

# Howling point

When a dream has the potential to turn into a nightmare...



Sally's anger and frustration over forgetting her hair straighteners quickly changed to utter amazement. Their car screeched to a halt. Doors flew open as all five girls scrambled for a better look. They were captivated by the view. The owner's castle stood in front of them, majestic on the brow of the hill in all its splendour, its fairy tale turrets partially shrouded in low-lying cloud. Nestling low in the valley nearby was the soon-to-be-theirs Gothic-style cottage, which, the owner had told them, 'used to be home to a coven of witches a few centuries ago'. It was surrounded on three sides by ancient trees, which only served to emphasise its austere appearance. Grace broke the silence and the magic of the moment. 'Blimey, if that's ours, where's the witches' pad?' The girls' laughter echoed out into the valley.

They'd decided a weekend away from it all was what they all needed. A series of personal disasters had affected each of them. From broken romances and broken hearts, to career crises; they'd all suffered from one or more of these, and the issues had taken their toll. Unanimously, it was agreed they needed a mini-break, in true Bridget Jones style. And you could not get more remote or away from it all than Howling Point – the nearest town was 15 miles away. So, car filled with food and drink, they'd set off on the four-hour journey from the city and now they were here, in the middle of

nowhere. Three whole days of peaceful bliss. What could go wrong?



As promised, the heavy wooden door was open and the large iron keys were hanging on the inside. The place was beautiful: a large, wood-burning fire was set in the equally large lounge, the kitchen and dining room filled the remainder of the ground floor, and the bedrooms occupied the first floor. In the hallway, on a large wooden chest, sat an array of lamps, torches and candles. A brief note warned of a storm and the strong possibility of power cuts. They looked at each other, groaned and laughed. 'What about the DVDs?' asked Carmen.

It didn't matter. Nothing was going to dampen their enthusiasm. No power? This merely added to the sense of adventure they could all feel. The weekend had been planned meticulously. Sally, Grace and Carmen were in charge of the fire, Lydia and Bridie were in the kitchen. No eating out, bars or clubs. Walking, talking, eating, laughing and watching rom-com DVDs was the agenda for this weekend, and they were determined to follow it. Within 30 minutes of arrival, the car was unpacked and the luggage placed in their respective bedrooms. The food was stowed away in the kitchen and the wine that wouldn't fit into the large American-style fridge was stashed away in the coolness of the cellar pantry.

However, Sally felt that the house had a strange feel to it. Being pretty intuitive,

**There was a strange feeling to the house, but it was perfect for them**

bordering on the psychic on occasion – sometimes having weird dreams which were like premonitions – she couldn't quite put her finger on it, but felt there was a definite 'atmosphere' in the air. The others laughed off her apprehension, because to all intents and purposes the house was perfect. It was decorated and furnished to an extremely high standard; a Minton tiled floor graced the hallway. Highly polished wood panels partially covered the walls, and extended into the dining room. The dark oak staircase swept up from the hallway, with a traditional carpet sitting in the middle, held in place by ornate carpet clips. The kitchen ran the length of the back of the house. The Aga was the central feature, with another, more modern stove to the side. Leather Chesterfields graced the lounge, and a huge, highly decorated dining table and chairs were in the dining room. The house had been a hunting lodge for the rich guests of this once grand estate, with its strong links to royalty and the landed gentry.



Sally was the first to wake up the next morning. The bright sunlight glinting through the curtains had awoken her from her slumber. With only one eye open, she



glanced at the clock. 8.45am. A reasonable time to rise. Note to self, drink less tonight, she thought, as she stumbled to the bathroom with a thick head. On the way she paused to look out of the window. A bright blue sky on a blustery day was the sight that greeted her. No sign of any bad weather, she thought. After her shower, Sally made her way onto the landing, making enough noise to rouse the others from their sleep. 'Come on girls,' she shouted. 'We need to get up and enjoy ourselves!'

The others quickly followed downstairs. The place was a mess; plates, bottles and glasses from the night before were strewn across the lounge. But in no time, the plates were loaded into the dishwasher and the place was spick and span. A breakfast was rustled up, with copious cups of tea and coffee from the fancy coffee machine, which would have served equally well in a high street coffee house.

Wellies, coats and thick jumpers on, they set off on their walk. They had planned a five-mile hike through the estate, but as they approached the wood, the dark clouds on the horizon and the strong winds began to worry the girls. They didn't want to get stranded in a strange place, so decided to head back to

the house. They just made it. Within minutes, the heavens opened, and the cottage grew darker and darker. The wind howled around the building, shaking windows and making strange sounds. Unperturbed, the girls nestled down in the lounge, television on in the background. With their books and magazines, they settled down for the remainder of the afternoon. The storm continued unabated, and the howling wind increased. The lights began to flicker. 'I think we may have a problem,' said Bridie. Too late. The lights faded, and the television screen went blank. With just enough light, they made their way to the hallway and collected the lamps, torches and candles. 'Hey, this is fun,' said Carmen, and they all laughed in agreement.

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The evening meal was cooked by candle light. Still the storm raged on. What had been fun was now getting a little trying – in fact, very trying. It was now late evening, and they'd been without power for five hours. Sally searched the cupboard under the stairs in search of more games. They were tired of dominoes and

draughts. In the poorly lit cupboard, her arms delved deeper. She felt something in a bag. Wanting to recoil from the dust, she gingerly pulled it out, wiping the cobwebs from the bag as she pulled out a long, thin box.

'What's that?' Lydia asked, as the others began to show an interest. Sally shook her head as she wiped off the dust. 'Oh my God, it's an Ouija Board!' Sally dropped the board on the table, and reeled back from it. 'Oh come on,' Bridie chided, 'it's only a game.' Lydia giggled and Carmen looked up from her book.

Curiosity got the better of them. 'Come on,' said Lydia to the others, 'it will be fun!' Sally reluctantly inched back towards the box. Grace had already got it out and the others were gathering round. 'Oh what the heck,' thought Sally, 'what harm can it do?' Lydia was reading out the instructions. The board was laid out on the table, and they all placed their hands on the glass in the middle of the game, some less enthusiastically than others. Following the instructions, they began to ask the board questions. 'Is anybody there? Who? Do you have a message for one of us? If so, who?'

The glass moved limply between the yes and no and the girls' hands followed. This was getting boring.

Then suddenly, the glass began to move in a strange way, as if some force was inside it. It didn't seem to be able to keep still. It began to move wildly around the board. L-I-S-T-E-N. U-R-G-E-N-T, it spelt out. The girls looked at each other nervously. They were in a dilemma; what had seemed fun and a little staid was now getting their full attention, but they weren't sure what to make of it.

Then the glass began to spell out, rhythmically, B-R-I-D-I-E, L-Y-D-I-A, S-A-L-L-Y, G-R-A-C-E, C-A-R-M-E-N, I-W-I-L-L K-I-L-L Y-O-U I-N T-H-E N-I-G-H-T. The girls leapt to their feet, screaming. Bridie had run to the door. 'It feels like it's being held shut! Sally! Sally! Help me! Sally!'

Feeling confused, the words were somehow still echoing in her ears... 'Sally! Sally!', her husband called as he tried to shake her awake. 'The girls will be here in a minute. You're going to miss the fun of your weekend away at Howling Point if you don't get up soon...' ■

## Wiping away the cobwebs, Sally pulled out an Ouija Board