



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, wait-

ing 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 un-dead. 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.