



'Right, listen!'

Lunch over, they had crammed themselves into the lounge with all their baggage, squeezing into chairs and settees, perching on the edges of tables, sitting on bags and cases on the floor while the three teachers sorted out room allocations and other matters with the Wilkinsons in the hallway. They had taken in the view from the bay window, looked at the prints round the walls and were starting to get restless when Mr Hepworth stuck his head through the doorway.

'I'm waiting, Andrew Roberts.' The noise faded as Andrew Roberts stopped using the top of his suitcase as a drum and everybody looked towards the teacher. 'There are bedrooms on four floors in this hotel, and two rooms to a floor. I'm going to give you your room numbers now, and tell you which floor your room is on. As soon as you know your floor and number, I want you

to pick up your luggage and walk quietly up to your room. What do I want you to do, Gemma Carlisle?'

'Sir, go up to our room, Sir.'

'And how do I want you to go?'

'Walking quietly, Sir.'

'Right.' Mr Hepworth glared about the crowded room from under dark, bushy eyebrows. 'Walking quietly. Not charging up the stairs like a crazed rhinoceros, swinging your case, smashing vases and screaming at the top of your voice. And when you find your room, go in and wait. Don't touch anything, and don't start fighting about whose bed is which, or who's going to have this wardrobe or that drawer. The teacher responsible for your floor will come and sort all that out as soon as possible.' He put on his spectacles and began reading from a list.

'Joanne O'Connor, Maureen O'Connor, Felicity Morgan and Marie Nero, top floor, room ten.'

'Aw, Sir -'

'Moaning already, Felicity?'

'Me and Lisa wanted to be together, Sir.'

'Well you're not, are you? We'd be here all day if we started trying to put everybody with their best friend. Off you go.' He scanned his list

again. 'Vicky Holmes, Samantha Storey and Lisa Watmough, top floor, room eleven.'

Fliss carried her case up the stairs. There were brown photographs in frames all the way up. Ships and boats with sails. Old-time fisherfolk in bulky clothes. A wave breaking over a jetty.

Room ten contained a pair of bunk-beds and a double bed. There were two wardrobes, a chest of drawers and a dressing-table. The carpet was green and thin. A small washbasin stood in one corner. A brown photograph on the wall showed two children playing with a toy boat in a rock-pool.

Maureen went to the window. 'Hey! We're ever so high. You can see the sea from here.' Joanne and Marie went to look. Fliss put her case down and joined them. Beyond the road an expanse of close-mown grass, bisected by a footpath, stretched almost to the clifftop. There were wooden seats at intervals along the footpath. Away to the left was something which might be a crazy-golf course, while to the right stood a shelter with benches and large windows, and a telephone kiosk. In the shelter an old woman sat. She was dressed in black, and seemed to be looking straight at them. Beyond all this, glinting blue-grey under the sun, lay the sea.

'Isn't it lovely?' breathed Marie.

'Hmm.' Maureen's eyes followed a gull that swooped and soared along the line of the cliff. Joanne peered towards the horizon and thought she could make out the long, low shape of a ship – a tanker, perhaps.

Fliss gazed out to sea too, but she wasn't looking for a ship. She was thinking, Marie's right. It is lovely, but not nearly so beautiful as at night, when the moon makes a silver path across the water.

Behind them somebody knocked loudly on the door and flung it open. 'Hey, Fliss!' It was Lisa. 'We're right next door – come and see our room.'

Fliss was starting towards the door when Mrs Marriott's voice sounded on the landing. 'What are you doing there, Lisa Watmough? Didn't you hear Mr Hepworth say you were to wait in your room?'

'Yes, Miss.' There was a scampering noise. Lisa's face disappeared. Fliss waited a moment then looked out. There was nobody on the landing. The door of number eleven was half-open, and she heard Mrs Marriott asking Lisa if she didn't think she'd caused enough trouble for one day.

There were two other doors. One had twelve on it, and Fliss guessed that was the bathroom. The other had no number, but she knew what

number it would have if it had. She was gazing at it, wondering what sort of room it concealed when Mrs Marriott came out of number eleven.

'Why are you standing there, Felicity Morgan?' she enquired.

'Please, Miss, I was just wondering what sort of room that is.' She pointed to the numberless door.

The teacher glanced at it. 'Linen cupboard, I should think.'

'It's big for a cupboard, Miss.'

The teacher nodded. 'Hotels need big cupboards, Felicity. All those sheets. Or it could be a broom cupboard, I suppose. Anyway, let's get your room organized.'

Felicity got the bottom bunk. She was glad. She hadn't fancied sharing the double bed. Mrs Marriott put Joanne and Maureen in that. They were twins, so that was all right. Marie had the top bunk. They had half an hour to unpack, put their things away and tidy up, then everybody was going down to the seafront for a look around.

Excited, anxious to be off, Fliss's three companions worked quickly. They chattered and giggled, but Fliss was silent. She was wondering when it was that she'd seen the sea under the moon, and noticing how broom rhymes with room, and also with doom.



It was three o'clock when the children gathered on the pavement outside the hotel. There were thirty-one of them, and Mr Hepworth split them into two groups of ten and one of eleven, with girls and boys in each group. 'Remember your group,' he said, 'because we'll be in groups a lot of the time while we're here.' Fliss found herself in Mrs Evans' group, and to her disgust Gary Bazzard was in it too. Gary was pretty disgusted himself, because his best friend David Trotter had ended up in Mrs Marriott's group. Lisa was in that group too.

It was breezy, but sunny and quite warm. The groups set off at intervals, turning right and walking in twos down North Terrace towards Captain Cook's monument and the whalebone arch. Fliss's group went second. As they passed the shelter, Fliss saw that the old woman was still there. She was gazing towards the hotel and seemed to be

talking to herself. The first group was looking at the monument, so Mrs Evans led them to the arch.

'Now: can anybody tell me why there should be a whalebone arch at Whitby?' she asked. 'Yes, Roger?'

'For people to walk through, Miss.'

'Yes, Roger, I know it's for people to walk through, but why should it be made from whalebone? Anybody?'

Tara Matejak raised her hand. She was Fliss's partner. 'Miss, because there were whaling ships at Whitby in the olden days.'

'That's right, Tara. And who knows why whales were valuable? Roger?'

'Oil, Miss. They used whale-oil for margarine and lamps and that. And they used the bones for women's dresses, Miss.'

'That's right.' Mrs Evans shielded her eyes with her hand and squinted up at the arch. 'What part of the whale's skeleton is this arch made from, d'you think?'

'Its jawbones, Miss,' said Maureen.

'Right. And they've put something on top, haven't they – it looks like an arrow. Can anybody guess what it actually is?'

Everybody gazed up at the object but nobody answered. After a moment Mrs Evans said, 'Well,

I'm not absolutely sure, but it looks to me like the tip of a harpoon. An old-fashioned harpoon – the sort they threw by hand from the bows of a whaleboat. Who's read *Moby Dick*?'

'Miss, I've seen *Jaws* on the telly.'

'What on earth has that got to do with it, Richard Varley?'

'Miss, nothing, Miss.'

'Then don't be so stupid, you silly boy!'

Nobody had read *Moby Dick*.

Mr Hepworth's group was now approaching, so Mrs Evans led Fliss and the others to Captain Cook's monument. They surrounded it, looking at the lengthy inscriptions on its plinth.

'Who can tell us something about Captain Cook?'

'Miss, he had one eye and one arm.'

'Rubbish, Michael Tostevin! That was Lord Nelson. Yes, Joanne?'

'He had a peg leg, Miss, and a parrot on his shoulder.'

'That was Long John Silver, dear – a fictitious character.' Mrs Evans sounded tired.

When they'd finished with Captain Cook, they went down a flight of stone steps on to a road called the Khyber Pass, and from there to the sea-front. There, Mrs Evans turned them loose for a while to join their classmates on the sands, while

she sank on to a bench which already supported her two colleagues.

Fliss found Lisa at the water's edge. 'What d'you think of it so far?'

Lisa pulled a face. 'Dead captains. Dead whales. Dead boring.'

Fliss laughed. 'It's OK down here though, isn't it?'

Lisa nodded. 'You bet. Let's find some flat pebbles and play at skimming.'



They played on the sand for an hour or so, until Mr Hepworth called them together at the foot of the slipway which connected the promenade with the beach.

'Right. What I thought we'd do between now and teatime is this: walk along the road here and have a look at the fish quay, then along the quayside to the swing-bridge and over into the old town. There are lots of interesting shops in the old town, including some specializing in Whitby jet. We could have a look in some of the windows, but I don't think we should shop today – otherwise some of us might run out of pocket-money halfway through the week. At the end of the old town is a flight of steps leading up to the abbey and a church. There are a lot of steps, and I want you to count them as we go up and tell me how many there are. We'll go in groups again – d'you know your group, Barry Tune?'

'Sir.'

'Good. Here we go, then.'

The three teachers moved apart and called their groups to them. The children got into twos, and this time Fliss had Gary for a partner. He grinned at her. 'Holding hands, are we?'

'No chance. I've to eat my tea with this hand when we get back.'

'I'll be using a knife and fork.'

'Ha, ha, ha.'

They looked at the fish dock, but there were no boats in and the sheds with their stacks of fish-boxes were shut. They went along the quayside, threading their way between strolling holiday-makers, looking in shop windows or at the different kinds of boats in the harbour. There was that exciting smell in the air which you get at the seaside – that blend of salt and mud and fish and sweet rotteness which has you breathing deeply and makes you tingle.

They were taking their time – the evening meal was not until six-thirty – and Fliss was looking at a coble with her name, *Felicity*, painted on its prow when Gary grabbed her hand and cried, 'Hey – look at this!'

'What?' She spoke irritably and jerked her hand away, but looked where he pointed and saw a narrow building with dark windows and a sign which

said 'The Dracula Experience'. A tall man with a pale face, dressed all in black, smiled from the doorway at the passing group. His teeth seemed quite ordinary.

Gary raised his hand and waved it at Mrs Evans. 'Miss – can we go in here, Miss, please?'

Mrs Evans, who had been looking out over the harbour, turned. She saw the building, read the sign, smiled faintly and shook her head. 'Not just now, Gary. On Thursday, everybody will be given some free time to shop for presents and spend what's left of their money in whatever way they choose. You'll be able to buy yourself some Dracula Experience then.' She looked into the eyes of the smiling man and added, loudly, 'If you must.'

They crossed the bridge and sauntered through the narrow streets of the old town till they came to the church steps. By the time they reached the top, Fliss was out of breath. She'd counted a hundred and ninety-seven steps but Mr Hepworth, whose group had got there first, said there were a hundred and ninety-nine and she believed him.

The top of the steps gave on to an old graveyard. Weathered stones leaned at various angles, so eroded you couldn't read the epitaphs. Long grass rippled in the wind. There was a church, and a breathtaking view of Whitby and the sea.

They had a look inside the church. It was called St Mary's. Mr Hepworth pointed out its special features. You could buy postcards and souvenirs by the door. Fliss bought a postcard of the ruined abbey to send home. When they were gathered outside she said, 'Are we going to the ruins, Sir?' She wasn't sure whether she wanted to or not.

'Not today, Felicity. We'll be looking at them on Wednesday morning, before we set off to walk to Saltwick Bay.'

They poked about in the churchyard for a while and visited the toilets near the abbey. Then they descended the hundred and ninety-nine steps and began making their way back to The Crow's Nest. The fresh air and exercise had sharpened everybody's appetite, and most of the children spent the walk back wondering what was for tea. Fliss did not. She was thinking about the landing at the top of the house, and what it would be like in the dark. The funny thing was, she seemed to know.



They got back in plenty of time for tea, which was eggs, chips and sausages, with swiss-roll and ice-cream for pudding. Afterwards everybody went upstairs to put on tracksuits and trainers. Mrs Marriott was taking them for a game of rounders on the sands. Lisa would be missing out, because of the apologies she had to write.

Gary Bazzard's room was one floor below Fliss's. Number seven. When she came down the stairs he was standing in the doorway showing something to a group of his friends, who were making admiring noises. As Fliss passed he called out, 'How about this, Fliss?'

She glanced in his direction. He was holding up the biggest stick of rock she'd ever seen. She didn't like him much, and would have loved to walk on with her nose in the air, but the pink stick really was enormous: nearly a metre long and about four centimetres thick. She stopped. 'Where

the heck did you get that from?' she asked, in what she hoped was a scornful voice.

'Shop on the quay. One pound fifty. No one saw me 'cause I stuck it down my jeans' leg.' His friends gasped and chuckled at his daring.

Fliss pulled a face. 'You're nuts. One pound fifty? I wouldn't give you fifty pence for it.'

'You wouldn't get chance.'

'It'll rot your teeth, so there.'

'You're only jealous.'

'I'm not. I hope Mr Hepworth catches you and hits you on the head with it.'

It was a good game of rounders. It was more fun than it might have been, because the tide was coming in and the strip of sand they were playing on grew narrower and narrower. People kept hitting the ball into the sea, and some of the fielders had to play barefoot so that they could retrieve it. Finally the pitch became so restricted that play was impossible. They wrapped up the game, retreated to the top of one of the concrete buttresses which protected the foot of the cliff and sat, watching the tide come in.

Cocoa and biscuits were served in the lounge at half-past eight. The children sat sipping and munching while twilight fell outside and Mrs Evans read them a story. Lisa came down with her written apologies. Mr Hepworth read them,

nodded, and gave her back her torch. It was nine o'clock. Bedtime.

Fliss was tired, but she couldn't sleep. It was fun at first, lying in the dark, talking with Marie and the twins, but one by one they drifted off to sleep and she was left listening to the muffled noises that rose from the boys' room below. After a while these too stopped, and then there was only the occasional creak, and the rhythmic shush of the sea.

She lay staring at the ceiling, waiting for her eyes to get tired. If the lids grew heavy enough they'd close, and then she'd drift off. She wouldn't even know she was lying in the dark, and when she woke up it would be morning and the first night – the worst night – would be over.

Phantom lights swam across her field of vision, lazily, like shoals of tiny fish. She watched them, but they failed to lull her, and presently it came to her that she would have to go to the bathroom.

She listened. If somebody else was awake somewhere it would be easier. A boy on the floor below perhaps, or one of the teachers. She looked at her watch. 23.56. Four minutes to midnight. Surely somebody was still about – the Wilkinsons, locking up for the night, or Mr Hepworth making a final patrol.

Silence. In all the world, only Fliss was awake.



She listened to the steady breathing of the other three girls. Why couldn't one of them have been a snorer? If somebody had been snoring she could have given them a shake. A policeman going by outside would be better than nothing – his footsteps might make her feel safe. But there was no policeman. There wasn't even a car.

The bed creaked as she sat up and swung her legs out. She listened. Nothing. The steady breathing continued. She hadn't disturbed anybody. Perhaps she'd have to put the light on to find the door – that would wake them. But no. There was moonlight and the curtains were thin and she could see quite clearly. It would be most unfair to wake them with the light.

She stood up and crept towards the door. There was sand in the carpet. A floorboard creaked and she paused, hopefully. One of the twins stirred, mumbling, and Fliss whispered, 'Maureen? Joanne?' but there was no response.

She opened the door a crack and looked out. The only illumination came from a small window on the half-landing below. It was minimal. She could make out the dark shapes of the doors but not the pattern on the carpet. The air had a musty smell and felt cold.

As she hesitated for a moment in the doorway, peering into the gloom and listening, she became

aware of a faint sound – the snuffling, grunting noise of somebody snoring beyond the door of room eleven. She found it oddly reassuring, and crossed the landing quickly in case it should stop.

Re-crossing a minute later with the hiss of the toilet cistern in her ears, she could still hear it. It seemed louder, and was accompanied now by a thin, whimpering noise, like crying. Fliss pulled a face. Somebody feeling homesick. Not Lisa, surely?

The idea that her friend might be in distress made her forget her fear for a moment. She took a couple of steps towards room eleven, unsure of what she intended to do. As she did so, she became aware that the noise was not coming from that room at all, but from the one next to it – the cupboard. Her eyes flicked to its door. On it, visible in the midnight gloom, was the number thirteen.

She recoiled, covering her mouth with her hand. When she had asked Mrs Marriott what lay beyond that door, there had been no number on it. She knew there hadn't, yet there it was. Thirteen. And somebody was in there. Somebody, or something.

She backed away. The hissing of the cistern dwindled and ceased. The other sounds continued, and now the whimpering was more persistent, and

the snuffling had a viscous quality to it, like a pig rooting in mud.

She retreated slowly, holding her breath. When she reached the doorway of her own room she backed through it, feeling for the doorknob and keeping her eyes fixed on the door of room thirteen. Once inside, she closed the door quickly, crossed to her bed and lay staring at the ceiling while spasms shook her body.

Much later, when the shivering had stopped and she was drifting to sleep, she thought she heard stealthy footsteps on the landing, but when she woke at seven with the sun in her face and her friends' excited chatter in her ears, she wondered whether she might have dreamed it all.



They gathered in the lounge after breakfast. Mr Hepworth had fixed a large map of the coast to the wall. He pointed. 'Here's Whitby, where we are. And here,' he slid his finger northward along the coastline, 'is Staithes, where the coach will drop us this morning. Staithes used to be an important fishing port like Whitby, and there are still a few fishermen there, but it is a quiet village now. Captain Cook worked in a shop at Staithes when he was very young – before he decided to be a sailor.'

'Will we be going in the shop, Sir?'

'No, Neil Atkinson, we will not. Unfortunately, it was washed away by the sea a long time ago. However, if we are very lucky we might see a ghost.'

There were gasps and exclamations at this. 'Captain Cook's ghost, Sir?' asked James Garside. The teacher shook his head, smiling. 'No, James.

Not Captain Cook's. A young girl's. There's a dangerous cliff at Staithes, a crumbling cliff, and the story goes that when this girl was walking under it one day, a chunk of rock fell and decapitated her. Who knows what decapitated means? Yes, Steven Jackson?

'Sir, knocked her cap off, Sir.'

'No. Michelle Webster?'

'Squashed her, Sir?'

'Closer, but not right. 'Ellie-May Sunderland?'

'Sir, knocked her head off, Sir.'

'Correct.' He leaned forward, peering at the girl through narrowed eyes. 'Are you all right, Ellie-May – you look a bit pasty?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Sure?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Right. Well, there's a bridge over a creek at Staithes, and that's where the headless ghost has been seen. We'll be having a look round the village, then walking along the clifftop path to Runswick Bay. That's here.' He jabbed at the map again. A boy raised his hand.

'What is it, Robert Field?'

'How far is it, Sir?'

The teacher shrugged, smiling. 'A few miles. We'll find somewhere to eat our packed lunches on the way, and the coach will be waiting at

Runswick to bring us back here. Right – it's a lovely sunny morning, so let's get started.'

Lisa saved Fliss a seat on the coach. As they roared along the coast road she said, 'We stayed awake ever so late in our room last night, talking. Telling jokes and that. It was brilliant.'

'You were all asleep before midnight, though,' said Fliss.

'How d'you know?'

'I passed your door at midnight. There wasn't a sound.'

'What were you doing, passing our door at midnight?'

'I went to the toilet. Or at least I think I did.'

'How d'you mean, you think you did – don't you know?'

Fliss pulled a face. 'No. It's all mixed up with this horrible dream I had.'

'What was it about, your dream?'

Fliss told her friend about the strange noises that had seemed to come from the linen cupboard, the number thirteen on the door, the footsteps she thought she'd heard later. 'It all seemed so real, Lisa. But then this morning I looked, and of course there was no number on the door and the sun was shining and everybody was shouting and messing about on the landing, and it didn't seem real any more. D'you know what I mean?'

Lisa nodded. 'Sure. It was all a dream – you didn't go to the toilet and you weren't outside our door at midnight so you don't know what time we went to sleep, right?'

'Right. Except –'

'Except what, Fliss? What is it?'

'After the toilet, I dreamed I washed my hands, right? And it was one of those spurty taps where the water comes all at once and goes everywhere. Some went on the floor. Quite a lot, in fact. There didn't seem to be anything to mop it up with, and anyway I was too scared to hang about so I left it.'

Lisa shrugged. 'Dream water in a dream bathroom. So what?'

Fliss looked at her friend. 'It was still there this morning,' she said.



They spent an hour in Staithes, but nobody saw the ghost. They saw crab pots piled by cottage doors and boats tied up in the creek. They stared at the dangerous cliff and tried to imagine what it would be like to be walking along quite normally one second, and to have no head the next. They bought sweets and ice-lollies and stood among their knapsacks and shoulder-bags, chatting and watching the waves while the teachers had a cup of tea. At eleven o'clock they picked up their bags and moved out, leaving the village by way of a steep, winding footpath which led to the clifftop and on out of sight. Mr Hepworth said, 'This is part of the Cleveland Way, and it will take us to Runswick Bay. It's a three-mile walk, more or less. About halfway, we'll stop and eat our lunches. There's no tearing hurry, but do try to keep up – the path runs very close to the cliff edge in places, and if there are stragglers it becomes