

# *Power of The Past*

**By Ella Dutton**

“Do we have to, Mum?” I moan. She seems intent on killing our legs by putting us through yet another tortuous walk.

“ Yes, we do have to, Tilly. Its exercise, and it’s good for you.” She says, rolling her eyes at my laziness.

Dad butted in, calling from the landing, “Tilly, listen to your mother!”

Jeez, I’ve not even gotten out of bed yet! Ever since Mum saw an article in a magazine about local landmarks , she has had us up and down the county doing these stupid walks. Today, apparently, we are going to Reigate Fort. I guess it might not be *too* bad. Maybe? One thing is for sure though – nothing would be better than spending the day snuggled in my cosy bed with a good book! I roll out of bed, grunting as I fall onto the floor, and I stumble over to my wardrobe to get dressed for the day.

An hour and a bowl of cereal later, we are in the car for the 20-minute drive to Reigate Hill. We park up, and the second that Sarah, my 4-year-old sister, sees that the café sells ice-cream, excitement lights up in her eyes. “Oh! Oh! Mummy, please can we get an ice-cream? *Pleeeeaase?* “ she begs.

“ Hmmm... maybe you can both have one when we get back.” Mum decides.

“ Do you promise? “ Sarah gives Mum her biggest, bluest puppy dog eyes, trying to look as innocent and adorable as possible. I must admit, she pulls it off well!

“ If you promise to be a good girl and not complain about having to walk, then I promise to get you both an ice-cream when we finish. “ Mum compromises. We set off, me and Sarah both desperate to get this walk done quickly, for different reasons though.

In a failed attempt to make the walk more interesting, Mum starts telling us about the history of the fort oblivious to my lack of interest. “Becky,” Dad hesitates,” Becky, I’m sorry but I don’t think they are paying much attention...” and she gives up. “How far from Reigate fort are we, Mum? “ I ask, unable to keep the boredom out of my voice.

“Don’t sound so deflated, sweetie, it isn’t just about the fort, it’s about spending time together as a family!” she chuckles.

For the next half-hour or so, until finally we reach what Dad points out to be Reigate Fort, I just wander slightly ahead, lost in the peaceful world of daydreams. Inexplicably, my interest suddenly peaks as we approach and I speed up a little; I am the first to open the screeching metal gate. I feel a weird pull, unlike anything I have ever felt. It drags me closer, like a magnetic bond. For some weird reason, I make a beeline to a partially obscured part of this strangely fascinating place. As if in as trance, I drift down a small flight of concrete stairs and

come to what looks to be an old cell block. I edge closer, now feeling more bizarre than ever. My cold fingers rest upon the metal bars. A spasm rips through my body. My body jolts. Distant shouting fills my ears. It isn't Mum, Dad or Sarah. I can't make out much but from the few lines I do pick up I hear something about an ammunition store and instinctively I know the voices come from World War 1. My head is thrown back, a gut-wrenching cry fills me. Sorrow hangs thick in the air. Someone had stood here; I can feel their presence, their pain and grief. They lost someone to the destructive, merciless grasp of war. A deafening shriek pierces the near silence, and I realise it is my own wail that I just heard. I step back, nausea taking over; I gag but thankfully don't throw up. Then the shouts recommence. People discussing something – I don't know what, though. Hang on, are they cracking codes? Then I remember mum said something about the Fort, it used to be a communications centre during World War 2, for the South East Command! My head spins, and I return dazedly from that other-worldly experience. Thank goodness. I take a swig of my water, silently grateful that Mum forced me to take it.

I start to head over to a grassy bank, overwhelmed at the traumatic yet fascinating sensation that I just went through. Surely it wasn't normal, I obviously won't be telling Mum or Dad – for now at least. I sit down in the grass, slumping exhaustedly against a mossy brick wall. Once again, the sensation takes over, but this time, instead of feeling sadness and fear, a sensation of warmth and joy fills me and nearly banishes the icy resentment I had for the outdoors. I hear the crackle and snap of a campfire; the laughter of children; the calls of adults warning them not to wander too far. Then I see the ghostly spirit of a child –12 or 13– runs past me. She slides through the metal bars, she's so slim, and hides in the gloom. Maybe it is a memory of a scout group, I heard they used to come here for camps and activities after the war had ended. It's genuinely lovely, the sudden sense of community I get from this memory that isn't mine. I sit up straight, and the feeling leaves me again. This time I feel no nausea, just wonder and amazement at my new ability. How long have I been able to do this?

I hear Mum calling; I must go now. "Coming, Mum!" I yell. She tells me that next week we're visiting friends in Royal Earlswood Park, and as there used to be a hospital there called '*Earlswood Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles*' the crazy possibilities of what could happen are practically infinite!