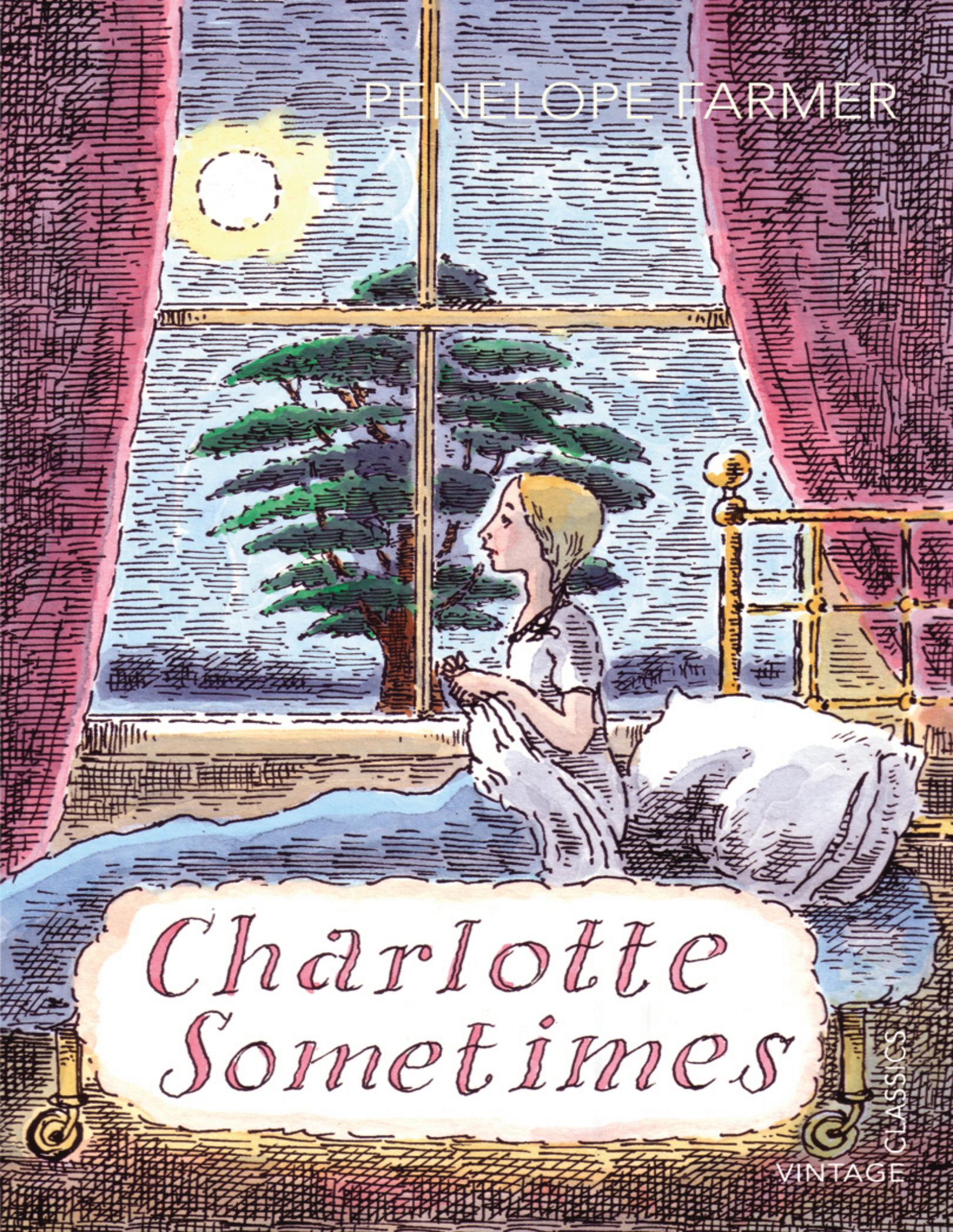


PENELOPE FARMER



*Charlotte
Sometimes*

CLASSICS

VINTAGE

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About the Book

‘Suppose you got stuck in here, and Clare there in your time. Just suppose you did?’

Charlotte Makepeace’s first day at boarding school is a bewildering blur of unfamiliar faces, timetables, rules and lists. All the other girls know the routine – and each other. No one invites her into their exclusive circles of whispers and giggles.

But on Charlotte’s very first night something mysterious starts to happen. She wakes up in the same bed, in the same dormitory, in the same school. But something has changed. Somehow Charlotte has slipped forty years back in time...

Vintage Children’s Classics is a twenty-first century classics list aimed at 8-12 year olds and the adults in their lives. Discover timeless favourites from *The Jungle Book* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* to modern classics such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

About the Author

Penelope Farmer was born in 1939 in Kent. She was a twin, although doctors weren't aware of her existence until she was born twenty-five minutes after her sister. Many of Penelope's novels deal with the issue of identity and some readers suggest that this is because she is a twin. In *Charlotte Sometimes* the strange things that happen to Charlotte force her to question her own identity and ponder the possibility that it could be lost.

Penelope Farmer has written many books for both adults and children in the course of her long career as a writer. *Charlotte Sometimes* is actually the third book in a trilogy featuring the characters of Charlotte and Emma Makepeace. Penelope currently lives on the Spanish island of Lanzarote, one of the Canary Islands, and writes a blog under the name Granny P.

OTHER BOOKS BY PENELOPE FARMER

Penelope
A Castle of Bone

Penelope Farmer

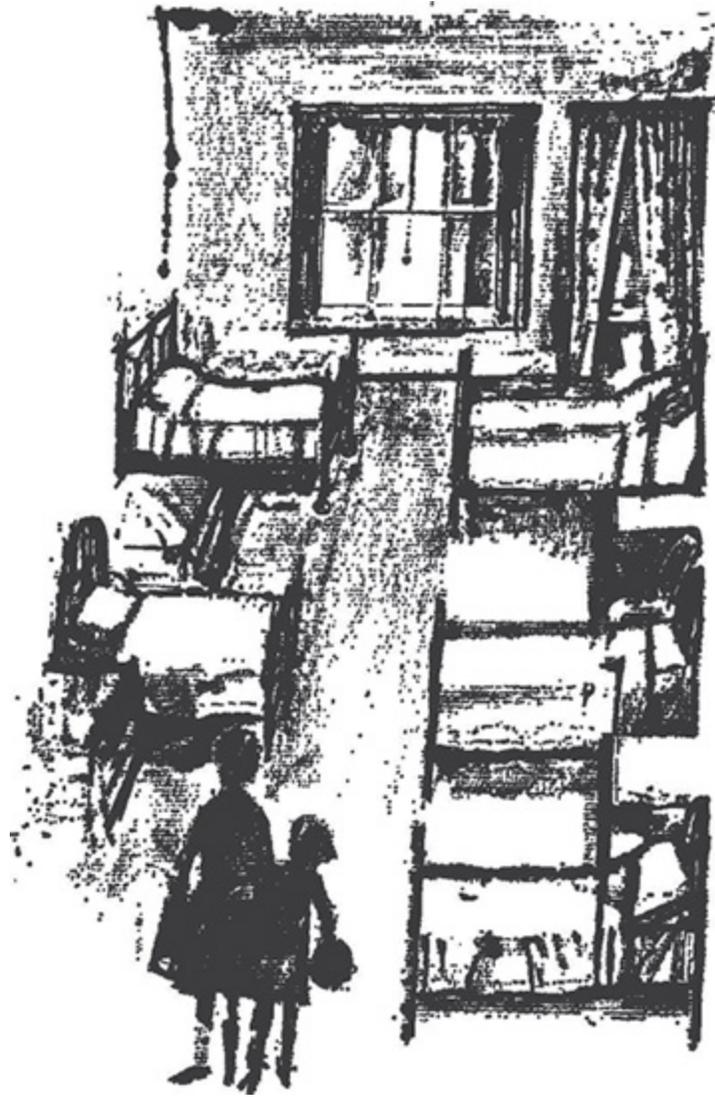
*Charlotte
Sometimes*



Illustrated by Chris Connor

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

Part One



1

BY BEDTIME ALL the faces, the voices had blurred for Charlotte to one face, one voice. She prepared herself for bed, very slowly and deliberately, cleaning her teeth with the new green toothbrush, undressing awkwardly because she did not like to hide herself in the washing-cubicle with her fellow new girl, Susannah; but she was on the other hand much too shy and strange to undress as openly as the other three, Vanessa, Janet and Elizabeth. Vanessa wandered about for ten minutes at least in just her vest and navy-blue school knickers. She had freckles all over her legs. Charlotte had never seen anyone with freckled legs before.

Susannah had ceased chattering which was a relief, but still giggled whenever Janet and Vanessa did, though she could not possibly have heard what they were giggling about. Janet and Vanessa talked, or rather whispered, exclusively to each other. The fourth girl, Elizabeth, was sprawled on her bed, reading a book. Charlotte had a book beside her too, but was so tired and confused she did not want to open it now. Her eyes felt stretched and huge. The light seemed too bright for them, glaring on white walls, white sheets and bedcovers; even the polished brown linoleum seemed to shine too much, so that the darkness when the light went out was thankful and cooling.

'Pull the blind up, Charlotte,' a voice ordered - Vanessa's probably, but it might have been Janet's. Charlotte had to climb to the end of her bed to do that and, the blind speeding up with a hiss, saw the moon rising across the

river, a huge September hunter's moon, the colour, almost the texture of honey.

At first, though so tired, she could not sleep. Her bed was uncomfortable in an unfamiliar way. Her old-fashioned school nightdress felt heavy and hot. All the sounds about her were unfamiliar, from the smothering roars of the aeroplanes to the slither of feet in the passages outside. She heard whispers and giggles from Janet and Vanessa, little snores from Elizabeth, the odd sob from Susannah. She found herself worrying about her own younger sister Emma, whom she had left behind alone at home. After a while she began to think it might be a relief if she could cry as Susannah was doing, so perhaps cry herself to sleep, but she could not cry - her eyes felt quite dried up. Every time too that her eyelids dropped an aeroplane came and jerked her awake again.

She must have slept at last, for later she awoke, abruptly, confusedly. At first she thought another aeroplane must have woken her, racing its engines as it neared the airport. But the silence seemed somehow too complete for that. The moon was silver now and bright, high in the sky. The shadows of the window-bars lay on the foot of her bed, and beyond the window she thought she saw a tree, a huge tree, black against the light, but silver where the moon caught, with foliage like thick floating strokes across its trunk. Yet it was odd, for as she became more awake she remembered there was no tree, only a red brick arm jutting out from the main school building where she lay. Sleepily, she took it for some mere trick of light, of the deceptive moon, and fell asleep again, though she dreamed all night in muddled snatches of the day that had just gone, her first day at boarding-school.

There were four pillars at the entrance to the school, making a portico that looked grander than the building. Four steps led up to double wooden doors with brass

handles on them – their little flash and gleam in the morning sun had been almost the first thing Charlotte saw as she drove in through the gates in the white school bus, among a great many other girls all wearing the same dark-blue uniform as she wore herself. She looked perhaps more primly organized than most, the pleats in her skirt very sharp and new, but felt hopelessly dazed and strange. In the rush to get out when the bus drew up she had scarcely dared to move until she heard suddenly over the jumble of voices her own name loudly called.

‘Charlotte Makepeace, Charlotte *Makepeace!*’

‘Yes,’ Charlotte said shyly. ‘Yes,’ again, more loudly, and a tall fair girl much older than herself grabbed the case from her hand and led her out of the bus and crowd and noise, through the portico, up still empty stairs.

‘I’m Sarah,’ she said over her shoulder. ‘I’m taking you to your bedroom.’ Otherwise she said nothing, walking ahead all the way along miles of indecipherable passages and eventually down four steep steps. She had a curious walk, Charlotte noticed, as if with each step ropes were slackened in her and then pulled tight again. Perhaps this was because she was so tall.

The bedroom to which she took Charlotte had the name *Cedar* printed on a small blue card pinned to its door. All the bedrooms were called after trees it seemed. There was nothing here to suggest particularly a cedar tree, though through the window Charlotte could see other kinds of trees. She saw also a corner of the river, the view cut off sharply by the jutting of the building on the right.

In the room were five black iron bedsteads like Charlotte’s own at her home, Aviary Hall. They were about as chipped and shabby too, but had white cotton bedspreads on them, smooth as snow. There were five white chests-of-drawers and five white-painted chairs, and across one corner a faded curtain hung on an iron rod to make the washing-cubicle.

'Which bed do you want, Charlotte?' the tall girl Sarah asked, dumping Charlotte's case down on one of the chests-of-drawers.

'Which am I allowed?' asked Charlotte falteringly. The bed nearest the window she saw had little wheels with ornamented spokes on them like wagon-wheels where the others had ordinary castors. She wanted that bed quite fiercely when she thought about it. But she did not think that as a new girl she could choose it.

'Any you like. Most would choose the window one. I would myself.'

'Oh, so would I,' Charlotte cried. 'Can I really have that one?'

'You're here first, aren't you?' asked Sarah.

It was odd then that Sarah remained, staring out of the window, swinging the window-cord, remote-seeming and separate. But Charlotte had an impression suddenly that Sarah had something to say to her. Once she turned round and opened her mouth to speak, but looked back to the window again before any words were formed. Charlotte stood behind her awkwardly and did not know whether to remain there or move away.

Beyond the bedroom door, down the long linoleum-covered passages she heard feet begin to thud and scurry and voices begin to call, the sound both channelled and enlarged by the passages as if they were sounding-boards, until the whole building seemed to buzz and hum. Sarah turned more urgently and started to speak, but at that moment several pairs of feet thumped down the steps outside, skidded on the linoleum at the bottom and the door burst open. Four girls jostled in the doorway.

'Hullo, Elizabeth, Janet, Vanessa,' said Sarah, friendly but quite detached.

'Hullo, Sarah,' the three said, polite but less friendly, Charlotte thought. The fourth girl had dark curly hair and looked rather red about the eyes as if she had been crying;

she giggled now for no reason, showing unexpectedly white teeth.

'I'm Susannah,' she said eagerly. 'I'm a new girl, you know.'

'This is Charlotte who is also new. You can keep each other company. Oh, since Charlotte was here first I told her she had first choice of beds. She chose the window bed.'

Sarah did not look at Charlotte again, but smiled briefly, generally, and went out.

For a moment Charlotte was stared at in silence. Susannah and Elizabeth began to smile at her. But Vanessa said sharply, 'Trust snooty Sarah to let the new girl take the best bed.'

'I don't mind which bed *I* have, honestly,' Susannah cried.

'Nor do I.' Charlotte blushed unhappily, grabbing her case off the bed on which she had set it again. 'I don't mind having another bed.'

But she did mind, ridiculously.

'Oh, you'd better keep it now.' Vanessa was grudging if perhaps less sharp. Her freckled nose was pointed, her straight hair pale as paper. 'You'd better keep it if snooty Sarah said. She thinks she's queen of the school that's all, just because her sisters were here, and her mother donkey's years ago.'

'Still it's not Charlotte's fault,' added Janet more kindly.

'How did you get here first anyway?' Vanessa asked. 'Why didn't you have to report to the staff-room, like us?'

'Sarah said she'd do it for me, since I was new.'

'Goodness, isn't she kind to you? Getting you the best bed too. Do you know her at home or something?'

'No ...' Charlotte was puzzled, for Sarah's kindness did seem odd. 'I don't know her. I don't know anyone here at all.'

By supper time though Charlotte knew all about Susannah, about her family, her father and mother and brother and sister (they were all just like Susannah,

judging by their photographs), about her cats and dogs and ponies and guinea-pigs, about the time she had been bridesmaid and the time she had broken her leg and the time she had been to France. She had been shown each of the photographs and ornaments which decorated Susannah's chest-of-drawers and envied them a little, having brought none herself so that her own chest-of-drawers remained bare and personless. After a while, Susannah's family seemed more real to Charlotte than the school yet seemed. She scarcely felt as real herself, indeed spent much of her time hunting for her name; on lists, games lists, table lists, class lists, cloakroom lists; on everything, everywhere, lockers, pegs, drawers, clothes, shoes, even on her toothbrush and sponge, as if she needed it to prove her own reality. When she was not looking she was writing her name, and not just *Charlotte* either as she would have put on her books at home, or even at the little village school where she went before. *Charlotte* alone proved no identity at all. *Charlotte Mary Makepeace* she wrote in full and in her best handwriting on each of the differently coloured exercise books given to her. Besides the satisfaction she found in writing so carefully it seemed comforting also to prove so emphatically over and over again that she was still Charlotte Makepeace just as she had been yesterday at home. For since this morning she had felt herself to be so many different people and half of them she did not recognize.

Next morning Charlotte woke before the bell. At least no bell had woken her and she doubted if she would have slept through it on only the second day of term. As she floated out of sleep she remembered it was Sunday so that the bell would be rung quite late in any case.

She lay with her eyes shut for a while, comfortable as a cat, the sun warm and rosy on her lids. When at last she opened them she found she was looking almost into the sun

itself, though its dazzle was broken by a tree. In return it blurred the dark limits of the tree's branches, beamed through them in places and shone full into her eyes, making her blink.

The tree; Charlotte sat up with a jump. For there should be no tree in the sun's way. In fact you would not expect to see the sun at all because the new building should have hidden it.

But though there had been a building there yesterday and no tree, today there was a tree and no building. The tree was a huge, dark cedar tree.

2

CHARLOTTE SHOT BACK down the bed, hiding her head beneath the covers. It must be a dream. If she counted ten before looking out again she would find she had imagined it. As a little girl she'd often lain like that under the bedclothes, counting, but hoping to open her eyes on a different world – a palace perhaps, herself a princess – whereas now she merely wanted things the same as yesterday, the red brick building, the shadowed room; no sun, no tree. Having counted to a hundred just to make sure, she peered out again to find the sun still there with its coloured, dusty beams; also the cedar tree.

Slowly, reluctantly, she turned her head to look into the room itself. Her sun-dazzled eyes could tell scarcely more at first than its shape and colour, both still apparently the same. She could see black iron bedsteads too, four of them, but as her sight cleared saw that against the wall opposite where the fifth bed should have been, was a huge white-painted cupboard with drawers underneath. All the proper chests-of-drawers had gone, and their photographs and ornaments, their dogs and cats and gnomes, their calendars and combs and hairbrushes; so had the curtained cubicle and the wash-basin with its shining taps. In place of that a white enamel basin stood on a stand, a white enamel jug inside it. On the chair beside Charlotte's bed instead of her new book there lay a little prayer-book in a floppy leather cover and a rather shabby Bible with gold-edged pages.

Janet and Vanessa must have got up early, Charlotte thought wildly, for two of the beds were empty, their

coverings smooth as if not slept in at all. They must have made their beds and gone out so quietly that no one had woken.

But that did not explain why the cupboard stood where Elizabeth's bed should have been, nor why the hair on Susannah's pillow next to her own was no longer dark like Susannah's hair, but a lightish brown.

The hump beneath the blankets stirred. There was a little groaning and sighing and a hand reached out, curling itself and uncurling again, terrifying Charlotte, because if she did not know who the hand belonged to and the light brown hair, how would that person know who Charlotte was, and however was she to explain her presence there?

The hump spoke. 'Clare,' it said crossly. '*Clare.*'

Charlotte looked wildly about, but found no one to answer, except herself.

'*Clare*, are you awake?' demanded the hump, more crossly than ever.

'I'm awake,' Charlotte said, which was true, without her having to admit she was not Clare, whoever Clare might be.

'Well then, why didn't you say so before?'

'I ...' began Charlotte. 'Because I ...' And then to her horror the girl in the other bed sat up abruptly. She was quite a little girl, much smaller than Susannah, indeed she looked smaller than anyone Charlotte had seen so far at boarding-school, though she wore the regulation nightdress. She had long hair and a round face, puzzled rather than cross and red and creased looking on the side nearest Charlotte on which she must have been lying.

She looked at Charlotte as if she saw just whom she expected to see and said, 'Is it early, Clare? Has the bell gone? Have we got to get up?'

'But I'm not Clare,' Charlotte began to say hopelessly, then stopped herself, explanation being impossible, especially since this girl seemed to think so incredibly that she was Clare.

'What's the matter with you, Clare?' the little girl cried. 'Why don't you answer me? Is it time to get up? Is it, is it, *is it?*'

'I haven't heard a bell yet,' Charlotte said.

'Oh, well, then it can't be time to get up. We mustn't be late. Aunt Dolly said we'd get into fearful trouble if we were late for breakfast at school.'

Charlotte was scarcely listening, thinking, horrified, that perhaps she was not Charlotte any more but had changed into someone else. That would explain why the little girl had greeted her as Clare.

She held out her hands to see. They did not look any different, but she wondered suddenly if she knew them well enough to tell. They were quite ordinary hands, having fingers of medium length and no scars or marks to distinguish them. With her hands she stroked her hair, which was quite straight and fell some way below her shoulders just as it had done the day before. When she picked up a piece and drew it round, it seemed the same colour too, fairish, nondescript. She moved her hands rapidly over all her face, eyes, mouth, chin, cheeks, nose, and then again, more slowly. But it did not tell her very much. Could you just by feel, she wondered, recognize your own face? A blind person might, whose touch was sight, but she was not sure she could trust herself to do it. Her mouth seemed wider than she'd thought, her nose felt narrower.

'What are you feeling your face for like that?' the little girl was asking curiously.

'Oh ... oh ... nothing in particular ...' And at that moment, luckily, the bell went, an old-fashioned clanging bell, not the shrill electric one of the night before. Charlotte jumped out of bed immediately, but the other huddled back into hers, saying, 'I don't feel a bit like getting up, but of course you do what we ought, Clare, you always do.'

Charlotte was by now so desperate she did not care if the girl found her odd. She ran to the only mirror in the room,

a square, rather stained and pitted one hung just beside the door, and the relief that came when she saw her own face staring back at her was huger than she could have thought.

Except, if she was Charlotte, why did the little girl take her for somebody else called Clare?

Just then the door opened and a woman came in, a tall, thin woman with her hair screwed up on her head under a white cap like a nurse's cap, her head very small like the knob on a knitting-needle. Her big white apron was starched to shine, indeed she shone all over as if newly polished: shoes, hair, apron, even her nose. Her skirt, Charlotte noticed, was so long it stopped not far above her ankles.

'Emily? Isn't it?' she said to Charlotte. 'Are you so vain, Emily, that you must stare at yourself before breakfast.'

Charlotte looked at her quite speechlessly, but Emily shot up in bed and said indignantly, 'She's not Emily, she's Clare, *I'm* Emily.'

'I do beg your pardon, then, Emily,' said the woman, sarcastically. 'Just to remind you *I* am Nurse Gregory. Did you not hear the bell, Emily? Get out of your bed at once. Just because you sleep here as a convenience ...' (And what does that mean? thought Charlotte) - 'just because you sleep here as a convenience does not mean you may take liberties or disregard the rules.'

'Oh, I don't think she meant to. I don't think she knew you had to get up at once.' Charlotte found herself automatically defending Emily, just as she had always defended her own sister Emma, at home.

'But it's a whole half-hour to breakfast,' Emily was protesting on her own behalf. 'It doesn't take me half an hour to get dressed.' The nurse looked from her to Charlotte with a smile that had glitter but no friendliness.

'Do I take it then you are a dirty little girl and never properly wash yourself?'