

THE CELLAR

By Mike Hopper

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PART 1

Chapter 1

In September 1965, Eleanor Grainger and Zak Tempest had started on the same day at Bradford's Tennyson Infants and for their full spell in primary school they were always in the same class.

They lived just a few houses from each other at one end of Plymouth Street, which comprised dozens of back-to-back terraced houses. Their homes were about half a mile from school.

There was a house at the front as well as at the back. The link between the two was what everyone referred to as a passage, though it was more like a mini-tunnel the length of a cricket pitch.

Inside the passage, was a side-door for each property, which in turn had two small bedrooms. Many still had no bathroom, while the toilet was outside in a small brick building. Home improvement grants were helping to improve the situation.

Also at the back was a modest open courtyard which was utilised by all four property owners, front and back on either side, notably for hanging out the washing.

Perhaps to make use of every bit of space, each house had a cellar which included a chimney and a coal-storage area, with stocks for open hearth fires upstairs and down. There was a lockable cellar window below ground level and this opened out and was accessible down a few steps.

The spirit amongst the people was second to none and the quality of life was good even if conditions were cramped. Each street seemed to have its own thriving community with relatives never far away.

At the other end of Plymouth Street to the Tempests was a lady in her early fifties — a widow — who Zak's mum Frances affectionately referred to as Aunt Molly, though he had no idea if she was actually related. However, when it suited, both of them would knock and have a cup of tea with the woman — in Zak's case more likely a glass of juice.

Likewise, if Molly was passing their end, she'd regularly pop in for a cuppa at the Tempest's.

Zak and Ellie, as the Grainger girl came to be called, were the closest of friends, but in 1972, at the age of eleven, their education took separate turns as they each moved on to single sexed secondary schools. Her parents, Pam and Gerry, appeared older than Zak's and he knew that Ellie had a sister who was quite a few years ahead of her. She was called Carol, was married and had gone to live away some time ago. Only occasionally did Ellie talk of her and indeed, Zak wondered if Carol had left home before Ellie was even born!

As for Zak and Ellie, because they lived so close to each other, their friendship was constant.

Also a pupil of Tennyson School was Trevor Noble whose reputation was far from clean. This in turn reflected on Trevor's behaviour both inside school and out. Ellie and Zak avoided, as best they could, anyone from the Noble family and not least Trevor, since he was in the same class as them.

Occasionally their paths would cross and Trevor was an intimidating character in whatever he said or did. Nearly everyone in the class was running scared of him and indeed, even some teachers were worried that the school might receive a visit, on the bounce, from one, or both, of Trevor's parents.

In that school-year 1972-73, when the youngsters transferred to secondary level, life was set to change significantly. Trevor and Ellie went to the local state modern, but Zak had been successful in an entrance exam for the selective St. Basil's School across the other side of the city.

At first the local youngsters continued to 'play out' in much the same way as they'd always done, but as they entered their teen years, the change in awareness of the opposite sex altered their leisure activities and habits.

Ellie, as girls tended to do, showed physical changes earlier than the lads, but at the age of fourteen, they were eligible to attend the Hanson Youth Club, which held a disco every Sunday evening.

Membership was required and though Trevor received his card during the same period as the others, within a matter of weeks he found himself banned after being involved in threatening behaviour.

Because he was at a selective school, Zak always had a large amount of homework and bit by bit, the notion of 'playing out' quickly disappeared.

Ellie meanwhile was part of a small social group of girls whose parents consoled themselves that they'd all take care of each other.

However, were it only as simple as that!

The cluster of friends, which could number up to half a dozen at times, became increasingly friendly with a similar group of lads, one of which included Trevor Noble and his older brother Jacob.

As the two groups became increasingly integrated, Jacob's influence, as the eldest lad, became more and more apparent. He was also showing an increasing interest in Ellie, who was flattered by it.

One summer's evening, a large group of boys and girls wandered up to the large open field called Myra Shay, which had once been a coal mine, at the top end of the local boys' secondary school. Suddenly, Jacob grabbed Ellie and began kissing her full on the lips. Afterwards they continued to walk together holding hands and regularly he would stop and repeat the performance.

Later, Ellie's girl friends expressed their shock, but not a little envy, that their pal should be chosen by the oldest boy in the group. With age came status.

Though the group stayed together, Ellie basically was now considered Jacob's girl-friend and though the relationship was a normal teenage crush, the intensity of the passion was increasing as Jacob endeavoured to assert his dominance over the girl.

Ellie, for her part, was content to revel in the standing she was able to claim. She was fifteen years old and able to feel the twinges of physical pleasure that Jacob was giving her.

The youth club provided a very respectable environment for teenagers with the Sunday evening discos in particular very busy, to such an extent that friends did not always see each other amongst the throng.

Jacob and Trevor however, were barred from the club which was heavily protected by a professional bouncer. No way in.

Ellie and Zak only occasionally bumped into each other. They were still good friends, but, because their paths crossed only intermittently, it came as something of a shock to Zak, one Sunday, when he noticed how attractive his friend had become; — almost overnight, it seemed.

They jived together for quite a while and then sat down in the soft drinks' bar and caught up on their lives. When Zak heard about her

relationship with Jacob Noble, he was mortified and, indeed, went as far as forewarning her as to where that could lead.

Such was Ellie's respect for her friend that the warning did not go unheeded and she began questioning exactly what she was doing messing about with Noble. She'd never before considered any dangers, but Zak's words had now made her a lot more perceptive.

During the summer holiday, the youth club organised a coach trip to Bolton Abbey in the Yorkshire Dales. The day offered nice scenery and pleasant walks by the river and was 'policed' by the regular club bouncer and the adult committee members.

On the coach-journey back, circumstances brought Ellie and Zak together in the same double-seat. They chatted for a while before she fell asleep on his shoulder. Instinctively, Zak put his arm around her and didn't dare to move for fear of waking her.

Somewhere along the journey, Ellie stirred and snuggled even closer to Zak. She opened her eyes once and looked at him before burying her head into the pit of his shoulder. Then he became aware that her face was into his neck.

Zak had never had this sort of physical contact with a girl before and it came as a bit of a shock to him. The affect on his loins was even more scary, but he simply went with it. It was as if Ellie realised this and she brought her arm over and wrapped it across his waist. Then slowly and deliberately she reached up and kissed him.

Zak didn't know the first thing about kissing, but there was something so tender about the way Ellie was teaching him what to do.

It was nice; in fact, more than that.

They were wrapped up in each other and then Zak began to wonder if others in the coach were aware of this togetherness.

As for Ellie, she was warming totally to the situation. She had never felt anything this satisfying from the rough and tumble approach that Jacob Noble employed. At this moment her contentment was good.

Then she surprised herself, not to mention Zak. She gently took his hand and slipped it discreetly inside her jacket and placed it over her breast. For his part, Zak left his hand there and had feelings that were as indescribable as anything he'd ever experienced in his short life.

If he had any worries about what was happening, the reassurance that it was all okay came when Ellie once again reached up and kissed him gently on the mouth.

Was this for real?

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The coach arrived back and a whole load of couples seemed to be disentangling themselves from each other. The majority carried their affections out onto the street outside, but if Ellie and Zak were inclined to do that, the notion quickly evaporated as the two Noble brothers had taken up a stance right at the foot of the coach steps.

Jacob immediately grabbed hold of Ellie and forced her to kiss him. Zak was hurt at what he was witnessing but Ellie managed to give him a quick warning glance which indicated he should do nothing.

For the very first time, she was seeing things the way they way. The contrast in pleasure from the two kisses was pronounced.

The problem was whether she'd got in too far to escape from Noble. The next day she knew the answer when she met up with the usual group and Jacob stormed over to her and slapped her savagely across the face.

"You were snogging that posh-school ponce on the coach," he snarled. "Don't think I don't know!"

He flung her forward with such force that she actually overbalanced and fell to the ground. The others all stood around her, making Ellie feel on her own.

All of a sudden, the world was not a happy place.

Chapter 2

That night at home, Ellie vowed that she'd no longer be leaving the house and joining up with the gang. School was only a week away and it was the year of her GCSEs. It provided the perfect excuse for her to stay in during the evenings.

The trouble was, however, that she'd not be able to easily avoid Trevor Noble during school time. Jacob might have left, but his younger brother was his eyes and ears. If he and his cronies chose to look for Ellie, she knew they would find her.

Jacob had a massive hold over Ellie and it was going to be very hard to free herself from it. What's more, his lines of communication were very effective. That's how he'd found out about her liaison with Zak.

"Oh my God," she thought. "I must forewarn Zak to watch out!"

She left the house and knocked at the Tempest's house. What greeted her wasn't very nice. Zak stood at the door sporting a blooded nose and a swollen eye.

"Oh, I am so sorry, Zak!" she said. "That's what I came to warn you about. Can I come in?"

The two sat in Zak's front room and talked about what had happened between them only a day earlier on the coach. It was obvious that the feelings of affection were still as strong as they had been then, but Ellie was adamant that she couldn't carry them forward.

"Jacob will set about us both if we as much as look at each other" she said.

"I could cope with that for you," responded Zak.

"What happened yesterday wasn't some silly snog on a coach," he went on. "You made me feel special and I want to go out with you."

Ellie was adamant. "He'll not let it go, Zak. You have to let me find a way through this," she said. "If Jacob sees me anywhere near you, he'll not only batter me, but he'll also come after you. There's no saying the extent of his violence."

The two of them sat facing each other. The inclination to embrace was overpowering, but when Zak started to move towards Ellie, she put up the palm of her hand to deter him.

"No Zak, you musn't! I won't be able to hold back if you come any closer," she admitted

Luckily, at that moment Mrs Tempest entered the room and the moment passed. It was the perfect excuse for Ellie to leave.

"Please take note of what I've said," Ellie reiterated. "It's for the best."

When school returned, Ellie was as good as her resolution. She concentrated on her studies determined to get good grades when the exams took place later in the year.

Perversely however, while so much of her time was spent deliberately avoiding both the Noble brothers, every so often she would recall the couple of hours on the youth club coach and the feelings of belonging she felt in the arms of Zak Tempest.

It felt so pleasant. It was special!

Try as she might, however, Ellie could not avoid Jacob and one day he'd clearly sneaked his way into the school grounds and made a point of finding her in an isolated area. He grabbed her with immense force and pushed her against the wall. Almost within the same movement his hand was between her legs and making painful intrusions.

Ellie felt helpless but, just as her spirit of resistance had all but gone, a group of lads appeared round the corner of the building.

Jacob backed off. She'd been rescued... for the moment. But when would the same thing happen again?

Zak was bogged down with schoolwork. The demands of selective-school were only too clear and the amount of homework

seemed endless. Ellie was never far from his thoughts and he couldn't get over how the half-dozen houses between where they lived might as well have been miles!

He'd only been with a girl this one time and he couldn't get away from the impact she'd had on his mind and body. He kept thinking that there must be a way out of the situation, but then he recalled Ellie telling him that Noble was quite capable of administering brutality to girls just as much as boys.

Zak wasn't concerned so much about himself, but he couldn't let anything bad happen to Ellie.

The weeks passed by quickly and before they knew it, winter had come and gone and the run-down towards the crucial GCSEs had started.

Then came a shock. Zak's parents sat him down and told him that his dad Sam, who was an engineer, had got a new job and was transferring to Liverpool. Zak and his mum would also be moving but the pair would stay in Bradford until after his exams.

Zak was upset, but he soon came to realise that there was no going back. Families move all the time and this was one such case.

Now he had to tell Ellie.

On three different occasions he called at the Grainger's house, but only when Zak refused to leave the doorstep did Ellie eventually appear.

When he told her the full story, this time, Ellie did leave her seat and sit next to him. They kissed, oblivious to the fact that one of her parents might enter the room at any moment.

"I love you, Zak," said Ellie. "I think I have since we met in infant school.

"The trouble is that life has a habit of taking people to places they don't always want. That musn't stop us from staying in touch. We can write regularly and when the time is right, we'll meet up again."

A rogue tear slipped down Zak's cheek.

"That's a promise," he said. "Wherever you are or whatever happens, there will come a time when I'll come back for you.

"But there's just one thing, Ellie. Nothing must ever give Noble the excuse or the opportunity to beat you up, or do anything worse to you. That cannot be allowed to happen."

The rest of the school year passed quickly and the exams had soon come and gone. Zak knew that within a matter of days he would be moving with his mother Frances to Liverpool, where they'd be joining up with his dad.