



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 ride-dance.'

'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, Baz-zard 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 yelled. 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 grim-

ace 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.