

Diana Hendry



The Seeing

'A dark and memorable novel ...

This wise and unsettling tale will captivate' *Telegraph*

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About the Book

'I've told you. Philip can see. He can see inside people. He can see the swastikas on their hearts.'

1956. When wild, dangerous, break-all-the-rules Natalie arrives in the quiet town of Norton, thirteen-year-old Lizzie is drawn irresistibly to the new girl from the wrong side of the tracks.

As the girls grow closer, Natalie and her strange, eerie brother, Philip, reveal a shocking secret. For Philip has second sight, and all around them he sees evil – 'left-over Nazis' lying in wait until the time is right for revenge. Natalie and Philip believe it's up to them to rout these people out of Norton.

Lizzie is swept up in what starts as a thrilling game – but the consequences of Philip's 'gift' quickly spiral into disaster.

The Seeing

Diana Hendry

RHCP DIGITAL

For Hamish II
Love ... adds a precious seeing to the eye
Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*

Prologue

The pills don't help. It's been three weeks now and every night it's the same. I'm trying to stop it all happening and I can't. The fire's eating up the whole beach. Even the sea can't put it out, can't even reach it. It's as if the sea sees the flames streaking the sky in a hellish mix of red, orange, yellow – and draws back, afraid. Looking at it could blind you. Its roar terrifies. Some nights Lal and Paul are there in their wedding clothes, but somehow the fire can't touch them. They're immune. The flames seem to lick round Lal's white satin wedding dress without even singeing it like an iron might. And Lal simply lifts up her arms to dance with Paul. Sometimes it's Hugo and Philip I see. Hugo's carrying his easel. Philip's holding a bunch of paintbrushes like a bouquet. They're so busy talking they haven't even noticed the fire – or, if they have, they don't care. And I know they're in terrible danger but I can't speak. The smoke from the fire is choking me. Whether it's Lal and Paul in the fire or Hugo and Philip walking away from it, it always ends the same way – me screaming for Natalie.

Then Mum comes in and shakes me awake. She has to shake me, she says, because I'm like someone in a fever. So she shakes me and I can hear her voice coming from a long way off, calling, 'Lizzie! Lizzie! Wake up, darling!' Waking is such a shock I'm immediately shivering with fright, and Mum grabs my dressing gown and wraps it round me. That's if I do wake up. Some mornings – and this is weird and awful – I'm awake but I'm still in the dream. The dream – the fire – is still blazing and I'm reaching out trying to save someone, only I don't know who.

I know even Mum is frightened when I'm like that. Once she dragged me out of bed and pulled me over to the mirror. 'Look!' she said. 'You're awake! It's morning! You've had a nightmare. Look at yourself!'

Only it wasn't me I saw in the mirror. It was Natalie. Then I knew that, of all the things Natalie had been wrong about, she was right about this. Evil doesn't just stop. However much good there is in the world, evil doesn't stop.

Mum cradled me in her arms then, and stroked my hair and said, 'It'll be all right, Lizzie. It will be all right.'

But I know it won't be all right. How can it be, without Natalie?

Chapter 1

Wild Spirit

NATALIE BLEW INTO my life like the wild west wind of Shelley's poem which our English teacher read to us, letting her voice go into a crescendo with:

*Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear!*

She appeared in our class halfway through the summer term. I didn't know where she'd come from and I didn't care. I thought she was wonderful. I thought she was like no one else I'd ever met. She made Alice and Dottie – they've been my best friends since first year – look dull. It didn't matter that Natalie was wearing what we all recognized as a second-hand school uniform, she wore it like it was a challenge to someone or something. Her gymslip was a dare shorter than anyone else's. She wore the girdle slung low around her skinny hips and her tie – a kind of frayed rag you could just about recognize as being in the green and purple school colours – dragged to one side. No socks, just plimsolls, and her hair a wild mass of uncombed curls yanked up with a tatty scarlet ribbon. Everything about her, from her fierce brown eyes to the kind of strutting walk she had, gave off defiance, as if she knew who she was and no one was going to change her.

Perhaps that was what made her different from the rest of us. We were all finding out who we were. Sometimes I thought I was trying on selves like you try on clothes in a

shop. Which self was really, really me? Natalie knew. On the day she arrived – and Miss Roberts told us all to welcome her and then took her aside and pointed to her feet so we knew she was suggesting socks – I looked at her and she reached to my heart. She went straight there, as if there was something in her that was in me too, only I hadn't known it before and though I didn't know what it was, I knew it was important. I wanted her for my friend like I'd never wanted anything before. Not even ballet lessons when I was seven! I had – what can I call it? – a kind of flash of recognition so that even though I hadn't said a word to her and she hadn't said a word to me, I kind of *knew* her. I knew her by heart as it were, like my mum can play the piano by heart – or by ear, without any music.

It was very obvious that this flash didn't go both ways. Natalie barely looked at me. And why should she? I knew what she'd see. A nice, well-behaved, good girl! A girl who was always tidy and neat. A girl often top of the class. A girl who wore expensive shoes and socks. How could she possibly see the matching wildness I felt inside me?

Not that Natalie seemed to want any friends. You'd think, being new, she'd make some effort, but she didn't. At break time she sat at the far end of the playing field, hunched up under the trees and scribbling in a small notebook. At lunch time she always found a seat by herself. She ate very fast. Everything. Even the worst sago puddings in the world. And then she was off out into the village – which, strictly speaking, wasn't allowed, though nobody quite dared to tell on her. She could give you a look with those fierce brown eyes of hers that made you want to sink into the ground.

There was lots of gossip about who she was and where she'd come from.

'She comes from London,' Alice said.

'How d'you know?' I asked.

'She's got that look,' Alice told me. 'You know - that tough city look.'

I knew what she meant, even if a 'look' wasn't exactly proof. Natalie made the rest of us village kids look like - well, village kids.

'My mum says they're hiding out,' Alice continued.

'Hiding out? Who from?'

She shrugged. 'I don't know. Rent collectors, I think. Mum says they were evicted from their last place. That means thrown out.'

'I know what *evicted* means,' I said, irritated. 'How does your mum know all this?'

'Monty's,' said Alice. She didn't need to say any more. Monty's was the village coffee shop. Correction. The village *gossip* shop.

'*And*,' she added, as if she now had the final piece of news, 'she doesn't have a dad.'

'I shall pray for her,' said Dottie. Dottie has recently got Jesus. She went to a big meeting in town and heard this American evangelist called Billy Graham and got saved. Now she wants to save everyone else. She walks around with a Bible and gives me little prayer cards. I think she's given up fun.

'I doubt she'll thank you for it,' Alice said sharply (she's a bit fed up with Dottie too).

'I don't expect thanks,' Dottie said, and stalked off as if we'd offended her.

Actually, although as far as we knew Natalie didn't have a dad, what we knew she *did* have was a little brother.

Philip was at the primary school and there was something wrong with him. He wore thick pebble specs, walked with a limp and stuttered. When Amanda Newton called Philip 'loopy', Natalie slapped her face. It happened in the playground and caused an impressed silence. I half expected Dottie to drop to her knees then and there.

Philip always waited for Natalie at the school gate so that they could walk home together. Somehow that made the rest of us keep away from her. She acted as if she didn't care. Walked away whistling, Philip dragging behind her.

I don't think Natalie would ever have noticed me if it hadn't been for Philip, and if I hadn't been at the swimming pool on the afternoon when he fell in the deep end. I was there just at the right moment to jump in and haul him out.

It's always been a mystery to me why we have a swimming pool in Norton when we have the sea. In fact, the swimming pool's next door to the sea! You can come out by the turnstile past the woman who sells you a ticket, and go straight onto the beach. Maybe they built The Baths (as we call it) because sea people need to swim at all hours of the day and night and you can't count on the tide being in. Or maybe it was the Council's way of making money or they thought the sea was dangerous - which it is at times - or just because someone thought it would be nice.

Whoever built The Baths must have been living in some kind of Eastern dream because the place looks as if it landed in Norton after being flown here from Arabia on a magic carpet. It has fat, white, lumpy walls (like pretend mud, whitewashed) with a dome at each corner. Inside there are fountains, bubbling over onto coloured stones. There's a sunbathing terrace, a choice of slides from Little to Curly to Steep, and a café where you can buy hot chocolate.

I'd never have been at The Baths that afternoon if it hadn't been for Mum. I was curled up on the sofa reading a book when she appeared, handing me my swimming costume Swiss-rolled into a towel.

'Maybe you haven't noticed,' she said, 'but it's sunny out there. Go and get some fresh air.'

I went. Grumbling. As soon as I was in I spotted Natalie and Philip. Natalie was on the sunbathing terrace, lying on her tummy and scribbling in that notebook that seemed to

go everywhere with her. Philip was wandering about in his underpants, sometimes taking his specs off and holding them up to the sun as if there was something not quite right with them which the sun might make better.

I don't think the boy meant to push him in the deep end. I think he was just rushing past and Philip was too near the edge and neither quick nor steady on his feet. He went in with a howl. His specs floated to the surface as he bobbed up and down, up and down, his arms thrashing, his mouth still open in the howl, only now there was no sound coming out of it. Then Natalie was there, screaming at me, 'I can't swim! I can't swim!' And I know I shouldn't have let such a selfish thought cross my mind, but it did. *Well, she's noticed me now*, I thought. Then I dived in.

I learned to swim when I was six. I can't imagine *not* being able to swim. Philip was light. It was easy to grab him and drag him to the bar where he clung on, spluttering and gasping until Natalie reached down, got him under the arms and hauled him out. I even managed to rescue Philip's specs.

'Thanks,' Natalie said casually, as if I hadn't just saved Philip's life. 'Thanks,' over her shoulder while thumping him on the back until he coughed up half the swimming pool and his colour – such as it was – came back. Then she walked away.

That's it, I thought. She'll ignore me again tomorrow. But she didn't. She was waiting for me outside school.

'Let's go down to the pier,' she said as if we'd already agreed to meet.

A twice life-size picture of the pier loomed into my head. The pier. Dangerous. Great open slats you could almost drop through. Rotting ones that could give way under you. *Death by drowning*, I thought, unless the lifeboat got to us in time, that is. And there was Mum. I don't know if all mothers can do this, but mine has the knack of speaking to me when she isn't there. I mean I can hear her voice in my

head, and what she said right now was *Don't go off the beaten track!* I knew she'd be expecting me home, probably watching out for me from the top front bedroom. I switched her off. Natalie was waiting. One hand on her hip, the other holding Philip. There was a kind of take-it-or-leave-it challenge on her face.

'OK,' I said, as casually as if daring rotten piers was something I did every day of the week. 'Let's go.'

Natalie's Diary

Sunday

Philip nearly drowned yesterday. A girl from my class jumped in and saved him. Lizzie. That's her name. She lives in one of those big houses at the other end of the village. Must be rich. We might need funds for the New Plan. Would she do? She looks sort of sweet-but-interesting. And innocent. No one would suspect her.

NB to Self. Can't do this on my own. I must have someone!

I hate it here. Miss Roberts says Norton's quiet and peaceful.

I hate quiet and peaceful.

Quiet and peaceful means half asleep.

Quiet and peaceful means pretending everything's all right when it isn't.

Quiet and peaceful lets badness in.

But the sea's good. Sea's *never* quiet and peaceful.

NB to Self. Be sure to test Lizzie out first.

That's what they did in the Resistance Movement before they enlisted anyone. Tested them out. I got Lizzie to walk to the end of that rotten pier. She was dead scared - went white as a sheet - but she did it. And she doesn't laugh at Philip like some of them do. The ignorant ones.

Philip not settled. Hates new places. What's happened to his dreams? He hasn't had a decent one since we got here. Has he left his dreams in

London? It's as if he's not quite here yet. Keeps waking up at night. Keeps crying. Says he can't see properly. Ma says to tell him to shut up. *It's bloody dark. Course he can't see properly.* Much she knows! Much she understands! No one does.

Could I tell Lizzie? Don't know. Too early to tell. I don't know how serious a person she is. There aren't many really *serious* people about.

NB to Self. Don't trust too soon.

The men have started coming again. It's going to be the same as it was in London.

Chapter 2

Seeing Things

THERE'S A NOTICE at the foot of the pier. It says: KEEP OFF! DANGER!

The pier is a bit like The Baths, someone's dream. Mum says it was built before the war when people thought Norton would become a seaside holiday resort. It was going to be lit up. It was going to have a theatre and side booths selling candyfloss and stuff, and a Punch and Judy show. Then the war came and nothing was lit up and any plans for the pier were abandoned.

'What about afterwards?' I asked Mum.

'Everyone had gone off the idea,' she said. 'No one wanted rowdy day trippers coming over from town and making the place cheap. Kids on the beach in their knickers. Not nice.'

Mum's got notions about what's nice and what's not nice. Anyone would think that kids on the beach in their not-nice knickers is the worst thing that could happen to Norton.

Natalie gave the KEEP OFF! DANGER! the briefest look. Then she shrugged, gave me a grin, rolled up the sleeves of her shirt, took off her plimsolls and dumped them on the beach with her school bag. I did the same. I was still hoping she'd change her mind. Philip obviously felt the same way because he kept saying, 'Home now ... H-h-h-home now.' Natalie ignored him.

The wind was just strong enough to make the sea leap up through the struts of the pier like the tongues of so

many hungry dogs. My arms came out in goose bumps. Philip sat down in the sand and wouldn't budge.

'Leave him,' said Natalie. 'He'll be all right.' She was first up on the pier. I scrambled after. Once up there, somehow everything changed. There was just Natalie and me high above the sea, high above Norton, braving the wind, daring the rotten or missing slats, trying to hold steady and shrieking with laughter when we couldn't.

Looking back, I could see the tall houses that lined the prom like so many snooty aunts, and Philip, just a small figure now, standing up with his mouth wide open. He could have been screaming but the sound was lost in the wind. Further down the beach, tucked in along the slipway, was the artist's yellow caravan.

The artist has been coming to Norton every year since I can remember. Mum always says that you know summer's begun when the artist arrives. I thought he'd turned up that day like a good omen. It seemed perfect to see his caravan – from up on the pier it was just a splodge of bright yellow – on the first day Natalie and I were together, hanging onto each other, the wind blowing my hair over my eyes, turning Natalie's scarlet ribbon into a streamer. *It's not just the start of summer*, I thought. *It's the start of my life. My life proper now I'm almost fourteen, now I've met Natalie.*

At the far end of the pier we sat down close to each other, cold arms touching, legs dangling over the edge. It was as near to being out at sea as you could get without a boat. Natalie began mimicking the seagulls and soon we were both screeching our heads off and laughing so hard it's a wonder we didn't fall off.

What was I expecting, hoping for? It was too vague for me to name. Excitement, I suppose. Adventure. Risk. Someone who'd help me escape from my dull home life. Someone I could speak my heart to. Someone I could tell how guilty I felt about not wanting peace when everyone