



This is what Fliss dreamed the night before the second year went to Whitby.

She was walking on a road high above the sea. It was dark. She was alone. Waves were breaking at the foot of cliffs to her left, and further out, the moonlight made a silver path on the water.

In front of her was a house. It was a tall house, looming blackly against the sky. There were many windows, all of them dark.

Fliss was afraid. She didn't want to go inside the house. She didn't even want to walk past but she had no control over her feet. They seemed to go by themselves, forcing her on.

She came to a gate. It was made of iron, worked into curly patterns. Near the top was a bit that was supposed to be a bird in flight – a seagull perhaps – but the gate had been painted black, and the paint had run and hardened into little stalactites along the bird's wings, making it look like a bat.

The gate opened by itself, and as she went through Fliss heard a voice that whispered, 'The Gate of Fate.' She was drawn along a short pathway and up some stone steps to the front door, which also opened by itself. 'The Keep of Sleep,' whispered the voice.

The door closed silently behind her. Moonlight shone coldly through a stained-glass panel into a gloomy hallway. At the far end were stairs that went up into blackness. She didn't want to climb that stairway but her feet drew her along the hallway and up.

She came to a landing with doors. The stairs took a turn and went on up. As Fliss climbed, it grew colder. There was another landing, more doors and another turn in the stair. Upward to a third landing, then a fourth, and then there were no more stairs. She was at the top of the house. There were four doors, each with a number. 10. 11. 12. 13. As she read the numbers, door thirteen swung inward with a squeal. 'No!' she whispered, but it was no use. Her feet carried her over the threshold and the voice hissed, 'The Room of Doom.'

In the room was a table. On the table stood a long, pale box. Fliss thought she knew what it was. It filled her with horror, and she whimpered helplessly as her feet drew her towards it. When she was close she saw a shape in the box and there

was a smell like damp earth. When she was very close the voice whispered, 'The Bed of Dread,' and then the shape sat up and reached out for her and she screamed. Her screams woke her and she lay damp and trembling in her bed.

Her mother came and switched on the light and looked down at her. 'What is it, Felicity? I thought I heard you scream.'

Fliss nodded. 'I had a dream, Mum. A nightmare.'

'Poor Fliss.' Her mother sat down on the bed and stroked her hair. 'It's all the excitement, I expect - thinking about going away tomorrow.' She smiled. 'Try to go back to sleep, dear. You've a long day ahead of you.'

Fliss clutched her mother's arm. 'I don't want to go, Mum.'

'What?'

'I don't want to go. I want to drop out of the trip.'

'But why - not just because of a silly dream, surely?'

'Well, yes, I suppose so, Mum. It was about Whitby, I think. A house by the sea.'

'A house?'

'Yes.' She shivered, remembering. 'I was in this house and something horrible was after me. Can I drop out, Mum?'

Her mother sighed. 'I suppose you could, Felicity, if you're as upset as all that. I could ring Mrs Evans first thing, tell her not to expect you, but you might feel differently in the morning.' She smiled. 'Daylight makes us forget our dreams, or else they seem funny – even the scary ones. Let's decide in the morning, eh?'

Fliss smiled wanly. 'OK.' She knew she wouldn't forget her dream, and that it would never seem funny. But it was all right. She was in control of her feet (she wiggled them under the covers to make sure), and they weren't going to take her anywhere she didn't want to go.



If you were a second year there was a different feel about arriving at school that morning. Your friends were standing around in groups by the gate with bags and cases and no uniform, watching the other kids trail down the drive to begin another week of lessons.

You'd be going into school yourself, of course, but only for a few minutes. Only long enough to answer your name and listen to some final instructions from Mr Joyce. There was a coach at the bottom of the drive – a gleaming blue-and-white coach with tinted windows and brilliant chrome, waiting to whisk you beyond the reach of chairs and tables and bells and blackboards and all the sights and sounds and smells of school, to freedom, adventure and the sea. A week. A whole week, tingling with possibilities and bright with promise.

Fliss had changed her mind. Waking to the sun

in her window and birds in the garden, she had thought about her friends, and the sea, and the things which were waiting there, and her dream of the night before had seemed misty and unreal, which of course it was. Her mother had been pleased, and had resisted the temptation to say 'I told you so.'

She'd managed to persuade her parents not to come and see her off. Some parents always did, even when their kids were just off on a day trip. Fliss thought it was daft. Talking in loud voices so everyone could hear, saying stuff like 'Wrap up warm and stay away from the water and don't forget to phone so we'll know you arrived in one piece.' Plonkers.

Lisa Watmough was among the crowd by the gate. She was wearing jeans and talking to a girl called Ellie-May Sunderland. Fliss didn't like Ellie-May much. Nobody did. She was sulky, spoilt and selfish. But never mind. They were off to the seaside, weren't they? Fliss joined them, putting her suitcase on the ground next to Lisa's. 'Hi, you two. Nice morning.'

'Yeah.' They smiled at the sky. 'I can't wait to get on that beach,' said Fliss.

'I can't wait to see the hotel,' said Lisa. 'Mr Hepworth says it's called The Crow's Nest. I hope we're in the same room, Fliss.'

'You won't be,' said Ellie-May. 'Our Shelley went last year and she says Mrs Evans splits you up from your friends so you don't play about at night.'

'She might not this year. It's a different hotel. And anyway, me and Fliss wouldn't play about, would we, Fliss?'

Fliss shook her head and Ellie-May sniggered. 'Try telling Mrs Evans that.'

Lisa looked at her watch. It was nearly ten to nine. 'We'd better move,' she said. 'The sooner we get the boring bit over, the sooner we'll be off.' They picked up their luggage and set off down the drive.

Mr Hepworth was standing by the coach. As the girls approached he called out, 'Come on you three - hurry up. Leave your cases by the back of the bus and go into the hall.' The driver was stowing luggage in the boot, watched by a knot of parents. The three girls deposited their cases and hurried into school.

All the second-year kids were lined up in the hall, waiting for Mr Joyce. As Fliss got into line she felt somebody's breath on her cheek and a voice whispered the word 'Dracula' in her ear. She turned round to find Gary Bazzard grinning at her. She scowled. 'What you on about?'

'I said Dracula.'

'I know that, you div – what about him?'

'Lives in Whitby, doesn't he?'

'Does he naff! He's dead for a start, and when he was alive he lived in Transylvania.'

'No.' The boy shook his shaggy head. 'Whitby. Old Hepworth told us. And he's not dead neither. He's undead. He sleeps in a coffin in the daytime and goes out at night.'

Fliss felt a flicker of unease as the boy's words recalled her dream, but the headmaster appeared at that moment and began to address the assembly. He spoke of rambles, ruins and rock-pools as the sun streamed in through high windows and anticipation shone in the eyes of his listeners, but Fliss gazed at the floor, her lip caught between her teeth.



They were off by twenty-five past nine, growling slowly up the drive while Mr Joyce and a handful of parents stood in a haze of exhaust, waving.

Fliss and Lisa managed to get seats together. Lisa had the one by the window. As the coach turned on to the road she twisted round for a last glimpse of the school. 'Goodbye, Bottomtop!' she cried. 'And good riddance.'

'That'll do, Lisa Watmough.'

Startled, she turned. Mrs Evans was sitting two rows behind, glaring at her through the space between headrests.

'Yes, Miss.' She faced the front, dug Fliss in the ribs and giggled. 'I didn't know she was sitting so close. Where's Mrs Marriott?'

'Back seat, so she can keep an eye on us all. And Mr Hepworth's up there with the driver.'

'Huh! Trust teachers to grab all the best seats. Who's this in front of us?' The tops of two heads

showed above the headrests.

'Gary Bazzard and David Trotter. I hope we're nowhere near them in the hotel.'

'You won't be,' said Ellie-May, who was sitting across the aisle from Fliss. 'Our Shelley says they put girls on one floor and boys on another so you don't see each other with nothing on.'

'Our Shelley,' sneered Fliss. 'Our Shelley says this, our Shelley says that. I hope we're not going to have a week of what our Shelley says, Ellie-May.'

'Huh!' Ellie-May tossed her head. 'I was telling you how it'll be, that's all, misery-guts. Anyway, you can naff off if you want to know owt else - you won't get it from me.'

'Good!' Fliss shuffled in her seat, turning as far from Ellie-May as she could, and sat scowling across Lisa at the passing scene.

Lisa looked at her. 'What's up with you?' she hissed. 'We're supposed to be enjoying ourselves and you look like somebody with toothache going into double maths.'

'It's her.' Fliss jerked her head in Ellie-May's direction. 'She gets on my nerves.'

'She was only telling you. You wanted to know if we'd be anywhere near Baz and Trot and she said we won't. What's wrong with that?'

Fliss shrugged. 'Nothing.'

'Well then.'

'I don't feel too good, right? I had this dream last night - a nightmare, and I couldn't sleep after it. And then this morning in the hall, Bazzard starts going on about Dracula. Saying he lives in Whitby, stuff like that, and I wasn't in the mood.'

Lisa pulled a face. 'No need to take it out on other people though, is there? You could go to sleep here, on the coach. Look - the seat tips back. Lie back and shut your eyes. There's nothing to look at anyway, unless you like the middle of Leeds.'

So Fliss pressed the button on the armrest and tipped her seat back, but then the boy in the seat behind yelled out that she was crushing his knees and demanded that she return it to its upright position. When she refused, settling back and closing her eyes, the boy, Grant Cooper, began rhythmically kicking the back of the seat, like somebody beating on a drum. Fliss sighed but kept her eyes closed, saying nothing. As she had anticipated, Mrs Evans soon noticed what the boy was up to. A hand came snaking through the gap between the headrests and grabbed a fistful of his hair. 'Ow!' he yelped. Mrs Evans rose, so that the top part of her face appeared over the seat. She began speaking very quietly to Grant Cooper, punctuating her words by alternately tightening

and relaxing her grip on his hair.

'Grant Cooper.' (Squeeze) 'The upholstery on that seat cost a lot of money.' (Squeeze) 'It was fitted to make this coach both smart and comfortable.' (Squeeze) 'It was not provided so that horrible little so-and-sos like you could use it for football practice.' (Squeeze) 'How d'you think your mother would like it if somebody came into your house and started kicking the back of her three-piece suite, eh?' (Squeeze) 'Eh?' (Squeeze) 'Like it, would she?' (Squeeze)

'Please, Miss, no, Miss.' Grant's eyes were watering copiously and his mouth was twisted into a grimace which would not have been out of place in a medieval torture-chamber.

'Well, then,' (Squeeze) 'kindly show the same respect for other people's property that your mother would expect to be shown to hers. All right, Grant Cooper?' (Squeeze)

'Yes, Miss.' The grip loosened. The hand withdrew. Grant slumped, like a man cut down from the whipping-post, and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. Mrs Evans' face sank from view. Fliss smiled faintly to herself, and drifted off to sleep.



Fliss opened her eyes as the coach swung into a tight turn which nearly catapulted her into the aisle. 'What's happening – where are we?'

'Pickering,' said Lisa. 'We're stopping. You've been asleep ages.'

Fliss looked out. They were rolling on to a big car-park with a wall round it. As the coach stopped, Mr Hepworth stood up at the front. 'This is Pickering,' he said. 'And we are making a toilet stop.' His eyes swept along the coach and locked on to those of a boy near the back. 'A toilet stop, Keith Halliday. Not a shopping stop. Not a sight-seeing stop. Not a "let's buy packets of greasy fish and chips, scoff the lot before Sir sees us and then throw up all over the coach" stop. Have I made myself quite clear?'

'Sir.'

'Right. The toilets,' he pointed, 'are down there at the bottom of this car-park. To get into them,

you have to go out on to the pavement. It's a very busy road, and I don't want to see anyone trying to cross it. Neither do I want to see boys going into the ladies' toilet, or girls into the gents'. Have I said something funny, Andrew Roberts?'

'No, Sir.'

'Right.' He looked at his watch. 'It's ten past eleven. The coach will leave here at twenty-five past on the dot. Make sure you're on it, because it's a long walk back to Bradford.'

'When we get back on,' whispered Fliss to Lisa, 'it's my turn for the window seat, right?'

Lisa nodded. 'You feeling better, then?'

'Yes, thanks. I had a lovely sleep.'

'I know. You missed a lot, though. There was this field – a sloping field with millions of poppies in it. The whole field was red. It was ace.'

When Fliss got back on the coach there was no sign of Lisa. She sat down and watched the kids straggling across the tarmac in the warm sunshine. Soon, everybody was back on board except her friend. The driver had started the engine and Mrs Marriott was counting heads when Lisa appeared from behind the toilet block and came hurrying to the coach. As she clambered aboard, Mr Hepworth looked at his watch. 'What time did I say we'd be leaving, Lisa Watmough?'

Some of the children were sniggering and Lisa

blushed. 'Twenty-five past, Sir. I forgot the time, Sir.'

'You forgot the time. Well, for your information it is now twenty-six minutes to twelve, and we'll be lucky if we arrive at the hotel by midday, which is when we are expected. The meal which is being prepared for us might well be ruined, and it will be all your fault, Lisa Watmough.' He bent forward suddenly, peering at her jeans. 'What have you got there?' Something was making a bulge in the pocket of Lisa's jeans and she was trying to conceal it with her hand.

'Nothing, Sir.'

'Take it out and give it to me.'

'It's just this, Sir.' She pulled out an object wrapped in tissue paper and handed it over. The teacher stripped away the wrapping to reveal a green plastic torch in the shape of a dragon. The bulb and its protective glass were in the dragon's gaping mouth. Mr Hepworth held up the torch, using only his thumb and forefinger, and looked at it with an expression of extreme distaste.

'Did you bring this – this thing with you from home, Lisa Watmough?'

'No, Sir.'

'Oh. Then I suppose there's a little kiosk inside the ladies' toilet where patrons can do a bit of shopping. Am I right?'



'No, Sir.'

The teacher frowned. 'Then I'm afraid I don't understand. You didn't bring it from home, and you didn't get it in the ladies'. You haven't been anywhere else, yet here it is. Perhaps you laid it, like a hen lays an egg. Did you?'

'No, Sir.'

'Then what did you do?'

'I went in a shop, Sir.'

'You did what?'

'Went in a shop, Sir.'

'And what had I said about shopping, Lisa Watmough, just before you got off the coach?'

'We weren't to do any, Sir.'

'Right. Then why did you go into that shop?'

'I don't know, Sir.'

'You don't know, and neither do I, but here's something I do know. This evening, when the rest of the group is listening to a story in the hotel lounge, you will be in your room writing two apologies – one to the children for having kept them waiting, and one to me for having disobeyed my instructions. When both apologies have been written to my satisfaction, this torch will be returned to you. In the meantime you can leave it with me. Go to your seat.'

'What the heck did you do that for?' whispered Fliss, as Lisa slid into her seat. Lisa was one of

those girls who seldom step out of line and are rarely in trouble at school.

She shook her head miserably. 'I don't know, Fliss. I don't even need a torch – I've got a better one at home. You'll think I'm crazy, but I couldn't help it – it was as though my feet were going by themselves.'

'Oh, don't you start,' groaned Fliss.

'What d'you mean?'

'Nothing. Forget it.' She looked out of the window. They passed a sign. North Yorkshire Moors National Park. The coach was climbing. Fliss gazed out as green pasture gave way to treeless desolation. She shivered.



'Hey look!'

A boy on the right-hand side near the front of the coach stood up and pointed. Everybody looked. Out of the bleak landscape rose three white, dome-shaped objects, like gigantic mushrooms breaking through the earth. As the coach carried them closer, they saw a scatter of low buildings and a fence. The great spheres, gleaming in the sunlight, looked like objects in a science-fiction movie.

'Wow! What are they, Sir?'

Mr Hepworth got up. 'That's the Fylingdales early-warning station,' he told them. 'Inside those domes is radar equipment, operated by the British and American forces. It maintains a round-the-clock watch for incoming missiles. They say it would give us a three-minute warning.' He smiled wryly. 'Three minutes in which to do whatever we haven't done yet and always wanted to.'

'What would you do, Sir?' asked a grinning Waseem Kader.

'What would I do?' The teacher thought for a moment. 'I think I'd get a brick and throw it through the biggest window I could find.' He smiled. 'I've always fancied that.'

'Oh, I wouldn't, Sir - I'd run to the Chinese and get chicken chop-suey ten times and gobble it right quick.'

'Yeah!' cried Sarah-Jane Potts. 'That's what I'd do and all - we wouldn't have to pay, would we, Sir?'

'I'd get a big club and smash our Shelley's head in,' said Ellie-May. 'I hate her.'

'There'd be no point, fathead!' sneered a boy behind her. 'She'd be dead in three minutes anyway.'

The noise level rose. Excited voices called back and forth across the coach as everybody tried to outdo everybody else in what they'd do with their last three minutes. The fact that many of them would have needed several hours or even days to carry out their plans was disregarded, and the discussion continued till the vehicle topped the highest rise and Mrs Marriott raised her voice, drawing everybody's attention to the ruins of Whitby Abbey, which were now visible in the hazy distance.

Gary Bazzard knelt, leering at Fliss over the back of his seat. 'See - that's where Dracula lives - in the ruins. Old Hepworth told us.'

'Old Hepworth told you no such thing.'

The boy's remark had coincided with a lull in conversation as everybody strained for a glimpse of the abbey, and Mr Hepworth had heard it. 'Old Hepworth told you that Bram Stoker, who created the character of Dracula, was inspired to do so after having seen the ruined abbey. Dracula does not live there or anywhere else. He is a figment of Stoker's imagination, Gary Bazzard, and sometimes I wish the same might be said of you.'

There was laughter at this. The boy's cheeks reddened as he resumed his seat. Fliss smiled faintly, gazing out at the distant ruins and beyond them to the sea.

It was ten past twelve when the coach drew up outside The Crow's Nest Hotel. Mr and Mrs Wilkinson, who ran it, were standing on the top step waiting for them. Lisa flushed, remembering what Mr Hepworth had said about it being all her fault. She hoped he wouldn't point her out to the Wilkinsons as the culprit.

'Check under your seats and on the luggage rack,' warned Mrs Marriott, as everybody stood up. 'Don't leave any of your property in the coach.' The children checked, then filed slowly along the

aisle and down on to the pavement. It was sunny, but a breeze blew from the sea, making it cooler than it would now be in Bradford. The driver went round the back and started unloading bags and cases, which their owners quickly claimed.

Fliss looked at the hotel. There was something vaguely familiar about the steps. The porch. Even the breeze, and the distant sound of the sea.

When everybody had their luggage Mr Hepworth led them into the hotel. Fliss looked at the iron bird on the black gate. For a moment she thought it was meant to be a gull, but then she remembered the name of the place and decided it was probably a crow. Somebody had made a poor job of painting it. Drips had run down to the edges of its wings and hardened there, giving them a webbed, spiky appearance, so that it looked more like a bat than a bird.