

THE GHOSTS IN THE CLOCK WALK AGAIN

CHAPTER ONE

A WAILING STORY

You may remember John, whose Dad bought a grandfather clock which John discovered was haunted by six ghosts. If you remember that, then you will also remember that John discovered that the ghosts were friendly and that he could enter the clock and share their adventures in the pictures that were painted on the clock face.

It was Spring and it had been a while since John had visited the ghosts. There was so much to do in the Spring holidays; he worked in the garden with his Dad and they went to see his batty aunt Doris, who could never remember his name, and uncle Fred who always gave him a pound coin that was polished up until it shone and which he said was from a pirate hoard. John liked Uncle Fred and his stories, and batty aunt Doris too, because she always gave him lots of fudge. And of course John saw a lot of his Grandad. He was so tired when he went to bed that visiting the clock was out of the question - he just went off to sleep and slept as soundly as a log. However, after several fine days the weather broke and it began to rain. John's Grandad had said he would take John out to the park that day and John was disappointed to see it raining. He went round to his Grandad's house anyway because he always liked to see him. His Grandad was sorry that he couldn't take John out but he said that John could have a look through his books and he promised him a really good tea with ice cream and cake.

So John spent the afternoon playing games like ludo and snakes and ladders with his Grandad and then while Grandad went off to make the tea, John looked through the bookshelves. He loved looking through his Grandad's books. There was so much there - old picture books, children's books that had belonged to his Dad when he was young - and even ones that had belonged to his Grandad when *he* was young, wonderful old magazines, old leather bound books that were very difficult to read but had the most beautiful coloured marbled papers just inside them that John loved looking at, tracing the intricate patterns and becoming lost in the swirling colours.

One of these books caught his eye on the bottom of a dusty shelf; it was a rather thin book, very old and falling to pieces, the green leather covers coming away and the marbled paper inside tattered at the edges - but it was the pictures that really impressed John when he opened the book up. There were some beautiful coloured engravings of a house, or rather several houses that all resembled each other in some way except for the very first. The lettering in the

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book was in a heavy, black type and it was difficult to read but John loved the pictures. His Grandad called him for tea and John showed him the book.

“Oh yes!” he said. “I forgot I had that. I picked it up a few years ago from an old place that sold all sorts of things. I was going to show it to the local paper and forgot. It’s all about an old house that used to stand just outside the town in a big overgrown park. I remember it when I was a lad - a bunch of us used to play in the park and get in trouble because we shouldn’t have been there. The house was falling down then and it was all boarded up. I heard that the family had died out and there was no-one who wanted to take it on. It was pulled down a few years ago and there is a horrible office block on the site now.”

That struck a bell in John’s memory - one of the ghosts had mentioned that the house that they had haunted had been pulled down and they had decided to live in the clock rather than in the new office block that had been built on the site of their house. Was this the old house that the ghosts had once lived in? He asked his Grandad if he could borrow the book. His Grandad agreed but asked him to look after it carefully; he was pleased to see that John loved books. He helped him to read some of the difficult lettering that described each picture and John found that with a bit of effort he could make some of the words out.

After a big tea with more ice cream and cake than even John could manage, John went home with the book carefully wrapped up in a plastic bag. That night he lay in bed looking through the pictures and decided he would show it to the ghosts. He waited until his parents had gone to bed and the house was quiet and then crept downstairs, the book in his dressing-gown pocket. He stood in the dark hallway, listening carefully for any sound - all he could hear was the steady tick-tock of the clock. And then he heard another sound, very faint, like a high pitched pipe or whistle in the far distance, playing a lively little tune. As he drew closer to the clock the sound became clearer. He opened the door and found that the clock was already filled with the familiar gentle yellow glow and sat on the pendulum, playing the pipe, was Abbot Baldwin, once known in his haunting days as the Mad Black Abbot. He stopped playing and grinned at John, his eyes twinkling.

“Coming in?” he asked and John found himself shrinking again. He put out his hands and grabbed the ledge just in time and the Abbot jumped down and reached out to help John up and on to the ledge.

“You know, I’m never sure that this is going to work,” said John, looking down rather gingerly into the great space of the clock case below him.

“It can be unnerving if you aren’t used to it,” nodded the Abbot. “I remember what it was like when I first stepped into thin air after I became a ghost. Very worrying. Everyone is down in the bottom of the clock,” he went on. “Should we join them?”

John nodded and they stepped out into space, John taking a deep breath first and holding on tight to the Abbot’s hand. He found himself floating gently

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and breathed more easily. It had been some time since he had floated and he began to enjoy it.

“I’ve bought a book to show you,” said John, taking it out of his dressing- gown pocket.

As he did, a piece of the coloured marbled paper that was loose in the book fell out. It fluttered around inside the clock.

“That’s pretty,” said Abbot Baldwin. He frowned and went on, “Hello, what’s happening?”

For the piece of paper was growing - or else John and the Abbot were shrinking. They found themselves falling towards the paper, now huge in size, the colours swirling and changing before their eyes. They fell into the colours and found themselves in a strange world which to John felt like being in the middle of a firework explosion, one of those multi-coloured ones that bursts in the air and then more bits of it burst as they spread out. There was no deafening explosion though, only strange quiet sounds, like gloops, gurgles and pops, and everything moved very slowly. John saw colours all round him, merging and exploding, and realised that he was sat on a great yellow spiral and was sliding slowly down it towards a blue round splodge below. In slow motion he landed in the splodge as if it was water, the blue splashing up in slow motion, but it wasn’t wet. John found himself sitting chest high in blue. There was a cry from above him and he looked up to see the Abbot riding on top of a purple and yellow fountain. He waved to John who waved back and then the fountain subsided and the Abbot fell slowly down and into a red pool that opened up and swallowed him. A bit alarmed, John shouted “Hang on! I’m coming!” and dived in.

Again it was a bit like hitting water in slow motion and John found himself falling through and coming out the other side, right way up, to join the Abbot who was lying on what seemed to be a big yellow cushion.

“Quite interesting,” said the Abbot, looking at the colours slowly exploding all round them, “However, I think we should try and get out of here if we can. Any suggestions?”

The yellow cushion heaved beneath them, billowed and blew up to a huge size with John and the Abbot clinging to the top. Then it burst and a fountain of colours rose high in the air with John and the Abbot riding on top like ping-pong balls on a water fountain in a fairground.

“This is fun,” said John. “But I think you’re right, we should try and get out, but how?”

“Look!” said the Abbot, pointing.

Ahead of them was a hole in the colours, where gentle yellow light was shining through, and they could see the pendulum of the clock swinging to and fro.

“Head for the hole!” shouted the Abbot.

He and John jumped off the fountain and floated towards the hole. It began to close but not quickly enough., and John and the Abbot found

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themselves sitting on the pendulum. The piece of marbled paper was now the right size and as it floated past, John grabbed it and quickly put it into the book.

“Best place for it!” said the Abbot. “I enjoyed that but I did get worried we might become trapped. Come on, let’s join the others.”

They drifted down, landing beside the big table which was all set out with a huge dinner. The bottom of the clock was just like a big dining room in some great house; the walls were panelled and there were pictures hanging on them, all of landscapes with trees and fine houses. There was a great carved fireplace, with a fire burning in it, and sat round the table on elegant carved chairs were all the other ghosts. They all greeted John warmly.

“Welcome back,” said old Jellicoe the clockmaker, rising and shaking John by the hand. He clapped his hands and another chair appeared, the table seeming to grow a little longer to make way for it.

“Very nice to see you again,” said Lady Matilda, once known as the Screaming Lady in her haunting heyday. “Like some ginger beer?”

John nodded and a glass of sparkling liquid appeared before him. The smell of ginger beer filled the room. He looked round at the cosy room and his old friends the ghosts, pleased to be back. There was the famous and dreadful Headless Knight, Sir Percy, who smiled and bowed while holding his hand on his head so that it didn’t fall off into the soup, and Bunsen, the very tall Wondering Butler who waved at John while Leticia, the famous Wailing Woman in White, blew him a kiss.

“Thank you,” he said. “It’s very nice to be back. I’ve bought a book to show you all. I think it might be about the house you all lived in once.”

“Be careful,” warned Abbot Baldwin, and he explained about their adventure in the piece of marbled paper.

John very carefully took the book out of his dressing-gown pocket and made sure the loose piece of paper was secure in the front. The other ghosts bent over the table to have a look. Jellicoe studied the pictures closely.

“Good steel engravings, hand coloured,” he said. “Lovely job, too. It’s our house all right. Shows you what it looked like at different times in its history.”

It was difficult for them all to see the book so the Abbot clapped his hands and it grew in size so it was easier for them to see the pictures.

“That’s the abbey I knew” said Abbot Baldwin as he turned over a page and pointed to a picture that showed a fine church with two great towers either side of the front and a range of buildings to one side, all decorated with round headed arches.

“I thought it was lots of different houses to start with,” said John, “but Grandad said that the house had been altered a lot over the years.”

“It certainly was,” nodded Percy. “I rebuilt a lot of it when I had it.” He turned several pages and pointed to a big square house with a courtyard in the middle and a sort of tower at each corner. It was all roofed in grey with dormer windows and all the windows along the sides had either a shallow curve or

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triangle over them. The garden was all laid out with little hedges and gravelled paths. "Then it all got altered again by my descendants."

"That's the house as I knew it," said Bunsen, pointing to the last picture, which showed a big building, all towers, pointed windows and spiked turrets, the gardens laid out with hedges clipped into neat shapes. "I was butler to that house and I knew every inch of it.

"Especially the wine cellar," put in Leticia.

John turned back to the first picture. It showed a two-story honey-coloured stone house, with steps outside that led up to a carved round-headed doorway. There were two round-headed windows on the first floor, with carved columns each side, and the roof was covered in flat grey stones. "I can't really understand what it says under this picture," admitted John. "The letters are too difficult for me."

"Not easy," agreed Jellicoe. "It's called gothic lettering. It states that nothing is left of the first house on the site because it was all pulled down in the Middle Ages. But it goes on to say that this picture is of a similar house of the same age and gives an idea of what it may have looked like."

"It does, too," said Leticia. "Except there was a tree just to the right and a cobbled area in front of the door. There was a stable and barn just at the back and a kitchen to the side. That's the house that I knew. It wasn't pulled down. I'm afraid I did the damage."

They all looked her. "It's a long story," she said.

"Do you think we could go into the picture and have a look at the house?" asked John. "After all, we can all get into the clock pictures."

All the others looked at him and no one said a word for a few minutes. Jellicoe looked Lady Matilda. "What do you think?" he said. "He's right. We can all go into the clock pictures - and after their adventure in the marbled paper, I should say that going into the pictures was possible."

"Yes," said Lady Matilda, "but I'm not sure it's a good idea. These aren't the clock pictures after all, and therefore possibly not subject to the same rules and magic. We may not be able to get out even if we can get in. I think you were lucky to get out of the coloured paper," she went on to John and Abbot Baldwin.

"Tell you what," suggested Sir Percy, "two of us can go in and have a look and make sure it's all right and then come out again and we can all go in."

"Suppose the ones who go in get stuck," said Bunsen. They all frowned and considered the problem for a few minutes.

"I'll go," said Leticia. "After all it's my house. If I get stuck, try going for Oglai and asking for his help."

Oglai was the Green Djinn or Genie who they had met once in the Desert Picture on the clock face and who knew a lot about magic. Leticia stood up and thought hard but nothing happened, then Jellicoe suggested they all try to concentrate on getting Leticia in to the picture but that didn't work either.

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“I’m getting a bad feeling about this,” muttered the Abbot. “Something’s happening and I don’t know what it is.” The others agreed but John looked puzzled. Jellicoe noticed and turned to John.

“You get a feeling for these things, after a while of going in and out of pictures and wishing things up,” he said. He turned to the others. “I think John better go back now and we’ll all have a think about it.” The others nodded. Jellicoe turned back to John. “See if you can bring the book another night,” he suggested.

John agreed and floated back up to the ledge with the others. He was used to floating off to sleep at the end of his adventures and finding himself in his own bed but this time it didn’t happen. They reached the ledge to find the door closed. The ghosts all pushed it open and looked out - but something was very wrong. Instead of a hall carpet far below and wallpapered walls in the distance with the staircase beyond there was a stone flagged floor and roughly plastered white walls, while above them was a dusty, cobwebbed, vaulted roof with some nasty cracks in it. Light filtered in through shutters over a couple of windows in the upper part of the walls and up a small flight of steps in front of them was a big, heavy, wooden door.

“Where are we?” asked John. “This isn’t my house.”

“No,” said Leticia in a worried voice, “It’s mine.”

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The ghosts all stood in silence, wondering what on earth had happened. John began to get worried - and yet at the same time rather excited. The worried bit of him was thinking that he might be trapped here, not able to go home and what would his parents think? But the other bit of him was thinking that this really was an adventure and wanted to explore.

The other more adventurous bit of him won. “Can we go into the house and see what it is like?” he asked.

Jellicoe screwed up his face in a thoughtful frown.

“I rather think we’ll have to,” he said. “I think we’ll have to find out where we are before we can get back.”

“I don’t understand,” said John.

“It’s to do with magic,” said Lady Matilda. “You have to find your way round a bit before everything works. It’s all a bit complicated, but you get used to it.”

“I hope John doesn’t have to,” said Sir Percy in a rather worried voice. “I just hope we can get him back.”

“Come on,” said Abbot Baldwin. “Let’s explore. We should grow to full size once we step outside - but I think we better use the door in the foot of the clock. I don’t fancy stepping out into space and finding out I’m wrong half way down. I know I’m a ghost, but I rather think a fall like that could still do some damage.”

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“I agree,” said Bunsen, who had some experience of falling from great heights, although in his case it had been into a barrel of brandy.

They all floated back down to the bottom of the case; the Abbot led the way down some steps and out of a little door in the foot of the clock that John had used once before. They trooped out into the dark stone hall and Jellicoe snapped his fingers. A lantern appeared in his hand and cast a bit more light around them onto the stone flags.

“Altogether now, think hard about growing,” said Jellicoe.

John saw all the others close their eyes and concentrate. He did the same. When he opened them he was his normal height and so were all the others - with the exception of Bunsen who was fifteen feet tall, and who had bumped his head in the vaulted roof.

“Clot!” scolded Leticia. “You’ve overdone it! Think smaller!”

Bunsen closed his eyes and shrank to his normal height. He rubbed his head.

“I didn’t mean to do that,” he said. “That roof’s solid.”

“So’s your head,” said Leticia, but she made him bend down so she could inspect his head and make sure he was all right. They looked round the dimly lit vaulted room.

“This is the cellar,” said Leticia. “Those steps lead up to the yard outside and then there’s a flight of steps up to the hall and solar.”

“What’s a solar?” asked John as they made their way out the big door and emerged blinking into the sunlit cobbled yard.

“Our private room,” said Leticia, leading them up a flight of stone steps outside the house and through a fine carved doorway into the hall, “The only place you could get any peace and quiet in the place. The hall was always busy and full of people coming and going.”

John was thinking that it therefore may not be a good idea to suddenly walk into a hall full of people coming and going when they all looked a bit strange - after all, a butler in his full black coat and tails, Jellicoe wearing the clothes of a respectable 19th century tradesman, Lady Matilda in a purple silk dress and Sir Percy in the best suit of a 17th century gentleman might all look rather out of place in a medieval hall, especially if Sir Percy’s head became detached. Only the Abbot and Leticia were really dressed for the part. The others didn’t seem bothered, but of course they could all become invisible - one of the joys of being a ghost - which rather left him looking the odd one out and he wondered how many little boys in the middle ages wondered around the halls of houses in a dressing gown.

As it happened there was no-one about and Leticia looked slightly puzzled and also rather startled or so John thought as she stood looking up at the ceiling at the far end of the room where there was a raised bit of floor and a table and two fine carved chairs. In the vaulting a large piece was missing and the rest of the ceiling was looking rather cracked.

“Anything wrong?” asked Lady Matilda.

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“Er, no, no, there isn’t. Come on, let’s go outside,” snapped Leticia and stomped off.

She was behaving rather strangely and as she swept outside looking in a bit of a bad mood, John whispered, “Is there something wrong?” to Jellicoe and the Abbot, who were standing by John and looking in some puzzlement at Leticia.

“I don’t know,” said the Abbot. “We never really knew much about Leticia. She was a ghost before all the rest of us and she never really told us much about how she became one. She was the Wailing Woman in White and until she stopped wailing we didn’t really have much to do with her.”

“She had stopped by the time I came on the scene,” said Jellicoe. “But she never really mixed with the rest of us until Bunsen arrived.”

“She never told me much about how she became a ghost,” said Bunsen who had overheard. “I think we better go after her.”

They did. Outside it was a fine sunny day. Around the grey stone house was a cobbled yard and behind the house as they stood in front of it was a stable while to one side was a square building with a tall pyramid roof. A low wall enclosed the whole place and a tree gave them some shade from the hot sun. Over the wall John could see fields with people working in them and just a little way off there was a village of low whitewashed thatched cottages; there were several people in the village street too. John looked back to the house. It was almost the same as the picture in the book; at one end of it, up a flight of stone steps, was the doorway with its carved round-headed arch, then two big round-headed windows and two smaller windows set higher up in the wall at the opposite end to the door. At ground level was the big wooden door that led to the cellar and to one side of it was one of the shuttered cellar windows. Leticia was stamping about in the cobbled yard, looking a bit agitated. Lady Matilda went over to her.

“Are you sure you are all right, dear?” she asked gently. Leticia looked up, caught sight of John and sighed and then smiled.

“Yes,” she said, “I’m sorry, but it’s bought back some nasty memories. I lived here when I was alive and I was absolutely rotten to every one. I always wanted my own way and if I couldn’t get it I’d wail and shout. I was unbearable. Then I married, and treated my husband the same way - I wailed at him if he didn’t do what I wanted. And I screamed at all the servants. He left and went off to the Crusades - I think he was glad to get away. The servants got more and more fed up with the me and I began to wail more and more. Come back in and let me show you something.”

They all trooped back in - but as they climbed the steps John cast a look back at the village and noticed that a small crowd had gathered and was pointing at the house. He wondered if there was anything wrong. Back inside Leticia led them up to the other end of the hall. To one side was a doorway.

“That’s the solar,” she said to John, pointing at the door. “That’s where I lived, in a nice room. I’ll show it to you. But this big hall was always full of villagers and servants; everyone ate here; did you see that building outside, the

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square one with the tall roof? That was the kitchen, and the cook always had to make a lot for dinner to feed all the people who came here to sort out any trouble. But because I behaved so badly they came less and less and the servants left. The place began to fall into bad repair. You can see the cracks in the walls and the ceiling,” she went on, pointing out the state of the walls. The cracks did look quite bad. “I used to bawl and shout to get something done but so few people were coming to the house that pretty soon I was almost left alone, so I shouted and screamed even more and then one day I went too far.” She pointed up above her head. “See the bit missing? I wailed so loudly that a bit of the vault fell out and on top of me! That’s how I became a ghost. The only thing is, according to my memories of it - which I grant you are a bit fuzzy and probably for the good reason that a large lump of stone fell on my head - the rest of the house fell down as well. But it seems that I’m wrong.”

“Not in a very good state, though,” said Sir Percy. “It was probably knocked down later.”

“I’ll show you the solar,” said Leticia and she led the way through the door and into a very cosy room, the walls all painted with beautiful diamond patterns and pictures, one of them of a big wheel and several figures. There was a big wooden four-poster bed hung with velvet curtains and a huge chest on the floor all painted with scenes of ships, knights and animals.

“The Wheel of Fortune,” said the Abbot, looking at the pictures on the walls. “Lovely picture. And several saints too - very nicely done.”

“Yes, no wallpaper then,” said Leticia. “You’d think I’d be grateful really. Look, lovely carved table and chairs, nice big wooden chest - that’s where we kept all the clothes - and that huge bed with all the curtains to keep out the draughts. The ceiling is all painted with stars,” she went on, pointing up. “Why was I so miserable?”

There were four windows that lit the room and they had big shutters each side of them; two of the windows had the shutters half open but two of them were closed and it wasn’t easy to see the painted ceiling. John opened the shutters fully and looked at the ceiling, all painted blue and spangled with silver or gold stars; he thought how wonderful it would be to lie in bed and look up at a ceiling like that. Then he looked out of the window; he could see the village and the lane that led between it and the house - and something else that worried him. He called to the others.

“Look,” he said, “There’s a crowd of people coming up the lane to the house.”

They all looked. There was a crowd of people all right, looking alarmed and angry and led by a big man wearing a heavy brown cloak and hood that hid most of his face but even so a whisp of black beard escaped the folds of material.

“It’s the villagers,” said Leticia, “but I don’t recognise the man leading them. Come on, I think we better go. I think this place is supposed to be abandoned. They probably think we are robbers.”

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They quickly made their way back to the hall, ran the length of it and dashed out the door and down to the cellars but the crowd was already entering the courtyard as the ghosts descended the stone steps. Sir Percy tripped and fell headlong. His head flew off and was caught by Bunsen, who tucked it under his arm like a rugby ball while Jellicoe and Lady Matilda picked up and guided the body of Sir Percy which seemed to understand that it was urgently required to run. They heard a deep voice behind them roaring, "Don't let them escape! Witches! Robbers! Ghouls! Capture them! Destroy their infernal machine!"

"Infernal machine?" puffed Abbot Baldwin, as they ran down the steps. "What's he on about?"

"The clock!" said Jellicoe, "That's what he's after. Come on!"

They all dashed through the cellar door and ran for the clock but John tripped and fell over the steps down to the cellar floor and as he looked up, horrified, he saw that all the others had suddenly grown smaller and were on the ledge of the clock door, looking back helplessly. It was obvious that they couldn't grow again and come back to help him! John picked himself up but was grabbed by rough, heavy hands. He looked up and found himself in the grip of the big man in the brown cloak, his face still muffled in its folds. Even so he could see wickedly glittering eyes - and a lot of jet black beard and moustache.

"Got one of them!" the man roared. "That's the infernal machine that these witches use. Smash it!" and he pointed to the clock. A crowd of villagers with clubs and sticks had followed the man down the steps. They were angry and they made for the clock, determined to wreck it. John knew that if they did, he was stuck in the Middle Ages for ever! Then they froze and suddenly clapped their hands to their ears as a terrible noise filled the echoing cellar, bouncing off the walls and going right through them - a noise half shriek and half whistle like a hundred saucepans being scraped with fingernails while several factory sirens went off all at once. The villagers stared in horror at something that appeared out of the gloom at the other end of the hall, a figure in white, transparent and terrible, hands waving, eyes staring and mouth wide open as it let out the terrible noise.

The villagers recognised the figure as that of their late mistress and turned to run but the man roared at them, "It's all right, it's only noise! Stuff your ears and destroy their machine." However, the villagers had had enough - whether it was the terrible sight of Leticia or the awful noise she was making, or possibly both, they were determined on flight and ran back up the steps as fast as they could. The man who had grabbed John still had a hammer in his hands and holding on to John with one hand and the hammer in the other he made for the clock. The noise grew in volume - Leticia had just been warming up until then. A bit of the roof fell on to the man's head and he looked up. The cracks in the vault were widening and the walls were cracking too. Bits of stone and plaster started to fall all round him. Another lump of stone hit him and a low rumbling noise made itself heard over the din as the house seemed to shake. The man gulped and clapped his hands over his head; John took the

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opportunity to leg it to the clock - and not a moment too soon as bigger lumps of masonry began to fall from the roof, the cracks in the walls widened and the rumbling noise became deafening. John ran for the clock while the man turned and ran outside, dropping his hammer. Bits of plaster, stone and rubble bounced off the floor around John and he felt himself shrinking and flying through the air, to join the ghosts on the ledge of the clock doorway.

John found the others were all holding their hands over their ears. They looked out into the now faint and misty scene before them, full of dust, as ever bigger lumps of masonry fell down and finally the whole vault collapsed and everything went dark. The noise stopped and the door closed and as John turned to the others, the gentle yellow glow of the inside of the clock began to light everything up again.

"Where's Leticia," he asked and the others looked at each other, eyes wide open, mouths drooping.

"She never made it," said Sir Percy, aghast.

"She must have been trapped in the house," said Bunsen sadly. "I don't think we'll ever see her again," and he sniffed.

"Oh yes you will," came a cheery voice, and Leticia appeared out of thin air, joining them on the ledge. She was a bit dusty and picked some lumps of plaster out of her hair. She grinned.

"Really bought the house down, didn't I?" she said. "I knew I managed to demolish it. I just got the timing a bit wrong."

They all looked relieved and gathered round to congratulate her and brush her down. John was a bit worried about the state of the clock, wondering if any of the rubble had damaged it, but Jellicoe said that luckily the clock had begun to vanish from the house just as the vault started to give way. They inspected the clock inside, found it was fine and opened the door a bit to have a look at the outside of the clock. There was a swirling mist outside, and as John looked into it, it seemed to fill with a yellow light and envelope him - and he woke up back in his bed, the sun glowing gold through his curtains. He sat up. The book was on the bed, open at the page with the picture of the old medieval house, and a lump of stone lay beside it, still with a bit of blue plaster attached. On the blue plaster was painted a little silver star. John put the bit of stone in his drawer, just in time, as his Dad poked his head round the door.

"Time to get up, sleepy head," he said, "Been snoring so loudly you'll shake the house down! Breakfast is on the table!"