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opening extract from

Ellie and the Cat

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Chapter One

I DON'T WANT TO!

Ellie glared out of the car window at her granma's house. It was horrible. It was big and spooky and Ellie didn't want to stay there – no she didn't!

"I don't want to stay with Granma. I DON'T WANT TO!" Ellie shouted.

"But Ellie, it's only for a few weeks. You know I would take you with me if I could, but I can't," Ellie's dad pleaded.

"But why do you have to go away again," Ellie asked unhappily.

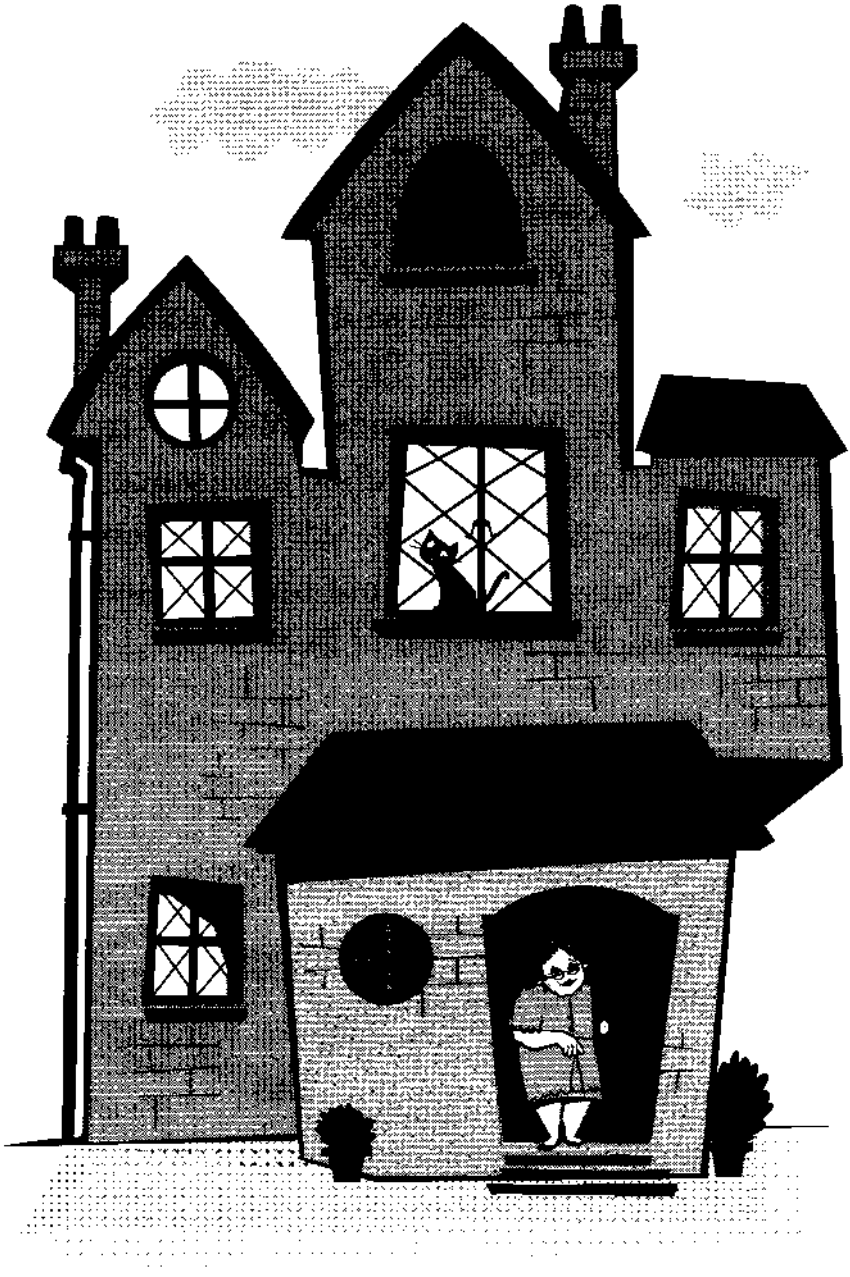
"Sweetie, it's my job. But I'll be back soon. I'll be back before you know it," Dad smiled.

Ellie shook her head. That's what Dad always said.

"What seems to be the problem?"

Ellie lifted her head at the sound of Granma's voice. She didn't like Granma. Granma had black hair streaked with silver-white strands and wore a peach-coloured dress that was all ruffles and bows. She had old-fashioned half-moon spectacles perched low down on her nose but she looked over them rather than through them with her round, piercing brown eyes.

"I won't stay with her, I won't," Ellie shouted. "She's dumpy and frumpy."



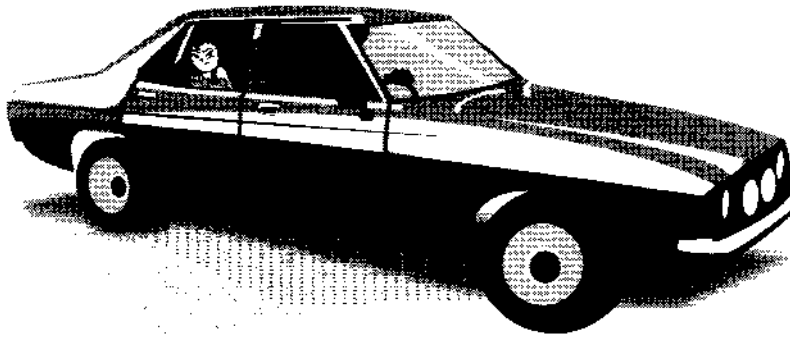
"Ellie! That is no way to talk about your granma," Dad said sternly.

"Ellie dear, you're just in time for all your favourites," Granma smiled.

"You don't know what my favourites are," Ellie said suspiciously.

"Yes, I do. You like sausages and chips and baked beans followed by vanilla ice-cream and chocolate sauce."

Ellie thought hard. "All right then. I'll get out of the car...but only because I'm hungry," she said at last.



"Wave goodbye to your father," Granma said.

"I won't," Ellie said. "He won't take me with him."

Ellie walked towards the house and didn't look back at her dad once. Granma watched Ellie and frowned.

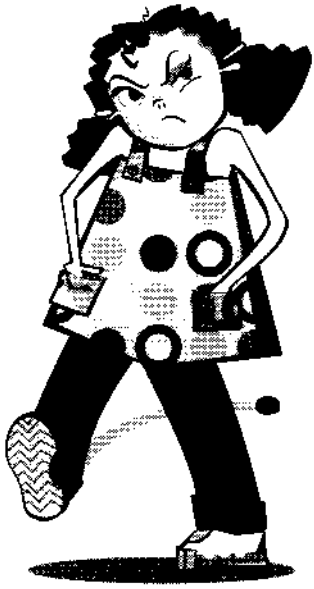
Ellie felt alone and miserable, utterly miserable. Her dad was the International Development Manager for a large company that made computers and he was always jetting off here, there and everywhere. Occasionally – very occasionally – he took Ellie with him, but more often he didn't. Dad never seemed to spend longer than a few months in any one place.

As a result Ellie had lived in more houses and been to more schools than any eight people put together. And because she had been to so many

schools, Ellie didn't have any close friends. She hadn't been in one school long enough to make any. Ellie felt like an unwanted parcel, being shunted back and forth between teachers and boring aunts and even some of Dad's friends, none of whom really wanted her.

"It's not fair." Ellie kicked a stone as she walked towards Granma's house.

Now her dad had dumped her on her granma who didn't want her any more than anyone else did.



There'd be no one to play with, nothing to see, nothing to do. And Ellie would have to put up with tons and tons of nothing for a whole month until she started yet another school in September.

"I hate school, I hate his house, I hate EVERYTHING," Ellie said, so fiercely that her eyes narrowed into thin slits and her lips turned down in a severe pout.

"I wish...I wish I could find someone who wanted to be friends with me, just me," Ellie whispered.

"Come along, Ellie," Granma said, appearing from nowhere. "I've just got time to show you around my home – you've never stayed here for longer than lunch before, have you?"

And so Granma and Ellie wandered all around the huge house before dinner. Ellie sulked in the basement, tutted in the living room, pouted in the bedrooms and sighed in the attic.

She was missing her dad already, and feeling very sorry that she hadn't given him a kiss and said a proper goodbye, the way she usually did.

"I don't want to do this any more," Ellie said sadly. "Can I have my dinner please?"

"Very well then," Granma said and off they went to the dining room.

But Ellie missed Granma's frown as Granma followed her up the stairs.

