

THE HAVEN

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HODDER CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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PROLOGUE

Maddy Sikes picked up the telephone, confident it was the call she'd been expecting. 'Is it done?'

'It's done,' replied the voice.

'The woman?'

'The woman. The kid, too.'

'The kid?'

'She wasn't alone. There was a kid there as well. But relax. It's been taken care of.'

Sikes pressed her fingertips to the bridge of her nose. 'You killed a kid. I never told you to kill a kid.'

'I didn't say I killed the kid. What I said was, the kid's been taken care of.'

'Wait,' said Sikes. 'You *didn't* kill the kid? You left him, her, whoever – you left it alive? What the hell am I paying you for?'

'Him. I left him alive. But relax, would you? I told you it's sorted and it is. You're safe, I promise you. Your precious shipment, too. This thing – the cops, the investigation, even the kid. Believe me when I tell you: it's over.'

1 NIGHT TERRORS

Ollie Turner was asleep when the men came.

They were dressed in black and wearing balaclavas. Before Ollie knew what was happening, they pulled him from his bed and dragged him across the carpet towards the landing.

‘Hey!’

Ollie caught a glimpse of a shorter man watching from the stairs. Ollie couldn’t see his face, but from the way the man was standing – arms crossed, feet apart – Ollie could tell he was in charge.

Ollie wriggled, but it did no good. He called for Nancy, his guardian, and one of the men clamped a hand around his mouth. In the distance he heard a muffled cry, and Ollie could tell the men had got Nancy, too. She was already being bundled towards the door of their flat. Ollie was an afterthought, it seemed. A loose end. Nancy was the one the men had come for.

They must have been good to catch Nancy unawares. Ollie’s guardian was a policewoman, and an expert at everything she did. But somehow these men had taken her captive. What did they want from her?

At the top of the staircase one of the men picked Ollie up, throwing him across his shoulder the way Ollie remembered his father doing when Ollie was young. Ollie tried to yell for help, but it was all he could do through the gag just to breathe. At some point they'd managed to bind his hands behind his back, and the man held his legs to stop him from kicking.

There was a van waiting for them on the street outside, parked at an angle over the kerb. The rear doors were open, like a gaping mouth, and the man got ready to throw Ollie inside. Ollie caught a glimpse of Nancy already sprawled in the back of the vehicle. She was bound like him, around her ankles as well as her hands, and didn't appear to be moving.

'Nancy,' Ollie tried to say, but when the man threw him into the van beside her, Ollie's head hit the metal floor and the world, abruptly, went black.

When Ollie awoke, the ground beneath him was cold and hard, and his hands remained bound behind his back. He wasn't in the van any more, but in a room he didn't recognise. No windows, bare walls and a dusty grey concrete floor.

Nancy was lying just beside him. She was facing away, and she wasn't moving.

'Nancy!' Ollie hissed, desperately.

Nancy had brought Ollie up since he was seven years old, since the day his real parents had been killed in a terrorist attack.

Six years on, Nancy was the person Ollie cared for most in the entire world, and the only person, he would have said, who truly cared for him.

When Nancy didn't respond, Ollie clumsily shuffled upright. He managed to get his feet from under him, and wriggled until he was sitting.

'Nancy!' Ollie said again. He kept his voice low, wary of letting his captors know he'd woken up. They wouldn't be far away, Ollie was certain, and even the slightest noise might bring them back.

He tried nudging his guardian with his knees, and spoke again into her ear.

'Nancy! Wake up. Please, Nancy. You have to wake up!'

Nothing. Nancy didn't even moan.

Ollie was crying, he realised. 'Please, Nancy,' he repeated, not caring now about how loudly he spoke. He didn't even care about the men any more, he just wanted Nancy to show him that she was all right.

'Nancy. Nancy!'

This time, finally, Nancy responded. She let out a whimper, and attempted to roll on to her back. When Ollie said her name again, she came around far more quickly than Ollie had.

'Ollie? Is that . . . is that you? Where are we? Are you OK? Are you hurt?'

'No, I . . .' Even as he spoke Ollie winced at a stabbing pain in his head. He must have hit it hard when he'd been thrown

into the van. ‘Nancy, you need to sit up,’ he said. ‘We need to get out of here. Those men, they’ll—’

As if on cue, Ollie heard voices from outside the room. There were two doors, he saw, one ahead of him and another behind, with neither offering a clue to where they led.

Nancy had heard the voices, too. She rolled herself upright, with far more agility than Ollie had shown. ‘Turn around, Ollie. Put your back to mine.’

Ollie didn’t pause to ask questions. He did as Nancy had instructed and immediately he could feel her fingers picking at the knot that was trapping his wrists. She was working blind, but in seconds Ollie found his hands free.

‘Now untie me,’ Nancy said. ‘Work fast, Ollie,’ she added, as once again they heard voices outside the door.

Ollie looked at the rope around Nancy’s wrists and couldn’t believe she had untied him so quickly. The knot in front of him was an inscrutable riddle of cord.

‘Hurry, Ollie. They’re coming.’

Ollie picked at the rope with his fingernails, but he couldn’t work the slightest gap.

‘I can’t, Nancy! The knot, it’s too tight!’

Nancy spun to face him. ‘Try the rope around my feet.’

Ollie did, but if anything the knot here was tighter still. He scrabbled with his fingers, felt one of his fingernails break. It was no good. He started looking around for something sharp he

might use to cut the rope. The room was empty, the floor bare, but even a piece of glass might do, or a bit of metal, or—

‘Ollie? Ollie. Look at me, Ollie.’

Ollie stopped moving. In the silence they heard voices right outside.

‘Run. Do you hear me, Ollie? You need to run.’

‘But—’

‘Run, Ollie! Now. Go!’

Ollie shook his head. He felt tears jostle free as he did so. ‘I won’t leave you. I won’t!’

His vision blurred and he wiped his eyes. Nancy was smiling.

‘I love you, Ollie Turner. With all my heart. And if you love me you’ll do as I ask. Run, Ollie. *Please.*’

The door ahead of them cracked open. The men were here, now. Ollie had time to let out one final sob, and then he ran.

He wasn’t three steps through the door opposite when he heard the shots.

Every instinct told Ollie to stop, to turn around, to go back. *Nancy. Oh, Nancy.* But it was his guardian’s voice, in his head, that kept him running. *Go!* she’d said. *Please.*

He wouldn’t let her down. He couldn’t.

After the shots he heard a shout behind him, and then the rapid pound of boot steps. Ollie reckoned he had a twenty-metre head start at best.

As he ran Ollie tried to take in his surroundings, to get a clue about where he should be heading. The corridor he found himself in was one long, anonymous passageway. His best guess was that he was in the office part of a factory of some kind. Something industrial, anyway, where nobody cared much what the building looked like.

He rounded a corner, and heard more men approaching from up ahead. There was a door in the corridor with a key in the lock, and Ollie realised it was his only option.

He unlocked the door and peeked inside. The door opened on to the top of a wooden staircase. There was no light on, and no sight or sound of anyone within, just the steps shearing off into the darkness below.

Ollie swallowed. Even at thirteen years old, he was afraid of the dark – but he was afraid of men with guns, on balance, slightly more. He stepped across the threshold and, before the men could have seen him, closed the door and turned the key.

He exhaled. The air felt thick, unbreathed, and there was a smell like the week-old contents of his gym bag.

All at once the door started shaking. Someone on the other side was trying the handle.

Ollie backed away from the door and his left foot slipped into a void. He looked down and realised he'd reached the edge of the platform at the top of the staircase.

He flailed and felt his fingertips scrape brickwork. His other hand hooked around a wooden stair pole and somehow he managed to haul himself upright. His heart thumping, he looked below him to try to see where he would have fallen – and almost slipped again when, in the darkness, he saw another pair of eyes staring up. Gollum eyes, Ollie found himself thinking, picturing the character from *The Lord of the Rings*. And not the funny Gollum either. The mean one. The one with the teeth.

Ollie yelled. He scrabbled away from the top of the staircase, pressing his back against the door. It clattered in its frame as the eyes below him vanished.

He clamped a hand across his mouth, but too late. Voices filtered through from the corridor outside.

‘In here. I thought I heard something.’

‘Well, open it up then!’

‘I can’t find the key. It should be in the lock.’

The key. Ollie unclenched his right hand from around his mouth and realised it was empty. He must have dropped the key when he’d lost his balance. How on earth was he supposed to get out now?

A crash against the door behind him was his answer. Ollie didn’t need to worry about breaking out. Whoever was out there was intent on breaking in.

‘Oof.’

‘Harder. Put your shoulder into it.’

This time the door trembled so much Ollie was sure it was about to give way.

The door reverberated with the force of another blow and this time the frame split all the way to the floor. One more thrust, Ollie reckoned, and they would be through.

Ollie crouched, preparing to throw himself at the men . . . but the final thrust never came.

Instead he heard, ‘What was that?’

Silence, followed by a noise somewhere in the distance.

Then, ‘Over there. Quick!’

The men outside thundered off. Ollie let out the breath he didn’t know he’d been holding. He was safe, he realised. For the time being at least. That was what he thought, until the door burst open. Ollie flinched and staggered away. When he turned back he saw a man grinning in the doorway, gleefully staring down at what he’d caught.

2 INTO DARKNESS

Ollie didn't want to fight, but he would if he had to.

The thought of what these men had done to Nancy only fed his anger. But when he set himself to drive forwards, to punch his shoulder into the man's solar plexus, he realised it wasn't a man at all. The owner of the grin was a boy, like him. Older, yes, by maybe two or three years, but a boy nonetheless. He had fair hair, kind eyes and a scar that ran from his left ear almost to his chin.

'Sorry,' the boy said. 'Didn't have time to warn you to stand back. You OK? Good. Then let's go. *Now*.'

The boy spun away. Ollie, open mouthed, was left staring at his retreating back.

When he noticed Ollie wasn't following, the boy turned around.

'I said, let's *go*. They'll be coming back, you know. Those men? It won't take them long to realise the noise they heard was only a distraction.' When Ollie didn't react, the boy extended his hand. 'I'm Dodge, by the way,' he said.

Ollie, automatically, reached out with his own. 'I'm . . . Ollie. I—'

But Ollie didn't have time to finish his sentence. Dodge gripped Ollie's hand and wrenched him through the doorway into the corridor.

'Who are you?' Ollie panted as they ran. 'Where did you come from?'

Dodge glanced at him sideways. 'No time to explain,' he puffed.

They reached a corner and Dodge slowed and spread a hand across Ollie's chest. The older boy peeked around the bend. 'Clear,' he said. 'Let's go.'

They seemed to be heading back the way Ollie had come, but Dodge took them down a turn-off Ollie hadn't realised he'd passed.

'Wait.' Once again Dodge pressed Ollie back. There was a junction ahead, and a man with a gun ran right across their path. He didn't see them. He was too busy listening to the voices crackling on his radio receiver.

'All clear,' said Dodge, and he tried to pull Ollie along.

This time Ollie resisted.

'We have to go back,' he said.

Dodge stumbled to a standstill ahead of him. 'What? What are you talking about?'

'Nancy . . . We have to go back. We have to make sure she's . . . to see if she's . . .'

Dodge checked quickly behind him. When he was sure

there was nobody coming, he drew closer and placed a hand on Ollie's shoulder.

'That woman,' he said. 'She was something to do with you?'

Ollie could feel the tears prickle his eyes. He nodded.

Dodge winced. 'Was she . . . your mum?'

'Not my mum,' Ollie managed to say. 'My friend.'

For half a moment Dodge closed his eyes. He sighed.

'She was a policewoman,' Ollie said. 'I think that's why she . . . why they . . .'

He shook his head to clear it.

'I have to go back,' Ollie insisted. 'I'm not leaving her. I *won't*.'

'Ollie, listen to me.' Dodge stooped slightly so that he and Ollie were roughly the same height. 'There's nothing we can do for her. Not now.'

'But if there's a chance . . .'

'There's no chance, Ollie. Do you hear me? There's no chance. I'm sorry.'

Ollie wriggled himself free of Dodge's grip. He could feel himself shaking his head, trying to deny what the older boy was telling him.

She couldn't be dead. She just *couldn't* be.

'I was in the air-conditioning duct,' Dodge said. 'I saw everything. We've been keeping tabs on what's going on here,' he added, when he noticed Ollie's confusion. 'Look, it's

complicated. I'll explain it all to you later. For the moment we need to concentrate on getting out of here. Agreed?'

Ollie hesitated . . . but then he nodded.

They took the next corner, and the next. They passed from the labyrinth of corridors on to what Ollie guessed was the factory floor, and here there were plenty of places for them to hide. There were people shifting crates and manoeuvring forklifts. They were unarmed as far as Ollie could tell, and focused on what they were doing. No one seemed particularly on the lookout – for escaped prisoners or anything else.

Dodge led them at a crouch between the stacks of pallets. As before he seemed to know where he was going. There was a fire door in the far corner and Ollie guessed they were making for that.

'What's in these boxes?' Ollie whispered as they moved.

Dodge frowned, as though he'd been wondering the same thing himself. 'To be honest I'm not sure. They're not her usual type of shipment.'

'Whose usual type of shipment?'

'Maddy Sikes. She owns this place.'

Who's Maddy Sikes? Ollie was about to ask, but it was then that he spotted one of the guards. The workers hadn't been on the lookout because other people were, he realised. And now he'd spotted one, he saw several: people who weren't involved with any of the labour, but instead were standing around the

central perimeter, facing out with weapons at the ready. Whatever was in these boxes, it was obviously precious.

They waited until the closest guard turned his back, then dashed to the next point of cover.

‘Who *are* these people?’ Ollie said. ‘You said you were watching them. Why? And what did they want with me? What did they want with Nancy?’

‘Your friend was a cop, right?’ Dodge answered.

‘Right,’ Ollie said, trying not to think about the tense Dodge had used. *Was a cop. Not is.*

‘What was she? On a task force or something?’

‘I . . .’ Ollie wasn’t sure. All he knew was that Nancy had been a detective of some kind.

Dodge didn’t appear to notice that Ollie hadn’t answered his question. As they trotted onwards he pulled out a phone. An old iPhone, Ollie thought, but it seemed to have been modified in some way, so that from the Lightning connector there was an antenna attached.

Dodge thumbed a message and tucked the phone back into his pocket.

‘Help’s on the way,’ he said. ‘Now we just need to get outside.’

Keeping low they moved towards the fire door, only pausing as they crossed between the rows of pallets to check for guards.

‘Right ahead. Almost there, Ollie. We just need to hope that the fire door isn’t . . .’

They reached the fire exit and Dodge, without hesitating, shoved down on the metal bar. As soon as the door broke contact with the frame, the air was filled with a piercing electronic scream.

‘Alarmed,’ Dodge finished, swallowing.

Ollie turned and saw a guard spot them and raise his gun.

‘Hey! Stop!’

‘Go!’

Dodge shoved Ollie through the doorway before the guard could fire. They bundled outside, and Ollie had barely a moment to register it was daybreak. In his mind it had still been dark outside. Instead, the sun was edging above the horizon, bringing with it a warm, candyfloss glow.

They dashed across the factory yard, dodging another forklift truck as they ran. There was no one behind them, not yet, but as far as Ollie could see they were no better off out here than they had been inside. The factory was on the bank of the Thames, but all around the yard there was a fence at least triple Ollie’s height, barricading their access to the river. Topping the fence was a roll of barbed wire.

‘What now?’ he yelled in panic.

Dodge led Ollie around a corner and pointed to a solid brick wall. ‘This way.’

‘But . . . we’ll be trapped!’

Dodge gave Ollie a look then, though Ollie couldn’t tell whether it was a grimace or a grin.

They slid between a parked lorry and the wall, and pressed their backs against the brickwork.

Ollie peeked out from behind the lorry’s tyre. ‘What now?’ he repeated, looking out across the yard. There were men some distance away, searching blindly, but heading steadily in their direction. ‘We can’t just sit and wait for them to—’

Ollie turned around and realised Dodge had vanished.

‘Dodge?’ he hissed urgently. ‘*Dodge*. Where are you?’

He felt panic building from his stomach and for a moment he thought he would be sick. But then a hand closed around his ankle and Ollie, jerking, looked down.

Dodge was peering up at him from a hole in the ground. Beside him, slid to one side, was a manhole cover.

‘Are you coming?’ Dodge said. ‘Or did you want to stay and play with your new friends?’

Ollie tried to peer past Dodge into the darkness below. He couldn’t see much, but he could smell plenty.

‘What’s that stench?’ he said, wrinkling his nose. ‘Is that a sewer?’

‘It is indeed,’ said Dodge. ‘And that stench, my friend, is the smell of freedom.’ He inhaled deeply and gave Ollie a grin. ‘Now, are you coming or not?’

Ollie looked again at the manhole, and saw Dodge had already disappeared down the ladder inside. Taking a deep breath, and with one last glance at the early morning sky, Ollie followed him into the darkness.