

The Names

‘Miss Trunchbull!’ Matilda cried, jumping about a foot in the air. ‘You mean *she* is your aunt? *She* brought you up?’

‘Yes,’ Miss Honey said.

‘No *wonder* you were terrified!’ Matilda cried. ‘The other day we saw her grab a girl by the pigtails and throw her over the playground fence!’

‘You haven’t seen anything,’ Miss Honey said. ‘After my father died, when I was five and a half, she used to make me bath myself all alone. And if she came up and thought I hadn’t washed properly she would push my head under the water and hold it there. But don’t get me started on what she used to do. That won’t help us at all.’

‘No,’ Matilda said, ‘it won’t.’

‘We came here,’ Miss Honey said, ‘to talk about *you* and I’ve been talking about nothing but myself the whole time. I feel like a fool. I am much more interested in just how much you can do with those amazing eyes of yours.’

‘I can move things,’ Matilda said. ‘I know I can. I can push things over.’

‘How would you like it,’ Miss Honey said, ‘if we made some very cautious experiments to see just how much you can move and push?’

Quite surprisingly, Matilda said, ‘If you don’t mind, Miss Honey, I think I would rather not. I want to go

home now and think and think about all the things I've heard this afternoon.'

Miss Honey stood up at once. 'Of course,' she said. 'I have kept you here far too long. Your mother will be starting to worry.'

'She never does that,' Matilda said, smiling. 'But I would like to go home now please, if you don't mind.'

'Come along then,' Miss Honey said. 'I'm sorry I gave you such a rotten tea.'

'You didn't at all,' Matilda said. 'I loved it.'

The two of them walked all the way to Matilda's house in complete silence. Miss Honey sensed that Matilda wanted it that way. The child seemed so lost in thought she hardly looked where she was walking, and when they reached the gate of Matilda's home, Miss Honey said, 'You had better forget everything I told you this afternoon.'

'I won't promise to do that,' Matilda said, 'but I will promise not to talk about it to anyone any more, not even to you.'

'I think that would be wise,' Miss Honey said.

'I won't promise to stop thinking about it, though, Miss Honey,' Matilda said. 'I've been thinking about it all the way back from your cottage and I believe I've got just a tiny little bit of an idea.'

'You mustn't,' Miss Honey said. 'Please forget it.'

'I would like to ask you three last things before I stop talking about it,' Matilda said. 'Please will you answer them, Miss Honey?'

Miss Honey smiled. It was extraordinary, she told



herself, how this little snippet of a girl seemed suddenly to be taking charge of her problems, and with such authority, too. 'Well,' she said, 'that depends on what the questions are.'

'The first thing is this,' Matilda said. 'What did Miss Trunchbull call *your father* when they were around the house at home?'

'I'm sure she called him Magnus,' Miss Honey said.

‘That was his first name.’

‘And what did your father call Miss Trunchbull?’

‘Her name is Agatha,’ Miss Honey said. ‘That’s what he would have called her.’

‘And lastly,’ Matilda said, ‘what did your father and Miss Trunchbull call *you* around the house?’

‘They called me Jenny,’ Miss Honey said.

Matilda pondered these answers very carefully. ‘Let me make sure I’ve got them right,’ she said. ‘In the house at home, your father was Magnus, Miss Trunchbull was Agatha and you were Jenny. Am I right?’

‘That is correct,’ Miss Honey said.

‘Thank you,’ Matilda said. ‘And now I won’t mention the subject any more.’

Miss Honey wondered what on earth was going on in the mind of this child. ‘Don’t do anything silly,’ she said.

Matilda laughed and turned away and ran up the path to her front-door, calling out as she went, ‘Good-bye, Miss Honey! Thank you so much for the tea.’

The Practice

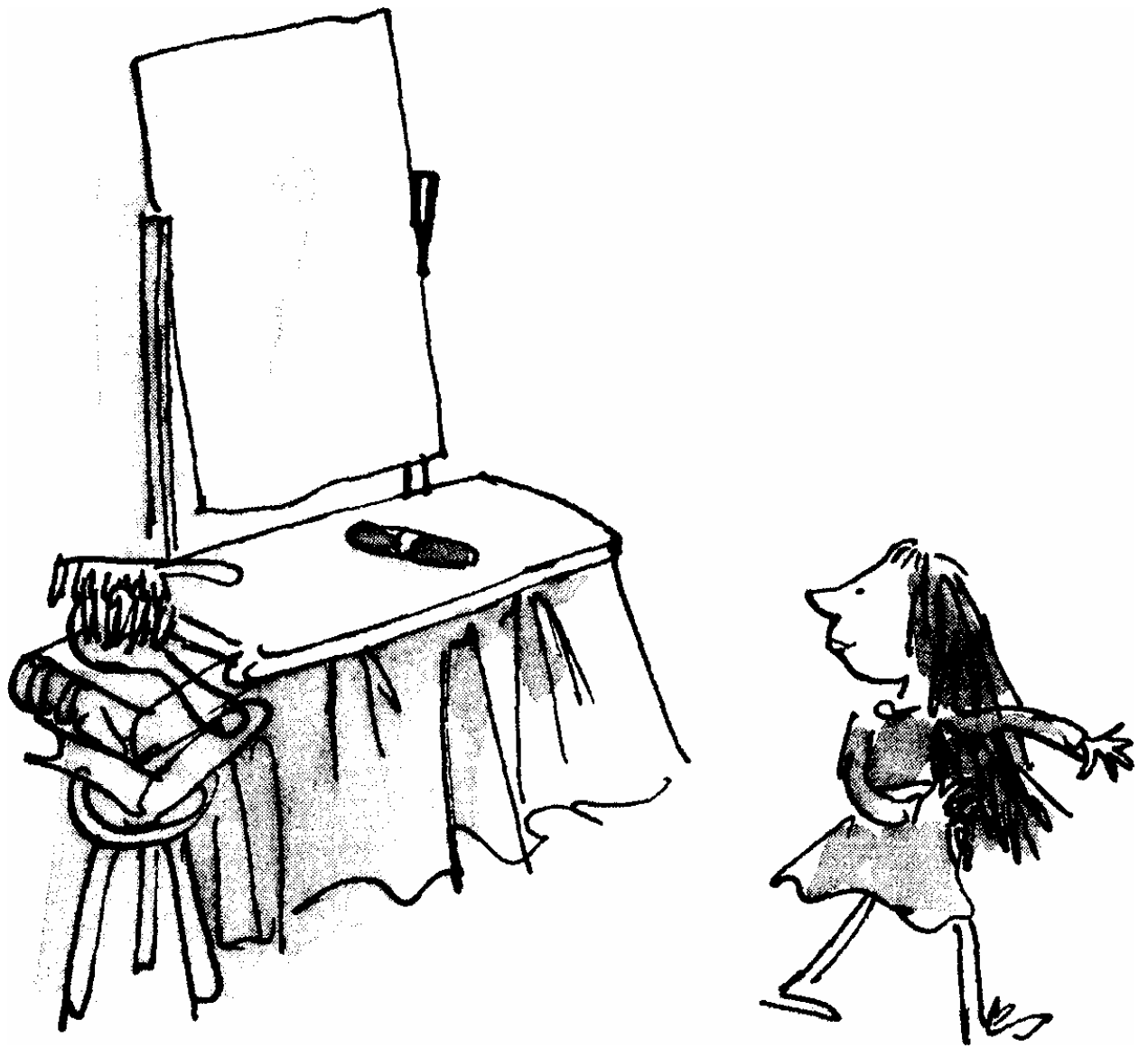
Matilda found the house empty as usual. Her father was not yet back from work, her mother was not yet back from bingo and her brother might be anywhere. She went straight into the living-room and opened the drawer of the sideboard where she knew her father kept a box of cigars. She took one out and carried it up to her bedroom and shut herself in.

Now for the practice, she told herself. It's going to be tough but I'm determined to do it.

Her plan for helping Miss Honey was beginning to form beautifully in her mind. She had it now in almost every detail, but in the end it all depended upon her being able to do one very special thing with her eye-power. She knew she wouldn't manage it right away, but she felt fairly confident that with a great deal of practice and effort, she would succeed in the end. The cigar was essential. It was perhaps a bit thicker than she would have liked, but the weight was about right. It would be fine for practising with.

There was a small dressing-table in Matilda's bedroom with her hairbrush and comb on it and two library books. She cleared these things to one side and laid the cigar down in the middle of the dressing-table. Then she walked away and sat on the end of her bed. She was now about ten feet from the cigar.

She settled herself and began to concentrate, and



very quickly this time she felt the electricity beginning to flow inside her head, gathering itself behind the eyes, and the eyes became hot and millions of tiny invisible hands began pushing out like sparks towards the cigar. 'Move!' she whispered, and to her intense surprise, almost at once, the cigar with its little red and gold paper band around its middle rolled away across the top of the dressing-table and fell on to the carpet.

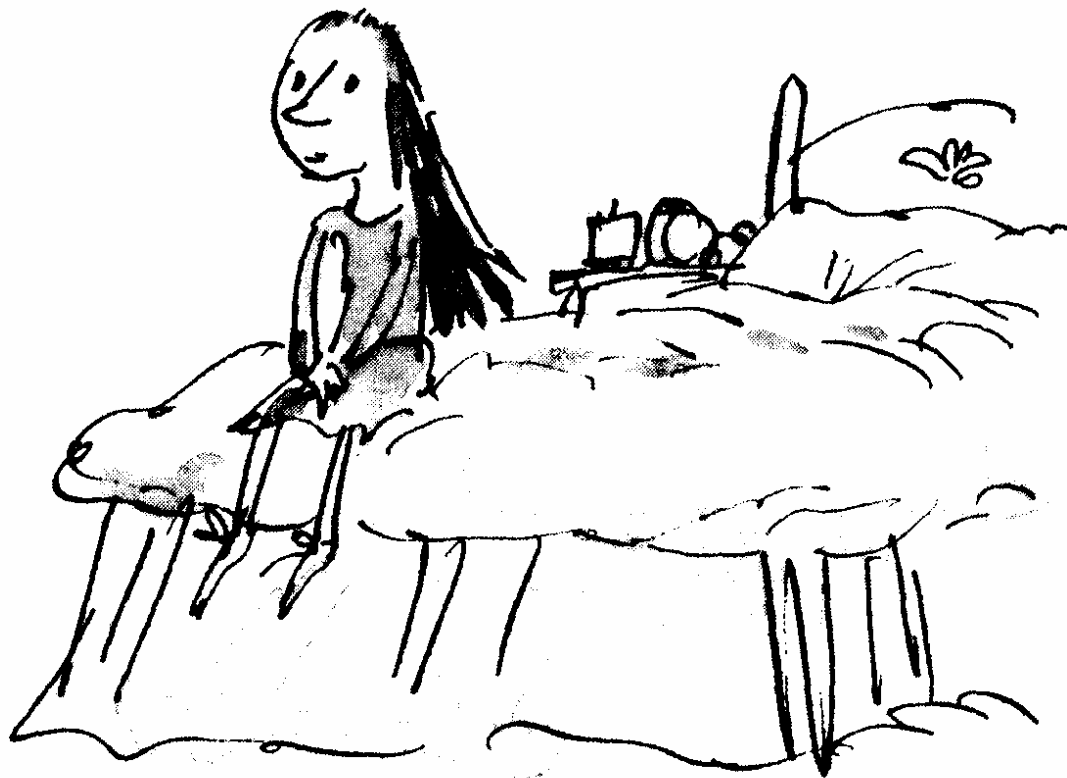
Matilda had enjoyed that. It was lovely doing it. It

had felt as though sparks were going round and round inside her head and flashing out of her eyes. It had given her a sense of power that was almost ethereal. And how quick it had been this time! How simple!

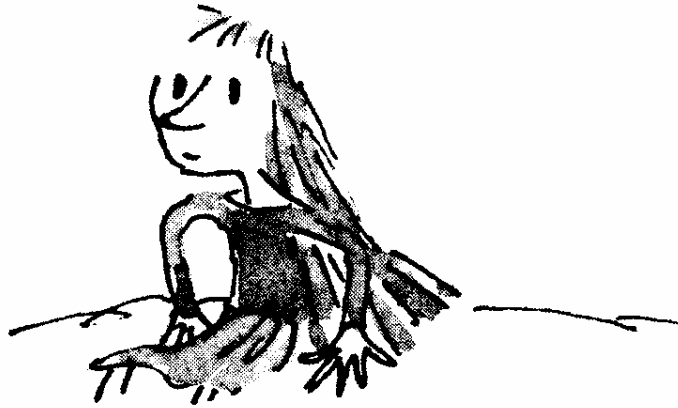
She crossed the bedroom and picked up the cigar and put it back on the table.

Now for the difficult one, she thought. But if I have the power to *push*, then surely I also have the power to *lift*? It is *vital* I learn how to lift it. I *must* learn how to lift it right up into the air and keep it there. It is not a very heavy thing, a cigar.

She sat on the end of the bed and started again. It was easy now to summon up the power behind her eyes. It was like pushing a trigger in the brain. '*Lift!*' she whispered. '*Lift! Lift!*'



At first the cigar started to roll away. But then, with Matilda concentrating fiercely, one end of it slowly lifted up about an inch off the table-top. With a colossal effort, she managed to hold it there for about ten seconds. Then it fell back again.



‘Phew!’ she gasped. ‘I’m getting it! I’m starting to do it!’

For the next hour, Matilda kept practising, and in the end she had managed, by the sheer power of her eyes, to lift the whole cigar clear off the table about six inches



into the air and hold it there for about a minute. Then suddenly she was so exhausted she fell back on the bed and went to sleep.



That was how her mother found her later in the evening.

‘What’s the matter with you?’ the mother said, waking her up. ‘Are you ill?’

‘Oh gosh,’ Matilda said, sitting up and looking around. ‘No. I’m all right. I was a bit tired, that’s all.’

From then on, every day after school, Matilda shut herself in her room and practised with the cigar. And soon it all began to come together in the most wonderful way. Six days later, by the following Wednesday evening, she was able not only to lift the cigar up into the air but also to move it around exactly as she wished. It was beautiful. ‘I can do it!’ she cried. ‘I can really do it! I can pick the cigar up just with my eye-power and push it and pull it in the air any way I want!’

All she had to do now was to put her great plan into action.

The Third Miracle

The next day was Thursday, and that, as the whole of Miss Honey's class knew, was the day on which the Headmistress would take charge of the first lesson after lunch.

In the morning Miss Honey said to them, 'One or two of you did not particularly enjoy the last occasion when the Headmistress took the class, so let us all try to be especially careful and clever today. How are your ears, Eric, after your last encounter with Miss Trunchbull?'

'She stretched them,' Eric said. 'My mother said she's positive they are bigger than they were.'

'And Rupert,' Miss Honey said, 'I am glad to see you didn't lose any of your hair after last Thursday.'

'My head was jolly sore afterwards,' Rupert said.

'And you, Nigel,' Miss Honey said, 'do please try not to be smart-aleck with the Headmistress today. You were really quite cheeky to her last week.'

'I hate her,' Nigel said.

'Try not to make it so obvious,' Miss Honey said. 'It doesn't pay. She's a very strong woman. She has muscles like steel ropes.'

'I wish I was grown up,' Nigel said. 'I'd knock her flat.'

'I doubt you would,' Miss Honey said. 'No one has ever got the better of her yet.'

‘What will she be testing us on this afternoon?’ a small girl asked.

‘Almost certainly the three-times table,’ Miss Honey said. ‘That’s what you are all meant to have learnt this past week. Make sure you know it.’

Lunch came and went.

After lunch, the class reassembled. Miss Honey stood at one side of the room. They all sat silent, apprehensive, waiting. And then, like some giant of doom, the enormous Trunchbull strode into the room in her green breeches and cotton smock. She went straight to her jug of water and lifted it up by the handle and peered inside.

‘I am glad to see,’ she said, ‘that there are no slimy creatures in my drinking-water this time. If there had been, then something exceptionally unpleasant would have happened to every single member of this class. And that includes you, Miss Honey.’

The class remained silent and very tense. They had learnt a bit about this tigress by now and nobody was about to take any chances.

‘Very well,’ boomed the Trunchbull. ‘Let us see how well you know your three-times table. Or to put it another way, let us see how badly Miss Honey has taught you the three-times table.’ The Trunchbull was standing in front of the class, legs apart, hands on hips, scowling at Miss Honey, who stood silent to one side.

Matilda, sitting motionless at her desk in the second row, was watching things very closely.

‘You!’ the Trunchbull shouted, pointing a finger the

size of a rolling-pin at a boy called Wilfred. Wilfred was on the extreme right of the front row. 'Stand up, you!' she shouted at him.

Wilfred stood up.

'Recite the three-times table backwards!' the Trunchbull barked.

'Backwards?' stammered Wilfred. 'But I haven't learnt it backwards.'

'There you are!' cried the Trunchbull, triumphant. 'She's taught you nothing! Miss Honey, why have you taught them absolutely nothing at all in the last week?'

'That is not true, Headmistress,' Miss Honey said. 'They have all learnt their three-times table. But I see no point in teaching it to them backwards. There is little point in teaching anything backwards. The whole object of life, Headmistress, is to go forwards. I venture to ask whether even you, for example, can spell a simple word like *wrong* backwards straight away. I very much doubt it.'

'Don't you get impertinent with me, Miss Honey!' the Trunchbull snapped, then she turned back to the unfortunate Wilfred. 'Very well, boy,' she said. 'Answer me this. I have seven apples, seven oranges and seven bananas. How many pieces of fruit do I have altogether? Hurry up! Get on with it! Give me the answer!'

'That's *adding up*!' Wilfred cried. 'That isn't the three-times table!'

'You blithering idiot!' shouted the Trunchbull. 'You festering gumboil! You fleabitten fungus! That *is* the three-times table! You have three separate lots of fruit

and each lot has seven pieces. 'Three sevens are twenty-one. Can't you see that, you stagnant cesspool! I'll give you one more chance. I have eight coconuts, eight monkey-nuts and eight nutty little idiots like you. How many nuts do I have altogether? Answer me quickly.'

Poor Wilfred was properly flustered. 'Wait!' he cried. 'Please wait! I've got to add up eight coconuts and eight monkey-nuts ...' He started counting on his fingers.

'You bursting blister!' yelled the Trunchbull. 'You moth-eaten maggot! This is *not* adding up! This is multiplication! The answer is three eights! Or is it eight threes? What is the difference between three eights and eight threes? Tell me that, you mangled little wurzel, and look sharp about it!'

By now Wilfred was far too frightened and bewildered even to speak.

In two strides the Trunchbull was beside him, and by some amazing gymnastic trick, it may have been judo or karate, she flipped the back of Wilfred's legs with one of her feet so that the boy shot up off the ground and turned a somersault in the air. But halfway through the somersault she caught him by an ankle and held him dangling upside-down like a plucked chicken in a shop-window.

'Eight threes,' the Trunchbull shouted, swinging Wilfred from side to side by his ankle, 'eight threes is the same as three eights and three eights are twenty-four! Repeat that!'



At exactly that moment Nigel, at the other end of the room, jumped to his feet and started pointing excitedly at the blackboard and screaming, 'The chalk! The chalk! Look at the chalk! It's moving all on its own!'

So hysterical and shrill was Nigel's scream that everyone in the place, including the Trunchbull, looked up at the blackboard. And there, sure enough, a brand-new piece of chalk was hovering near the grey-black

writing surface of the blackboard.

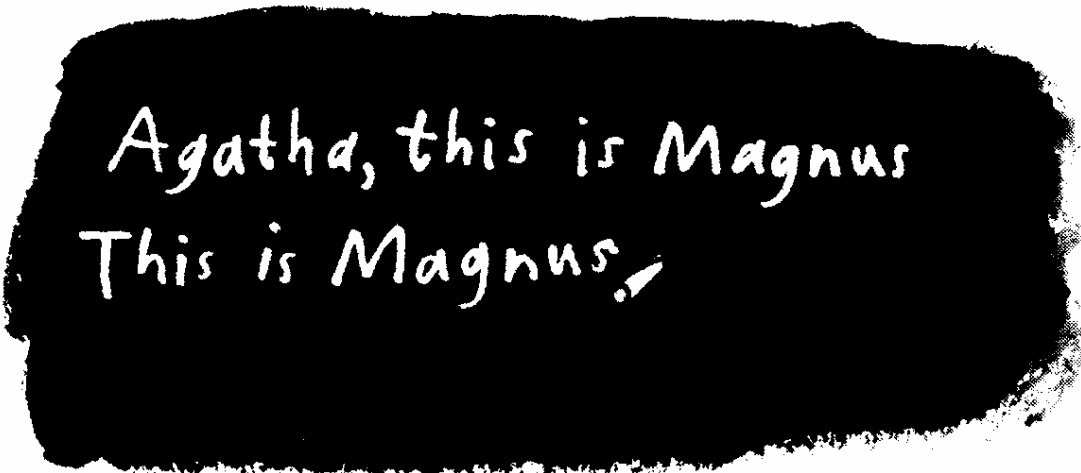
'It's writing something!' screamed Nigel. *'The chalk is writing something!'*

And indeed it was.



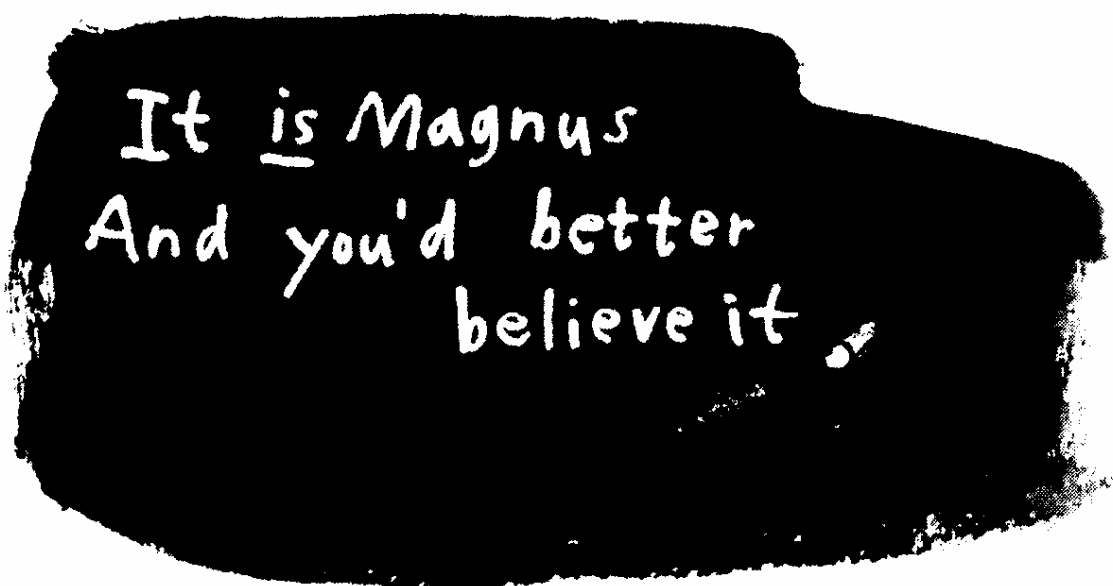
'What the blazes is this?' yelled the Trunchbull. It had shaken her to see her own first name being written like that by an invisible hand. She dropped Wilfred on to the floor. Then she yelled at nobody in particular, *'Who's doing this? Who's writing it?'*

The chalk continued to write.



Agatha, this is Magnus
This is Magnus.

Everyone in the place heard the gasp that came from the Trunchbull's throat. 'No!' she cried. 'It can't be! It can't be Magnus!'



It is Magnus
And you'd better
believe it.

Miss Honey, at the side of the room glanced swiftly at Matilda. The child was sitting very straight at her desk, the head held high, the mouth compressed, the eyes glittering like two stars.

Agatha, give my Jenny
back her house !

For some reason everyone now looked at the Trunchbull. The woman's face had turned white as snow and her mouth was opening and shutting like a halibut out of water and giving out a series of strangled gasps.



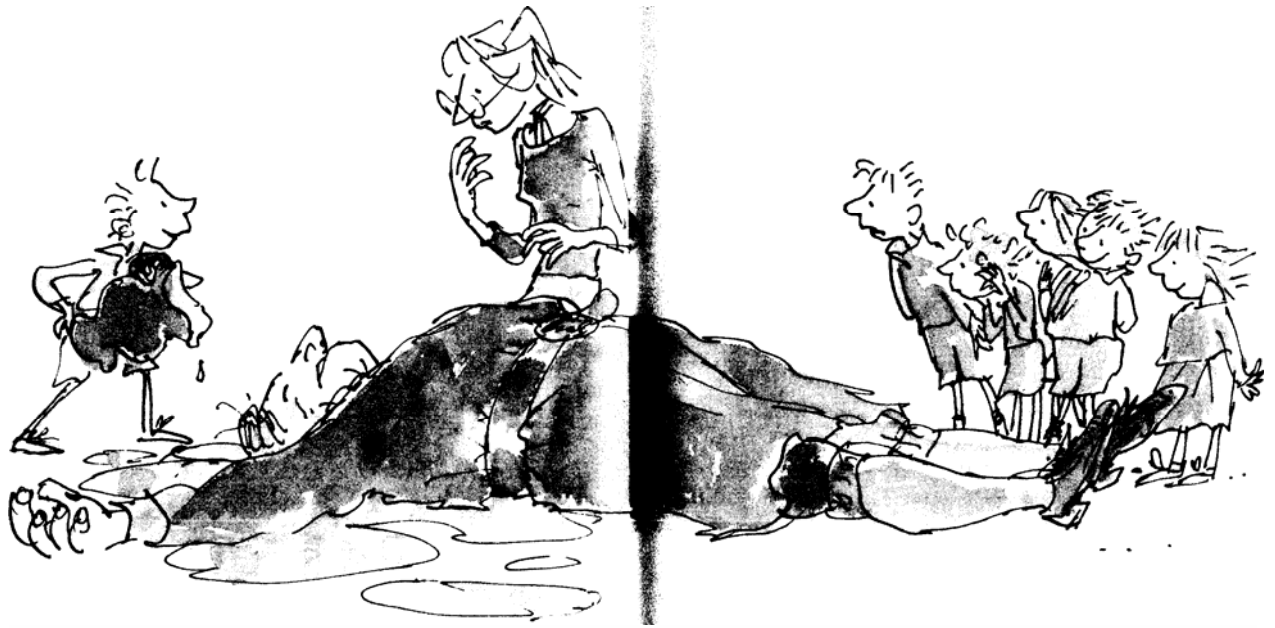
Give my Jenny her wages
Give my Jenny the house
Then get out of here.
If you don't, I will come
and get you
I will come and get you
like you got me.
I am watching you
Agatha _.

The chalk stopped writing. It hovered for a few moments, then suddenly it dropped to the floor with a tinkle and broke in two.



Wilfred, who had managed to resume his seat in the front row, screamed, 'Miss Trunchbull has fallen down! Miss Trunchbull is on the floor!'

This was the most sensational bit of news of all and the entire class jumped up out of their seats to have a really good look. And there she was, the huge figure of the Headmistress, stretched full-length on her back across the floor, out for the count.



Miss Honey ran forward and knelt beside the prostrate giant. 'She's fainted!' she cried. 'She's out cold! Someone go and fetch the matron at once.' Three children ran out of the room.

Nigel, always ready for action, leapt up and seized the big jug of water. 'My father says cold water is the best way to wake up someone who's fainted,' he said, and with that he tipped the entire contents of the jug over the Trunchbull's head. No one, not even Miss Honey, protested.

As for Matilda, she continued to sit motionless at her desk. She was feeling curiously elated. She felt as though she had touched something that was not quite of this world, the highest point of the heavens, the farthest star. She had felt most wonderfully the power surging up behind her eyes, gushing like a warm fluid inside her skull, and her eyes had become scorching hot, hotter than ever before, and things had come bursting out of her eye-sockets and then the piece of chalk had lifted itself up and had begun to write. It

seemed as though she had hardly done anything, it had all been so simple.

The school matron, followed by five teachers, three women and two men, came rushing into the room.

‘By golly, somebody’s floored her at last!’ cried one of the men, grinning. ‘Congratulations, Miss Honey!’

‘Who threw the water over her?’ asked the matron.

‘I did,’ said Nigel proudly.

‘Good for you,’ another teacher said. ‘Shall we get some more?’

‘Stop that,’ the matron said. ‘We must carry her up to the sick-room.’

It took all five teachers and the matron to lift the enormous woman and stagger with her out of the room.

Miss Honey said to the class, ‘I think you’d all better go out to the playground and amuse yourselves until the next lesson.’ Then she turned and walked over to the blackboard and carefully wiped out all the chalk writing.

The children began filing out of the classroom. Matilda started to go with them, but as she passed Miss Honey she paused and her twinkling eyes met the teacher’s eyes and Miss Honey ran forward and gave the tiny child a great big hug and a kiss.

A New Home

Later that day, the news began to spread that the Headmistress had recovered from her fainting-fit and had then marched out of the school building tight-lipped and white in the face.

The next morning she did not turn up at school. At lunchtime, Mr Trilby, the Deputy Head, telephoned her house to enquire if she was feeling unwell. There was no answer to the phone.

When school was over, Mr Trilby decided to investigate further, so he walked to the house where Miss Trunchbull lived on the edge of the village, the lovely small red-brick Georgian building known as The Red House, tucked away in the woods behind the hills.

He rang the bell. No answer.

He knocked loudly. No answer.

He called out, 'Is anybody at home?' No answer.

He tried the door and to his surprise found it unlocked. He went in.

The house was silent and there was no one in it, and yet all the furniture was still in place. Mr Trilby went upstairs to the main bedroom. Here also everything seemed to be normal until he started opening drawers and looking into cupboards. There were no clothes or underclothes or shoes anywhere. They had all gone.

She's done a bunk, Mr Trilby said to himself, and he went away to inform the School Governors that the

Headmistress had apparently vanished.

On the second morning, Miss Honey received by registered post a letter from a firm of local solicitors informing her that the last will and testament of her late father, Dr Honey, had suddenly and mysteriously turned up. This document revealed that ever since her father's death, Miss Honey had in fact been the rightful owner of a property on the edge of the village known as The Red House, which until recently had been occupied by a Miss Agatha Trunchbull. The will also showed that her father's lifetime savings, which fortunately were still safely in the bank, had also been left to her. The solicitor's letter added that if Miss Honey would kindly call in to the office as soon as possible, then the property and the money could be transferred into her name very rapidly.

Miss Honey did just that, and within a couple of weeks she had moved into The Red House, the very place in which she had been brought up and where luckily all the family furniture and pictures were still around. From then on, Matilda was a welcome visitor to The Red House every single evening after school, and a very close friendship began to develop between the teacher and the small child.

Back at school, great changes were also taking place. As soon as it became clear that Miss Trunchbull had completely disappeared from the scene, the excellent Mr Trilby was appointed Head Teacher in her place. And very soon after that, Matilda was moved up into the top form, where Miss Plimsoll quickly discovered

that this amazing child was every bit as bright as Miss Honey had said.

One evening a few weeks later, Matilda was having tea with Miss Honey in the kitchen of The Red House after school as they always did, when Matilda said suddenly, 'Something strange has happened to me, Miss Honey.'

'Tell me about it,' Miss Honey said.

'This morning,' Matilda said, 'just for fun I tried to push something over with my eyes and I couldn't do it. Nothing moved. I didn't even feel the hotness building up behind my eyeballs. The power had gone. I think I've lost it completely.'

Miss Honey carefully buttered a slice of brown bread and put a little strawberry jam on it. 'I've been expecting something like that to happen,' she said.

'You have? Why?' Matilda asked.

'Well,' Miss Honey said, 'it's only a guess, but here's what I think. While you were in my class you had nothing to do, nothing to make you struggle. Your fairly enormous brain was going crazy with frustration. It was bubbling and boiling away like mad inside your head. There was tremendous energy bottled up in there with nowhere to go, and somehow or other you were able to shoot that energy out through your eyes and make objects move. But now things are different. You are in the top form competing against children more than twice your age and all that mental energy is being used up in class. Your brain is for the first time having to struggle and strive and keep really busy,



which is great. That's only a theory, mind you, and it may be a silly one, but I don't think it's far off the mark.'

'I'm glad it's happened,' Matilda said. 'I wouldn't want to go through life as a miracle-worker.'

'You've done enough,' Miss Honey said. 'I can still hardly believe you made all this happen for me.'

Matilda, who was perched on a tall stool at the kitchen table, ate her bread and jam slowly. She did so love these afternoons with Miss Honey. She felt completely comfortable in her presence, and the two of them talked to each other more or less as equals.

'Did you know,' Matilda said suddenly, 'that the heart of a mouse beats at the rate of *six hundred and fifty times a minute?*'

'I did not,' Miss Honey said smiling. 'How absolutely fascinating. Where did you read that?'

‘In a book from the library,’ Matilda said. ‘And that means it goes so fast you can’t even hear the separate beats. It must sound just like a buzz.’

‘It must,’ Miss Honey said.

‘And how fast do you think a hedgehog’s heart beats?’ Matilda asked.

‘Tell me,’ Miss Honey said, smiling again.

‘It’s not as fast as a mouse,’ Matilda said. ‘It’s three hundred times a minute. But even so, you wouldn’t have thought it went as fast as that in a creature that moves so slowly, would you, Miss Honey?’

‘I certainly wouldn’t,’ Miss Honey said. ‘Tell me one more.’

‘A horse,’ Matilda said. ‘That’s really slow. It’s only forty times a minute.’

This child, Miss Honey told herself, seems to be interested in everything. When one is with her it is impossible to be bored. I love it.

The two of them stayed sitting and talking in the kitchen for an hour or so longer, and then, at about six o’clock, Matilda said goodnight and set out to walk home to her parents’ house, which was about an eight-minute journey away. When she arrived at her own gate, she saw a large black Mercedes motor-car parked outside. She didn’t take too much notice of that. There were often strange cars parked outside her father’s place. But when she entered the house, she was confronted by a scene of utter chaos. Her mother and father were both in the hall frantically stuffing clothing and various objects into suitcases.



‘What on earth’s going on?’ she cried. ‘What’s happening, Daddy?’

‘We’re off,’ Mr Wormwood said, not looking up. ‘We’re leaving for the airport in half an hour so you’d better get packed. Your brother’s upstairs all ready to go. Get a move on, girl! Get going!’

‘Off?’ Matilda cried out. ‘Where to?’

‘Spain,’ the father said. ‘It’s a better climate than this lousy country.’

‘Spain!’ Matilda cried. ‘I don’t want to go to Spain! I love it here and I love my school!’

‘Just do as you’re told and stop arguing,’ the father snapped. ‘I’ve got enough troubles without messing about with you!’

‘But Daddy . . .’ Matilda began.

‘Shut up!’ the father shouted. ‘We’re leaving in thirty minutes! I’m not missing that plane!’

‘But how long for, Daddy?’ Matilda cried. ‘When are we coming back?’

‘We aren’t,’ the father said. ‘Now beat it! I’m busy!’

Matilda turned away from him and walked out through the open front-door. As soon as she was on the road she began to run. She headed straight back towards Miss Honey’s house and she reached it in less than four minutes. She flew up the drive and suddenly she saw Miss Honey in the front garden, standing in the middle of a bed of roses doing something with a pair of clippers. Miss Honey had heard the sound of Matilda’s feet racing over the gravel and now she straightened up and turned and stepped out of the rose-bed as the child came running up.

‘My, my!’ she said. ‘What in the world is the matter?’

Matilda stood before her, panting, out of breath, her small face flushed crimson all over.

‘They’re *leaving*!’ she cried. ‘They’ve all gone mad and they’re filling their suitcases and they’re leaving for Spain in about thirty minutes!’

‘Who is?’ Miss Honey asked quietly.

‘Mummy and Daddy and my brother Mike and they say I’ve got to go with them!’



'You mean for a holiday?' Miss Honey asked.

'For *ever*!' Matilda cried. 'Daddy said we were *never* coming back!'

There was a brief silence, then Miss Honey said, 'Actually I'm not very surprised.'

'You mean you *knew* they were going?' Matilda cried. 'Why didn't you tell me?'

'No, darling,' Miss Honey said. 'I did not know they were going. But the news still doesn't surprise me.'

'Why?' Matilda cried. 'Please tell me why.' She was still out of breath from the running and from the shock of it all.

'Because your father,' Miss Honey said, 'is in with a bunch of crooks. Everyone in the village knows that. My guess is that he is a receiver of stolen cars from all over the country. He's in it deep.'

Matilda stared at her open-mouthed.

Miss Honey went on, 'People brought stolen cars to

your father's workshop where he changed the number-plates and resprayed the bodies a different colour and all the rest of it. And now somebody's probably tipped him off that the police are on to him and he's doing what they all do, running off to Spain where they can't get him. He'll have been sending his money out there for years, all ready and waiting for him to arrive.'

They were standing on the lawn in front of the lovely red-brick house with its weathered old red tiles and its tall chimneys, and Miss Honey still had the pair of garden clippers in one hand. It was a warm golden evening and a blackbird was singing somewhere near by.

'I don't want to go with them!' Matilda shouted suddenly. 'I won't go with them.'

'I'm afraid you must,' Miss Honey said.

'I want to live here with you,' Matilda cried out. 'Please let me live here with you!'

'I only wish you could,' Miss Honey said. 'But I'm afraid it's not possible. You cannot leave your parents just because you want to. They have a right to take you with them.'

'But what if they agreed?' Matilda cried eagerly. 'What if they said yes, I can stay with you? Would you let me stay with you then?'

Miss Honey said softly, 'Yes, that would be heaven.'

'Well, I think they might!' Matilda cried. 'I honestly think they might! They don't actually care tuppence about me!'

'Not so fast,' Miss Honey said.



‘We’ve got to be fast!’ Matilda cried. ‘They’re leaving any moment! Come on!’ she shouted, grasping Miss Honey’s hand. ‘Please come with me and ask them! But we’ll have to hurry! We’ll have to run!’

The next moment the two of them

were running down the drive together and then out on to the road, and Matilda was ahead, pulling Miss

Honey after her by her wrist, and it was a wild and wonderful dash they made along the country lane and through the village to the house where Matilda’s parents lived. The big black Mercedes was still outside and now its boot and all its doors were open and Mr and Mrs Wormwood and the brother were scurrying around it like ants, piling in the suitcases, as Matilda and Miss Honey came dashing up.

‘Daddy and Mummy!’ Matilda burst out, gasping for breath. ‘I don’t want to go with you! I want to stay here and live with Miss Honey and she says that I can but only if you give me permission! Please say yes! Go on, Daddy, say yes! Say yes, Mummy!’

The father turned and looked at Miss Honey. ‘You’re

that teacher woman who once came here to see me, aren't you?' he said. Then he went back to stowing the suitcases into the car.

His wife said to him, 'This one'll have to go on the back seat. There's no more room in the boot.'

'I would love to have Matilda,' Miss Honey said. 'I would look after her with loving care, Mr Wormwood, and I would pay for everything. She wouldn't cost you a penny. But it was not my idea. It was Matilda's. And I will not agree to take her without your full and willing consent.'

'Come on, Harry,' the mother said, pushing a suitcase into the back seat. 'Why don't we let her go if that's what she wants. It'll be one less to look after.'

'I'm in a hurry,' the father said. 'I've got a plane to catch. If she wants to stay, let her stay. It's fine with me.'

Matilda leapt into Miss Honey's arms and hugged her, and Miss Honey hugged her back, and then the mother and father and brother were inside the car and the car was pulling away with the tyres screaming. The brother gave a wave through the rear window, but the other two didn't even look back. Miss Honey was still hugging the tiny girl in her arms and neither of them said a word as they stood there watching the big black car tearing round the corner at the end of the road and disappearing for ever into the distance.

