



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.'