

**P210**

**Chapter Twenty-Four: 1:30am (pps 210-214)**

*Sophie's vodka*

AZ: Has Craig ever pursued a girl like this before? KF: No—which is one reason he knows Sophie is special. Perhaps his persistence with her also tells us something about his character.

AZ: What is Craig's career ambition—doctor? Movie star? What is Sophie's?

AZ: More of Craig's interior.

- Does he or doesn't he like his strange sister?
- Where is his hard-on? Does it embarrass him?
- How excited does he get at Sophie's arriving with vodka?
- Does he fantasize himself in a sex scene out of some movie?

# 1:30 a.m.

In the barn, Sophie had produced a bottle of vodka.

The youngsters were supposed to be asleep, of course. Craig's mother had ordered them to put their lights out at midnight, but she had not come back to check, so they were all sitting in front of the television set, watching an old horror movie.<sup>?</sup> Craig's older sister, Caroline, stroked a white rat and pretended she thought the film was silly. His little cousin Tom was pigging out on chocolates and struggling to stay awake. Sexy Sophie smoked cigarettes and said nothing. Craig was alternately worrying about the dented Ferrari and watching for a chance to kiss Sophie. Somehow the setting was not romantic enough. But would it get any better?

The vodka surprised him. He had thought her talk of cocktails was just showing off. But she went up the ladder to the hayloft bedroom, where her bag was, and came back down with a half-bottle of Smirnoff in her hand.

There was a fridge with water and soft drinks and ice. The only glasses they had were plastic tumblers decorated with pictures of Pooh and Tigger and Eeyore. "Who wants some?" Sophie said.

They all did.

Tom and Caroline mixed theirs with Coca-Cola. Craig, not sure what to do, copied

Sophie and drank it straight with ice. The taste was bitter, but he enjoyed the warm glow as it went down his throat.

After a few minutes, he began to feel pleasantly relaxed and uninhibited. He toyed with the idea of kissing Sophie right now, ignoring the others. What held him back was the thought that she might reject him in front of his sister, which would be humiliating.

Sophie drained her glass. "Another?" she asked.

They all had another.

Craig began to realise that the movie was, in fact, hilarious. "That castle is so obviously made of plywood," he said with a chuckle.

Sophie said: "And they all have Sixties eye make-up and hairstyles, even though it's set in the Middle Ages."

Caroline suddenly said: "Oh, God, I'm so sleepy." She got to her feet, climbed the ladder with some difficulty, and disappeared.

Craig thought: One down, one to go. Maybe the scene could turn romantic after all.

The old witch in the story had to bathe in the blood of a virgin to make herself young again. The bathtub scene was a hilarious combination of titillation and gross-out, and both Craig and Sophie giggled helplessly.

"I'm going to be sick," said Tom.

"Oh, no!" Craig sprang to his feet. He felt dizzy for a second, then recovered. "Bathroom, quick," he said. He took Tom's arm and led him there.

Tom start to throw up a fatal second before he reached the toilet.

Craig ignored the mess on the floor and guided him to the bowl. Tom puked some more. Craig held the boy's shoulders and tried not to breathe. There goes the romantic

atmosphere, he thought.

Sophie came to the door. "Is he all right?"

"Yeah." Craig put on the air of a snooty schoolteacher. "An injudicious combination of chocolates, vodka, and virgin's blood."

Sophie laughed. Then, to Craig's surprise, she grabbed a length of toilet roll, got down on her knees, and began to clean up the puke from the tiled floor of the bathroom.

Tom straightened up.

"All done?" Craig asked him.

Tom nodded.

"Sure?"

"Sure."

Craig flushed the toilet. "Now clean your teeth."

"Why?"

"So you won't smell so bad."

Tom brushed his teeth.

Sophie threw a wad of paper into the toilet and took some more.

Craig took Tom out of the bathroom and led him to his camp bed on the floor. "Get undressed," he said. He opened Tom's small suitcase and found a pair of Spiderman pyjamas. Tom put them on and climbed into bed. Craig folded his clothes.

"I'm sorry I heaved," Tom said.

Craig pulled the blanket up to Tom's chin. "Forget it," he said. "Good night."

He returned to the bathroom. Sophie had cleaned up with surprising efficiency, and she was pouring disinfectant into the bowl. Craig washed his hands, and she stood beside him