in here for ever,' she moaned. 'We'll starve to death.'

'We have to get rid of the roach,' said Frank. 'We have to get it off the table somehow.'

'Wait a minute,' said William. 'Won't the bat do that for us? Tonight, when it's out hunting? I bet that cockroach would make a great catch for it.'

Frank had been peering out through the steel grille. He said, 'Come and take a look—we've got a grandstand view from here.'

They all clustered round the grille. Through the narrow bars, they could see, in the distance, the roof of the Town Hall and the tops of the trees in the square.

'If anything happens tonight,' said Frank, 'between the bat and the roach, I mean, we'll see it. I'll take the first watch.'