



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 sightseeing 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.