



'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 at-

tention 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 some-

times 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.