

The First Miracle

Matilda sat down again at her desk. The Trunchbull seated herself behind the teacher's table. It was the first time she had sat down during the lesson. Then she reached out a hand and took hold of her water-jug. Still holding the jug by the handle but not lifting it yet, she said, "I have never been able to understand why small children are so disgusting. They are the bane of my life. They are like insects. They should be got rid of as early as possible. We get rid of flies with fly-spray and by hanging up fly-paper. I have often thought of inventing a spray for getting rid of small children. How splendid it would be to walk into this classroom with a gigantic spray-gun in my hands and start pumping it. Or better still, some huge strips of sticky paper. I would hang them all round the school and you'd all get stuck to them and that would be the end of it. Wouldn't that be a good idea, Miss Honey?"

"If it's meant to be a joke, Headmistress, I don't think it's a very funny one," Miss Honey said from the back of the class.

"You wouldn't, would you, Miss Honey?" the Trunchbull said. "And it's *not* meant to be a joke. My idea of a perfect school, Miss Honey, is one that has no children in it at all. One of these days I shall start up a school like that. I think it will be very successful."

The woman's mad, Miss Honey was telling herself.

She's round the twist. She's the one who ought to be got rid of.

The Trunchbull now lifted the large blue porcelain water-jug and poured some water into her glass. And suddenly, with the water, out came the long slimy newt straight into the glass, *plop!*



The Trunchbull let out a yell and leapt off her chair as though a firecracker had gone off underneath her. And now the children also saw the long thin slimy yellow-bellied lizard-like creature twisting and turning in the glass, and they squirmed and jumped about as well, shouting, "What is it? Oh, it's disgusting! It's a snake! It's a baby crocodile! It's an alligator!"

"Look out, Miss Trunchbull!" cried Lavender. "I'll bet it bites!"

The Trunchbull, this mighty female giant, stood there in her green breeches, quivering like a blanc-mange. She was especially furious that someone had succeeded in making her jump and yell like that because she prided herself on her toughness. She stared at the creature twisting and wriggling in the glass. Curiously enough, she had never seen a newt before. Natural history was not her strong point. She hadn't the faintest idea what this thing was. It certainly looked extremely unpleasant. Slowly she sat down again in her chair. She looked at this moment more terrifying than ever before. The fires of fury and hatred were smouldering in her small black eyes.

"Matilda!" she barked. "Stand up!"

"Who, me?" Matilda said. "What have *I* done?"

"Stand up, you disgusting little cockroach!"

"I haven't done anything, Miss Trunchbull, honestly I haven't. I've never seen that slimy thing before!"

"Stand up at once, you filthy little maggot!"

Reluctantly, Matilda got to her feet. She was in the second row. Lavender was in the row behind her,

feeling a bit guilty. She hadn't intended to get her friend into trouble. On the other hand, she was certainly not about to own up.

"You are a vile, repulsive, repellent, malicious little brute!" the Trunchbull was shouting. "You are not fit to be in this school! You ought to be behind bars, that's where you ought to be! I shall have you drummed out of this establishment in utter disgrace! I shall have the prefects chase you down the corridor and out of the front-door with hockey-sticks! I shall have the staff escort you home under armed guard!

And then I shall make absolutely sure you are sent to a reformatory for delinquent girls for the minimum of forty years!"



The Trunchbull was in such a rage that her face had taken on a boiled colour and little flecks of froth were gathering at the corners of her mouth. But she was not the only one who was losing her cool. Matilda was also beginning to see red. She didn't in the least mind being accused of having done something she had actually done. She could see the justice of that. It was, however, a totally new experience for her to be accused of a crime that she definitely had not committed. She had had absolutely nothing to do with that beastly creature in the glass. By golly, she thought, that rotten Trunchbull isn't going to pin this one on me!



"I did not do it!" she screamed.

"Oh yes, you did!" the Trunchbull roared back. "Nobody else could have thought up a trick like that! Your father was right to warn me about you!" The woman seemed to have lost control of herself completely. She was ranting like a maniac. "You are finished in this school, young lady!" she shouted. "You are finished everywhere. I shall personally see to it that you are put away in a place where not even the crows can land their droppings on you! You will probably never see the light of day again!"

"I'm telling you I did not do it!" Matilda screamed. "I've never even seen a creature like that in my life!"

"You have put a . . . a . . . a crocodile in my drinking water!" the Trunchbull yelled back. "There is no worse crime in the world against a Headmistress! Now sit down and don't say a word! Go on, sit down at once!"

"But I'm telling you . . ." Matilda shouted, refusing to sit down.

"I am telling you to shut up!" the Trunchbull roared. "If you don't shut up at once and sit down I shall remove my belt and let you have it with the end that has the buckle!"

Slowly Matilda sat down. Oh, the rottenness of it all! The unfairness! How dare they expel her for something she hadn't done!

Matilda felt herself getting angrier . . . and angrier . . . and angrier . . . so unbearably angry that something was bound to explode inside her very soon.

The newt was still squirming in the tall glass of water. It looked horribly uncomfortable. The glass was not big enough for it. Matilda glared at the Trunchbull. How she hated her. She glared at the glass with the newt in it. She longed to march up and grab the glass and tip the contents, newt and all, over the Trunchbull's head. She trembled to think what the Trunchbull would do to her if she did that.

The Trunchbull was sitting behind the teacher's table staring with a mixture of horror and fascination at the newt wriggling in the glass. Matilda's eyes were also riveted on the glass. And now, quite slowly, there began to creep over Matilda a most extraordinary and peculiar feeling. The feeling was mostly in the eyes. A

kind of electricity seemed to be gathering inside them. A sense of power was brewing in those eyes of hers, a feeling of great strength was settling itself deep inside her eyes. But there was also another feeling which was something else altogether, and which she could not understand. It was like flashes of lightning. Little waves of lightning seemed to be flashing out of her eyes. Her eyeballs were beginning to get hot, as though vast energy was building up somewhere inside them. It was an amazing sensation. She kept her eyes steadily on the glass, and now the power was concentrating itself in one small part of each eye and growing stronger and stronger and it felt as though millions of tiny little invisible arms with hands on them were shooting out of her eyes towards the glass she was staring at.



“Tip it!” Matilda whispered. *“Tip it over!”*

She saw the glass wobble. It actually tilted backwards a fraction of an inch, then righted itself again. She kept pushing at it with all those millions of invisible little arms and hands that were reaching out from her eyes, feeling the power that was flashing straight from the two little black dots in the very centres of her eyeballs.

“Tip it!” she whispered again. *“Tip it over!”*

Once more the glass wobbled. She pushed harder still, willing her eyes to shoot out more power. And then, very very slowly, so slowly she could hardly see it happening, the glass began to lean backwards, farther and farther and farther backwards until it was balancing on just one edge of its base. And there it teetered for a few seconds before finally toppling over and falling with a sharp tinkle on to the desk-top. The water in it and the squirming newt splashed out all over Miss Trunchbull’s enormous bosom. The Headmistress let out a yell that must have rattled every window-pane in the building and for the second time in the last five minutes she shot out of her chair like a rocket. The newt clutched desperately at the cotton smock where it covered the great chest and there it clung with its little claw-like feet. The Trunchbull looked down and saw it and she bellowed even louder and with a swipe of her hand she sent the creature flying across the classroom. It landed on the floor beside Lavender’s desk and very quickly she ducked down and picked it up and put it into her pencil-box for another time. A newt, she decided, was a useful thing to have around.

The Trunchbull, her face more like a boiled ham than ever, was standing before the class quivering with fury. Her massive bosom was heaving in and out and the splash of water down the front of it made a dark wet patch that had probably soaked right through to her skin.



“Who did it?” she roared. “Come on! Own up! Step forward! You won’t escape this time! Who is responsible for this dirty job? Who pushed over this glass?”

Nobody answered. The whole room remained silent as a tomb.

“Matilda!” she roared. “It was you! I know it was you!”

Matilda, in the second row, sat very still and said

nothing. A strange feeling of serenity and confidence was sweeping over her and all of a sudden she found that she was frightened by nobody in the world. With the power of her eyes alone she had compelled a glass of water to tip and spill its contents over the horrible Headmistress, and anybody who could do that could do anything.

“Speak up, you clotted carbuncle!” roared the Trunchbull. “Admit that you did it!”

Matilda looked right back into the flashing eyes of this infuriated female giant and said with total calmness, “I have not moved away from my desk, Miss Trunchbull, since the lesson began. I can say no more.”

Suddenly the entire class seemed to rise up against the Headmistress. “She didn’t move!” they cried out.



“Matilda didn’t move! Nobody moved! You must have knocked it over yourself!”

“I most certainly did not knock it over myself!” roared the Trunchbull. “How dare you suggest a thing like that! Speak up, Miss Honey! You must have seen

everything! Who knocked over my glass?"

"None of the children did, Miss Trunchbull," Miss Honey answered. "I can vouch for it that nobody has moved from his or her desk all the time you've been here, except for Nigel and he has not moved from his corner."

Miss Trunchbull glared at Miss Honey. Miss Honey met her gaze without flinching. "I am telling you the truth, Headmistress," she said. "You must have knocked it over without knowing it. That sort of thing is easy to do."

"I am fed up with you useless bunch of midgets!" roared the Trunchbull. "I refuse to waste any more of my precious time in here!" And with that she marched out of the classroom, slamming the door behind her.

In the stunned silence that followed, Miss Honey walked up to the front of the class and stood behind her table. "Phew!" she said. "I think we've had enough school for one day, don't you? The class is dismissed. You may all go out into the playground and wait for your parents to come and take you home."

The Second Miracle

Matilda did not join the rush to get out of the classroom. After the other children had all disappeared, she remained at her desk, quiet and thoughtful. She knew she had to tell somebody about what had happened with the glass. She couldn't possibly keep a gigantic secret like that bottled up inside her. What she needed was just one person, one wise and sympathetic grown-up, who could help her to understand the meaning of this extraordinary happening.

Neither her mother nor her father would be of any use at all. If they believed her story, and it was doubtful they would, they almost certainly would fail to realize what an astounding event it was that had taken place in the classroom that afternoon. On the spur of the moment, Matilda decided that the one person she would like to confide in was Miss Honey.

Matilda and Miss Honey were now the only two left in the classroom. Miss Honey had seated herself at her table and was riffling through some papers. She looked up and said, "Well, Matilda, aren't you going outside with the others?"

Matilda said, "Please may I talk to you for a moment?"

"Of course you may. What's troubling you?"

"Something very peculiar has happened to me, Miss Honey."

Miss Honey became instantly alert. Ever since the

two disastrous meetings she had had recently about Matilda, the first with the Headmistress and the second with the dreadful Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood, Miss Honey had been thinking a great deal about this child and wondering how she could help her. And now, here was Matilda sitting in the classroom with a curiously exalted look on her face and asking if she could have a private talk. Miss Honey had never seen her looking so wide-eyed and peculiar before.

“Yes, Matilda,” she said. “Tell me what has happened to you that is so peculiar.”

“Miss Trunchbull isn’t going to expel me, is she?” Matilda asked. “Because it wasn’t me who put that creature in her jug of water. I promise you it wasn’t.”

“I know it wasn’t,” Miss Honey said.

“Am I going to be expelled?”

“I think not,” Miss Honey said. “The Headmistress simply got a little over-excited, that’s all.”

“Good,” Matilda said. “But that isn’t what I want to talk to you about.”

“What do you want to talk to me about, Matilda?”

“I want to talk to you about the glass of water with the creature in it,” Matilda said. “You saw it spilling all over Miss Trunchbull, didn’t you?”

“I did indeed.”

“Well, Miss Honey, I didn’t touch it. I never went near it.”

“I know you didn’t,” Miss Honey said. “You heard me telling the Headmistress that it couldn’t possibly have been you.”

"Ah, but it *was* me, Miss Honey," Matilda said. "That's exactly what I want to talk to you about."

Miss Honey paused and looked carefully at the child. "I don't think I quite follow you," she said.

"I got so angry at being accused of something I hadn't done that I made it happen."

"You made what happen, Matilda?"

"I made the glass tip over."

"I still don't quite understand what you mean," Miss Honey said gently.

"I did it with my eyes," Matilda said. "I was staring at it and wishing it to tip and then my eyes went all hot and funny and some sort of power came out of them and the glass just toppled over."

Miss Honey continued to look steadily at Matilda through her steel-rimmed spectacles and Matilda looked back at her just as steadily.

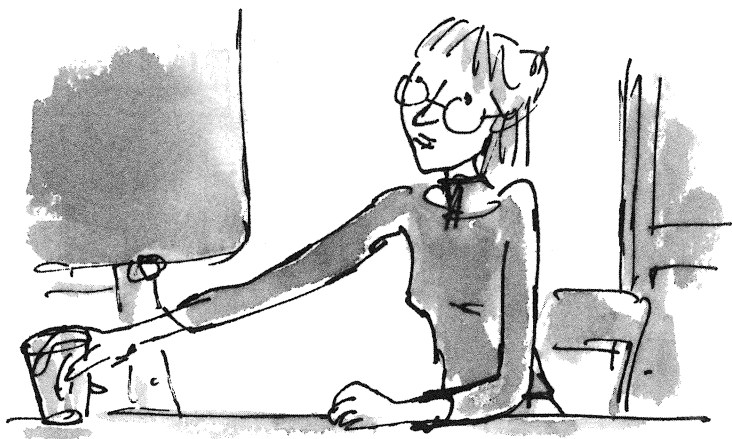
"I am still not following you," Miss Honey said. "Do you mean you actually willed the glass to tip over?"

"Yes," Matilda said. "With my eyes."

Miss Honey was silent for a moment. She did not think Matilda was meaning to tell a lie. It was more likely that she was simply allowing her vivid imagination to run away with her. "You mean you were sitting where you are now and you told the glass to topple over and it did?"

"Something like that, Miss Honey, yes."

"If you did that, then it is just about the greatest miracle a person has ever performed since the time of Jesus."



“I did it, Miss Honey.”

It is extraordinary, thought Miss Honey, how often small children have flights of fancy like this. She decided to put an end to it as gently as possible. “Could you do it again?” she asked, not unkindly.

“I don’t know,” Matilda said, “but I think I might be able to.”

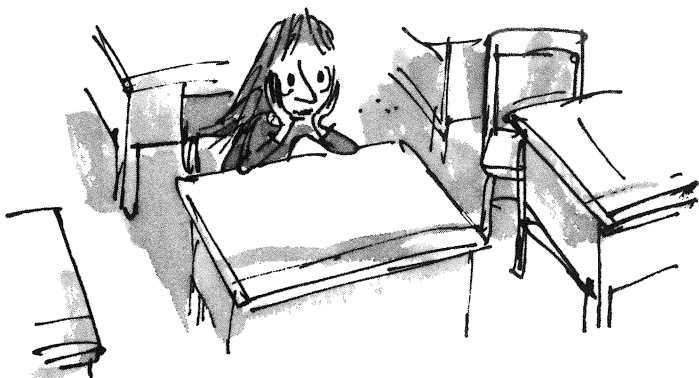
Miss Honey moved the now-empty glass to the middle of the table. “Should I put water in it?” she asked, smiling a little.

“I don’t think it matters,” Matilda said.

“Very well, then. Go ahead and tip it over.”

“It may take some time.”

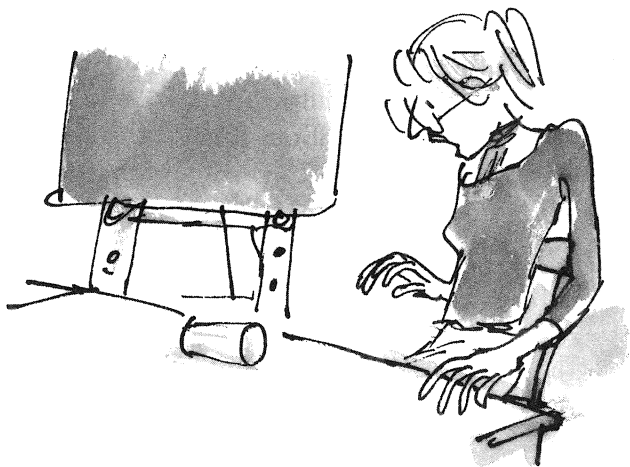
“Take all the time you want,” Miss Honey said. “I’m in no hurry.”



Matilda, sitting in the second row about ten feet away from Miss Honey, put her elbows on the desk and cupped her face in her hands, and this time she gave the order right at the beginning. "*Tip glass, tip!*" she ordered, but her lips didn't move and she made no sound. She simply shouted the words inside her head. And now she concentrated the whole of her mind and her brain and her will up into her eyes and once again but much more quickly than before she felt the electricity gathering and the power was beginning to surge and the hotness was coming into the eyeballs, and then the millions of tiny invisible arms with hands on them were shooting out towards the glass, and without making any sound at all she kept on shouting inside her head for the glass to go over. She saw it wobble, then it tilted, then it toppled right over and fell with a tinkle on to the table-top not twelve inches from Miss Honey's folded arms.

Miss Honey's mouth dropped open and her eyes stretched so wide you could see the whites all round. She didn't say a word. She couldn't. The shock of seeing the miracle performed had struck her dumb. She gaped at the glass, leaning well away from it now as though it might be a dangerous thing. Then slowly she lifted her head and looked at Matilda. She saw the child white in the face, as white as paper, trembling all over, the eyes glazed, staring straight ahead and seeing nothing. The whole face was transfigured, the eyes round and bright, and she was sitting there speechless, quite beautiful in a blaze of silence.

Miss Honey waited, trembling a little herself and watching the child as she slowly stirred herself back into consciousness. And then suddenly, *click* went her face into a look of almost seraphic calm. "I'm all right,"



she said and smiled. "I'm quite all right, Miss Honey, so don't be alarmed."

"You seemed so far away," Miss Honey whispered, awestruck.

"Oh, I was. I was flying past the stars on silver wings," Matilda said. "It was wonderful."

Miss Honey was still gazing at the child in absolute wonderment, as though she were The Creation, The Beginning Of The World, The First Morning.

"It went much quicker this time," Matilda said quietly.

"It's not possible!" Miss Honey was gasping. "I don't believe it! I simply don't believe it!" She closed her eyes and kept them closed for quite a while, and when she opened them again it seemed as though she had gathered herself together. "Would you like to come back and have tea at my cottage?" she asked.

"Oh, I'd love to," Matilda said.

"Good. Gather up your things and I'll meet you outside in a couple of minutes."

"You won't tell anyone about this . . . this thing that I did, will you, Miss Honey?"

"I wouldn't dream of it," Miss Honey said.

Miss Honey's Cottage

Miss Honey joined Matilda outside the school gates and the two of them walked in silence through the village High Street. They passed the greengrocer with his window full of apples and oranges, and the butcher with bloody lumps of meat on display and naked chickens hanging up, and the small bank, and the grocery store and the electrical shop, and then they came out at the other side of the village on to the narrow country road where there were no people any more and very few motor-cars.

And now that they were alone, Matilda all of a sudden became wildly animated. It seemed as though a valve had burst inside her and a great gush of energy was being released. She trotted beside Miss Honey with wild little hops and her fingers flew as if she would scatter them to the four winds and her words went off like fireworks, with terrific speed. It was Miss Honey this and Miss Honey that and Miss Honey I do honestly feel I could move almost anything in the world, not just tipping over glasses and little things like that . . . I feel I could topple tables and chairs, Miss Honey . . . Even when people are sitting in the chairs I think I could push them over, and bigger things too, much bigger things than chairs and tables . . . I only have to take a moment to get my eyes strong and then I can push it out, this strongness, at anything at all so

long as I am staring at it hard enough . . . I have to stare at it very hard, Miss Honey, very very hard, and then I can feel it all happening behind my eyes, and my eyes get hot just as though they were burning but I



don't mind that in the least, and Miss Honey . . .

"Calm yourself down, child, calm yourself down," Miss Honey said. "Let us not get ourselves too worked up so early in the proceedings."

"But you do think it is *interesting*, don't you, Miss Honey?"

"Oh, it is *interesting* all right," Miss Honey said. "It is *more* than interesting. But we must tread very carefully from now on, Matilda."

"Why must we tread carefully, Miss Honey?"

"Because we are playing with mysterious forces, my child, that we know nothing about. I do not think they are evil. They may be good. They may even be divine. But whether they are or not, let us handle them carefully."

These were wise words from a wise old bird, but Matilda was too steamed up to see it that way. "I don't see why we have to be so careful?" she said, still hopping about.

"I am trying to explain to you," Miss Honey said patiently, "that we are dealing with the unknown. It is an unexplainable thing. The right word for it is a phenomenon. It is a phenomenon."

"Am I a phenomenon?" Matilda asked.

"It is quite possible that you are," Miss Honey said. "But I'd rather you didn't think about yourself as anything in particular at the moment. What I thought we might do is to explore this phenomenon a little further, just the two of us together, but making sure we take things very carefully all the time."

"You want me to do some more of it then, Miss Honey?"

"That is what I am tempted to suggest," Miss Honey said cautiously.

"Goody-good," Matilda said.

"I myself," Miss Honey said, "am probably far more bowled over by what you did than you are, and I am trying to find some reasonable explanation."

"Such as what?" Matilda asked.

"Such as whether or not it's got something to do with the fact that you are quite exceptionally precocious."

"What exactly does that word mean?" Matilda said.

"A precocious child," Miss Honey said, "is one that shows amazing intelligence early on. You are an unbelievably precocious child."

"Am I really?" Matilda asked.

"Of course you are. You must be aware of that. Look at your reading. Look at your mathematics."

"I suppose you're right," Matilda said.

Miss Honey marvelled at the child's lack of conceit and self-consciousness.

"I can't help wondering," she said, "whether this sudden ability that has come to you, of being able to move an object without touching it, whether it might not have something to do with your brain-power."

"You mean there might not be room in my head for all those brains so something has to push out?"

"That's not quite what I mean," Miss Honey said, smiling. "But whatever happens, and I say it again, we

must tread carefully from now on. I have not forgotten that strange and distant glimmer on your face after you tipped over the last glass.”

“Do you think doing it could actually hurt me? Is that what you’re thinking, Miss Honey?”

“It made you feel pretty peculiar, didn’t it?”

“It made me feel lovely,” Matilda said. “For a moment or two I was flying past the stars on silver wings. I told you that. And shall I tell you something else, Miss Honey? It was easier the second time, much much easier. I think it’s like anything else, the more you practise it, the easier it gets.”

Miss Honey was walking slowly so that the small child could keep up with her without trotting too fast, and it was very peaceful out there on the narrow road now that the village was behind them. It was one of those golden autumn afternoons and there were blackberries and splashes of old man’s beard in the hedges, and the hawthorn berries were ripening scarlet for the birds when the cold winter came along. There were tall trees here and there on either side, oak and sycamore and ash and occasionally a sweet chestnut. Miss Honey, wishing to change the subject for the moment, gave the names of all these to Matilda and taught her how to recognize them by the shape of their leaves and the pattern of the bark on their trunks. Matilda took all this in and stored the knowledge away carefully in her mind.

They came finally to a gap in the hedge on the left-hand side of the road where there was a five-barred

gate. "This way," Miss Honey said, and she opened the gate and led Matilda through and closed it again. They were now walking along a narrow lane that was no more than a rutted cart-track. There was a high hedge of hazel on either side and you could see clusters of ripe brown nuts in their green jackets. The squirrels would be collecting them all very soon, Miss Honey said, and storing them away carefully for the bleak months ahead.

"You mean you *live* down here?" Matilda asked.

"I do," Miss Honey replied, but she said no more.

Matilda had never once stopped to think about where Miss Honey might be living. She had always regarded her purely as a teacher, a person who turned up out of nowhere and taught at school and then went away again. Do any of us children, she wondered, ever stop to ask ourselves where our teachers go when



school is over for the day? Do we wonder if they live alone, or if there is a mother at home or a sister or a husband? "Do you live all by yourself, Miss Honey?" she asked.

"Yes," Miss Honey said. "Very much so."

They were walking over the deep sun-baked mud-tracks of the lane and you had to watch where you put your feet if you didn't want to twist your ankle. There were a few small birds around in the hazel branches but that was all.

"It's just a farm-labourer's cottage," Miss Honey said. "You mustn't expect too much of it. We're nearly there."

They came to a small green gate half-buried in the hedge on the right and almost hidden by the overhanging hazel branches. Miss Honey paused with one hand on the gate and said, "There it is. That's where I live."



Matilda saw a narrow dirt-path leading to a tiny red-brick cottage. The cottage was so small it looked more like a doll's house than a human dwelling. The bricks it was built of were old and crumbly and very pale red. It had a grey slate roof and one small chimney, and there were two little windows at the front. Each window was no larger than a sheet of tabloid newspaper and there was clearly no upstairs to the place. On either side of the path there was a wilderness of nettles and blackberry thorns and long brown grass. An enormous oak tree stood overshadowing the cottage. Its massive spreading branches seemed to be enfolding and embracing the tiny building, and perhaps hiding it as well from the rest of the world.

Miss Honey, with one hand on the gate which she had not yet opened, turned to Matilda and said, "A poet called Dylan Thomas once wrote some lines that I think of every time I walk up this path."

Matilda waited, and Miss Honey, in a rather wonderful slow voice, began reciting the poem:

"Never and never, my girl riding far and near
In the land of the hearthstone tales, and spelled
asleep,
Fear or believe that the wolf in the sheepwhite hood
Loping and bleating roughly and blithely shall leap,
my dear, my dear,
Out of a lair in the flocked leaves in the dew dipped
year
To eat your heart in the house in the rosy wood."



There was a moment of silence, and Matilda, who had never before heard great romantic poetry spoken aloud, was profoundly moved. “It’s like music,” she whispered.

"It is music," Miss Honey said. And then, as though embarrassed at having revealed such a secret part of herself, she quickly pushed open the gate and walked up the path. Matilda hung back. She was a bit frightened of this place now. It seemed so unreal and remote and fantastic and so totally away from this earth. It was like an illustration in Grimm or Hans Andersen. It was the house where the poor woodcutter lived with Hansel and Gretel and where Red Riding Hood's grandmother lived and it was also the house of The Seven Dwarfs and The Three Bears and all the rest of them. It was straight out of a fairy-tale.

"Come along, my dear," Miss Honey called back, and Matilda followed her up the path.

The front-door was covered with flaky green paint and there was no keyhole. Miss Honey simply lifted the latch and pushed open the door and went in. Although she was not a tall woman, she had to stoop low to get through the doorway. Matilda went after her and found herself in what seemed to be a dark narrow tunnel.

"You can come through to the kitchen and help me make the tea," Miss Honey said, and she led the way along the tunnel into the kitchen—that is if you could call it a kitchen. It was not much bigger than a good-sized clothes cupboard and there was one small window in the back wall with a sink under the window, but there were no taps over the sink. Against another wall there was a shelf, presumably for preparing food, and there was a single cupboard above the shelf. On the shelf itself there stood a Primus stove, a



saucepan and a half-full bottle of milk. A Primus is a little camping-stove that you fill with paraffin and you light it at the top and then you pump it to get pressure for the flame.

“You can get me some water while I light the Primus,” Miss Honey said. “The well is out at the back. Take the bucket. Here it is. You’ll find a rope in the well. Just hook the bucket on to the end of the rope and lower it down, but don’t fall in yourself.” Matilda, more bemused than ever now, took the bucket and carried it out into the back garden. The well had a little wooden roof over it and a simple winding device and there was

the rope dangling down into a dark bottomless hole. Matilda pulled up the rope and hooked the handle of the bucket on to the end of it. Then she lowered it until she heard a splash and the rope went slack. She pulled it up again and lo and behold, there was water in the bucket.



“Is this enough?” she asked, carrying it in.

“Just about,” Miss Honey said. “I don’t suppose you’ve ever done that before?”

“Never,” Matilda said. “It’s fun. How do you get enough water for your bath?”

“I don’t take a bath,” Miss Honey said. “I wash

standing up. I get a bucketful of water and I heat it on this little stove and I strip and wash myself all over.”

“Do you honestly do that?” Matilda asked.

“Of course I do,” Miss Honey said. “Every poor person in England used to wash that way until not so very long ago. And *they* didn’t have a Primus. They had to heat the water over the fire in the hearth.”

“Are *you* poor, Miss Honey?”

“Yes,” Miss Honey said. “Very. It’s a good little stove, isn’t it?” The Primus was roaring away with a powerful blue flame and already the water in the saucepan was beginning to bubble. Miss Honey got a teapot from the cupboard and put some tea leaves into it. She also found half a small loaf of brown bread. She cut two thin slices and then, from a plastic container, she took some margarine and spread it on the bread.

Margarine, Matilda thought. She really must be poor.

Miss Honey found a tray and on it she put two mugs, the teapot, the half-bottle of milk and a plate with the two slices of bread. “I’m afraid I don’t have any sugar,” she said. “I never use it.”

“That’s all right,” Matilda said. In her wisdom she seemed to be aware of the delicacy of the situation and she was taking great care not to say anything to embarrass her companion.

“Let’s have it in the sitting-room,” Miss Honey said, picking up the tray and leading the way out of the kitchen and down the dark little tunnel into the room at the front. Matilda followed her, but just inside the doorway of the so-called sitting-room she stopped and

stared around her in absolute amazement. The room was as small and square and bare as a prison cell. The pale daylight that entered came from a single tiny window in the front wall, but there were no curtains. The only objects in the entire room were two upturned wooden boxes to serve as chairs and a third box between them for a table. That was all. There were no pictures on the walls, no carpet on the floor, only rough unpolished wooden planks, and there were gaps between the planks where dust and bits of grime had gathered. The ceiling was so low that with a jump Matilda could nearly touch it with her finger-tips. The walls were white but the whiteness didn't look like paint. Matilda rubbed her palm against it and a white powder came off on to her skin. It was whitewash, the cheap stuff that is used in cowsheds and stables and hen-houses.

Matilda was appalled. Was this really where her neat and trimly dressed school teacher lived? Was this all she had to come back to after a day's work? It was unbelievable. And what was the reason for it? There was something very strange going on around here, surely.

Miss Honey put the tray on one of the upturned boxes. "Sit down, my dear, sit down," she said, "and we'll have a nice hot cup of tea. Help yourself to bread. Both slices are for you. I never eat anything when I get home. I have a good old tuck-in at the school lunch and that keeps me going until the next morning."

Matilda perched herself carefully on an upturned box and more out of politeness than anything else she took a slice of bread and margarine and started to eat it. At home she would have been having buttered toast and strawberry jam and probably a piece of sponge-cake to round it off. And yet this was somehow far more fun. There was a mystery here in this house, a great mystery, there was no doubt about that, and Matilda was longing to find out what it was.



Miss Honey poured the tea and added a little milk to both cups. She appeared to be not in the least ill at ease sitting on an upturned box in a bare room and drinking tea out of a mug that she balanced on her knee.

“You know,” she said, “I’ve been thinking very hard about what you did with that glass. It is a great power you have been given, my child, you know that.”

“Yes, Miss Honey, I do,” Matilda said, chewing her bread and margarine.

“So far as I know,” Miss Honey went on, “nobody else in the history of the world has been able to compel an object to move without touching it or blowing on it or using any outside help at all.”

Matilda nodded but said nothing.

“The fascinating thing,” Miss Honey said, “would be to find out the real limit of this power of yours. Oh, I know you think you can move just about anything there is, but I have my doubts about that.”

“I’d love to try something really huge,” Matilda said.

“What about distance?” Miss Honey asked. “Would you always have to be close to the thing you were pushing?”

“I simply don’t know,” Matilda said. “But it would be fun to find out.”

Miss Honey's Story

"We mustn't hurry this," Miss Honey said, "so let's have another cup of tea. And do eat that other slice of bread. You must be hungry."

Matilda took the second slice and started eating it slowly. The margarine wasn't at all bad. She doubted whether she could have told the difference if she hadn't known. "Miss Honey," she said suddenly, "do they pay you very badly at our school?"

Miss Honey looked up sharply. "Not too badly," she said. "I get about the same as the others."

"But it must still be very little if you are so dreadfully poor," Matilda said. "Do all the teachers live like this, with no furniture and no kitchen stove and no bathroom?"

"No, they don't," Miss Honey said rather stiffly. "I just happen to be the exception."

"I expect you just happen to like living in a very simple way," Matilda said, probing a little further. "It must make house cleaning an awful lot easier and you don't have furniture to polish or any of those silly little ornaments lying around that have to be dusted every day. And I suppose if you don't have a fridge you don't have to go out and buy all sorts of junky things like eggs and mayonnaise and ice-cream to fill it up with. It must save a terrific lot of shopping."

At this point Matilda noticed that Miss Honey's face

had gone all tight and peculiar-looking. Her whole body had become rigid. Her shoulders were hunched up high and her lips were pressed together tight and she sat there gripping her mug of tea in both hands and staring down into it as though searching for a way to answer these not-quite-so-innocent questions.

There followed a rather long and embarrassing silence. In the space of thirty seconds the atmosphere in the tiny room had changed completely and now it was vibrating with awkwardness and secrets. Matilda said, "I am very sorry I asked you those questions, Miss Honey. It is not any of my business."



At this, Miss Honey seemed to rouse herself. She gave a shake of her shoulders and then very carefully she placed her mug on the tray.

“Why shouldn’t you ask?” she said. “You were bound to ask in the end. You are much too bright not to have wondered. Perhaps I even *wanted* you to ask. Maybe that is why I invited you here after all. As a matter of fact you are the first visitor to come to the cottage since I moved in two years ago.”

Matilda said nothing. She could feel the tension growing and growing in the room.

“You are so much wiser than your years, my dear,” Miss Honey went on, “that it quite staggers me. Although you look like a child, you are not really a child at all because your mind and your powers of reasoning seem to be fully grown-up. So I suppose we might call you a grown-up child, if you see what I mean.”

Matilda still did not say anything. She was waiting for what was coming next.

“Up to now,” Miss Honey went on, “I have found it impossible to talk to anyone about my problems. I couldn’t face the embarrassment, and anyway I lack the courage. Any courage I had was knocked out of me when I was young. But now, all of a sudden I have a sort of desperate wish to tell everything to somebody. I know you are only a tiny little girl, but there is some kind of magic in you somewhere. I’ve seen it with my own eyes.”

Matilda became very alert. The voice she was

hearing was surely crying out for help. It must be. It had to be.

Then the voice spoke again. "Have some more tea," it said. "I think there's still a drop left."

Matilda nodded.

Miss Honey poured tea into both mugs and added milk. Again she cupped her own mug in both hands and sat there sipping.

There was quite a long silence before she said, "May I tell you a story?"

"Of course," Matilda said.

"I am twenty-three years old," Miss Honey said, "and when I was born my father was a doctor in this village. We had a nice old house, quite large, red-brick. It's tucked away in the woods behind the hills. I don't think you'd know it."

Matilda kept silent.

"I was born there," Miss Honey said. "And then came the first tragedy. My mother died when I was two. My father, a busy doctor, had to have someone to run the house and to look after me. So he invited my mother's unmarried sister, my aunt, to come and live with us. She agreed and she came."

Matilda was listening intently. "How old was the aunt when she moved in?" she asked.

"Not very old," Miss Honey said. "I should say about thirty. But I hated her right from the start. I missed my mother terribly. And the aunt was not a kind person. My father didn't know that because he was hardly ever around but when he did put in an appearance, the

aunt behaved differently.”

Miss Honey paused and sipped her tea. “I can’t think why I am telling you all this,” she said, embarrassed.

“Go on,” Matilda said. “Please.”

“Well,” Miss Honey said, “then came the second tragedy. When I was five, my father died very suddenly. One day he was there and the next day he was gone. And so I was left to live alone with my aunt. She became my legal guardian. She had all the powers of a parent over me. And in some way or another, she became the actual owner of the house.”

“How did your father die?” Matilda asked.

“It is interesting you should ask that,” Miss Honey said. “I myself was much too young to question it at the time, but I found out later that there was a good deal of mystery surrounding his death.”

“Didn’t they know how he died?” Matilda asked.

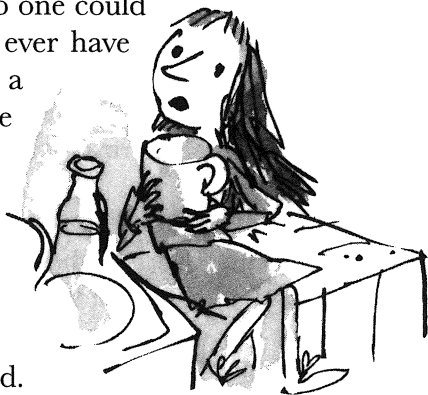
“Well, not exactly,” Miss Honey said, hesitating, “You see, no one could believe that he would ever have done it. He was such a very sane and sensible man.”

“Done what?”
Matilda asked.

“*Killed* himself.”

Matilda was
stunned.

“Did he?” she gasped.



"That's what it *looked* like," Miss Honey said. "But who knows?" She shrugged and turned away and stared out of the tiny window.

"I know what you're thinking," Matilda said. "You're thinking that the aunt killed him and made it look as though he'd done it himself."

"I am not thinking anything," Miss Honey said. "One must never think things like that without proof."

The little room became quiet. Matilda noticed that the hands claspings the mug were trembling slightly. "What happened after that?" she asked. "What happened when you were left all alone with the aunt? Wasn't she nice to you?"

"Nice?" Miss Honey said. "She was a demon. As soon as my father was out of the way she became a holy terror. My life was a nightmare."

"What did she do to you?" Matilda asked.

"I don't want to talk about it," Miss Honey said. "It's too horrible. But in the end I became so frightened of her I used to start shaking when she came into the room. You must understand I was never a strong character like you. I was always shy and retiring."

"Didn't you have any other relations?" Matilda asked. "Any uncles or aunts or grannies who would come and see you?"

"None that I knew about," Miss Honey said. "They were all either dead or they'd gone to Australia. And that's still the way it is now, I'm afraid."

"So you grew up in that house alone with your aunt," Matilda said. "But you must have gone to school."

“Of course,” Miss Honey said. “I went to the same school you’re going to now. But I lived at home.” Miss Honey paused and stared down into her empty tea-mug. “I think what I am trying to explain to you,” she said, “is that over the years I became so completely cowed and dominated by this monster of an aunt that when she gave me an order, no matter what it was, I obeyed it instantly. That can happen, you know. And by the time I was ten, I had become her slave. I did all the housework. I made her bed. I washed and ironed for her. I did all the cooking. I learnt how to do everything.”

“But surely you could have complained to *somebody*?” Matilda said.

“To whom?” Miss Honey said. “And anyway, I was far too terrified to complain. I told you, I was her slave.”

“Did she beat you?”

“Let’s not go into details,” Miss Honey said.

“How simply *awful*,” Matilda said. “Did you cry nearly all the time?”

“Only when I was alone,” Miss Honey said. “I wasn’t allowed to cry in front of her. But I lived in fear.”

“What happened when you left school?” Matilda asked.

“I was a bright pupil,” Miss Honey said. “I could easily have got into university. But there was no question of that.”

“Why not, Miss Honey?”

“Because I was needed at home to do the work.”

“Then how did you become a teacher?” Matilda asked.

“There is a Teachers’ Training College in Reading,” Miss Honey said. “That’s only forty minutes’ bus-ride away from here. I was allowed to go there on condition I came straight home again every afternoon to do the washing and ironing and to clean the house and cook the supper.”

“How old were you then?” Matilda asked.

“When I went into Teachers’ Training I was eighteen,” Miss Honey said.

“You could have just packed up and walked away,” Matilda said.

“Not until I got a job,” Miss Honey said. “And don’t forget, I was by then dominated by my aunt to such an extent that I wouldn’t have dared. You can’t imagine what it’s like to be completely controlled like that by a very strong personality. It turns you to jelly. So that’s it. That’s the sad story of my life. Now I’ve talked enough.”

“Please don’t stop,” Matilda said. “You haven’t finished yet. How did you manage to get away from her in the end and come and live in this funny little house?”

“Ah, that was something,” Miss Honey said. “I was proud of that.”

“Tell me,” Matilda said.

“Well,” Miss Honey said, “when I got my teacher’s job, the aunt told me I owed her a lot of money. I asked her why. She said, ‘Because I’ve been feeding you for all these years and buying your shoes and your clothes!’ She told me it added up to thousands and I



had to pay her back by giving her my salary for the next ten years. 'I'll give you one pound a week pocket-money,' she said. 'But that's all you're going to get.' She even arranged with the school authorities to have my salary paid directly into her own bank. She made me sign the paper."

"You shouldn't have done that," Matilda said. "Your salary was your chance of freedom."

"I know, I know," Miss Honey said. "But by then I had been her slave nearly all my life and I hadn't the courage or the guts to say no. I was still petrified of her. She could still hurt me badly."

"So how did you manage to escape?" Matilda asked.

"Ah," Miss Honey said, smiling for the first time, "that was two years ago. It was my greatest triumph."

"Please tell me," Matilda said.

"I used to get up very early and go for walks while my

aunt was still asleep,” Miss Honey said. “And one day I came across this tiny cottage. It was empty. I found out who owned it. It was a farmer. I went to see him. Farmers also get up very early. He was milking his cows. I asked him if I could rent his cottage. ‘You can’t live there!’ he cried. ‘It’s got no conveniences, no running water, no nothing!’”

“‘I want to live there,’ I said. ‘I’m a romantic. I’ve fallen in love with it. Please rent it to me.’”

“‘You’re mad,’ he said. ‘But if you insist, you’re welcome to it. The rent will be ten pence a week.’”

“‘Here’s one month’s rent in advance,’ I said, giving him forty pence. ‘And thank you so much!’”

“‘How super!’ Matilda cried. ‘So suddenly you had a house all of your own! But how did you pluck up the courage to tell the aunt?’”

“‘That was tough,’ Miss Honey said. ‘But I steeled myself to do it. One night, after I had cooked her supper, I went upstairs and packed the few things I possessed in a cardboard box and came downstairs and announced I was leaving. ‘I’ve rented a house,’ I said.

“‘My aunt exploded. ‘Rented a house!’ she shouted. ‘How can you rent a house when you have only one pound a week in the world?’”

“‘I’ve done it,’ I said.

“‘And how are you going to buy food for yourself?’”

“‘I’ll manage,’ I mumbled and rushed out of the front door.”

“‘Oh, well done you!’ Matilda cried. ‘So you were free at last!’”



"I was free at last," Miss Honey said. "I can't tell you how wonderful it was."

"But have you really managed to live here on one pound a week for two years?" Matilda asked.

"I most certainly have," Miss Honey said. "I pay ten pence rent, and the rest just about buys me paraffin for my stove and for my lamp, and a little milk and tea and bread and margarine. That's all I need really. As I told you, I have a jolly good tuck-in at the school lunch."

Matilda stared at her. What a marvellously brave thing Miss Honey had done. Suddenly she was a heroine in Matilda's eyes. "Isn't it awfully cold in the winter?" she asked.

"I've got my little paraffin stove," Miss Honey said. "You'd be surprised how snug I can make it in here."

"Do you have a bed, Miss Honey?"

"Well not exactly," Miss Honey said, smiling again. "But they say it's very healthy to sleep on a hard surface."

All at once Matilda was able to see the whole situation with absolute clarity. Miss Honey needed help. There was no way she could go on existing like this indefinitely. "You would be a lot better off, Miss Honey," she said, "if you gave up your job and drew unemployment money."

"I would never do that," Miss Honey said. "I love teaching."

"This awful aunt," Matilda said, "I suppose she is still living in your lovely old house?"

"Very much so," Miss Honey said. "She's still only about fifty. She'll be around for a long time yet."

"And do you think your father really meant her to own the house for ever?"

"I'm quite sure he didn't," Miss Honey said. "Parents will often give a guardian the right to occupy the house for a certain length of time, but it is nearly always left in trust for the child. It then becomes the child's property when he or she grows up."

"Then surely it is your house?" Matilda said.

"My father's will was never found," Miss Honey said. "It looks as though somebody destroyed it."

"No prizes for guessing who," Matilda said.

"No prizes," Miss Honey said.

“But if there is no will, Miss Honey, then surely the house goes automatically to you. You are the next of kin.”

“I know I am,” Miss Honey said. “But my aunt produced a piece of paper supposedly written by my father saying that he leaves the house to his sister-in-law in return for her kindness in looking after me. I am certain it’s a forgery. But no one can prove it.”

“Couldn’t you try?” Matilda said. “Couldn’t you hire a good lawyer and make a fight of it.”

“I don’t have the money to do that,” Miss Honey said. “And you must remember that this aunt of mine is a much respected figure in the community. She has a lot of influence.”

“Who is she?” Matilda asked.

Miss Honey hesitated a moment. Then she said softly, “Miss Trunchbull.”

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!

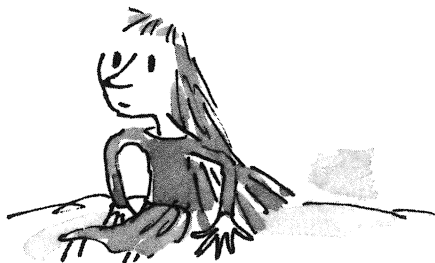
She crossed the bedroom and picked up the cigar and put it back on the table.

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.



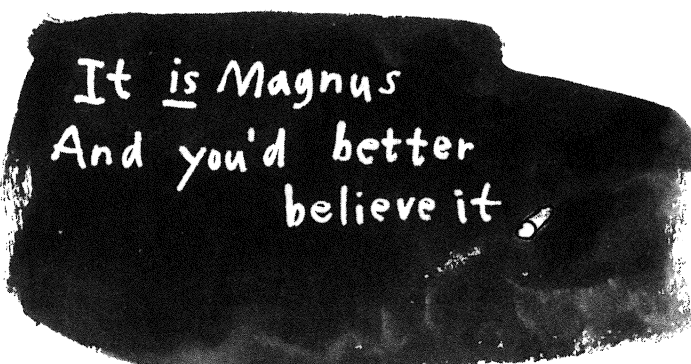
"*What the blazes is this?*" yelled the Trunchbull. It had shaken her to see her own first name being written like that by an invisible hand. She dropped Wilfred on to the floor. Then she yelled at nobody in particular, "*Who's doing this? Who's writing it?*"

The chalk continued to write.

A blackboard with white chalk writing. The text is written in a cursive, handwritten style. The first line says "Agatha, this is Magnus" and the second line says "This is Magnus." with a small mark at the end of the word "Magnus".

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!"

A blackboard with white chalk writing. The text is written in a cursive, handwritten style. The first line says "It is Magnus" and the second line says "And you'd better believe it." with a small mark at the end of the word "it".

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.



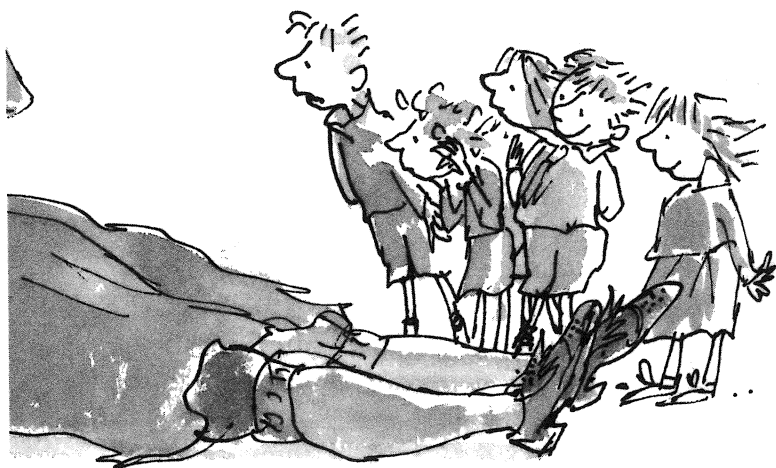
Wilfred, who had managed to resume his seat in the front row, screamed, "Miss Trunchbull has fallen down! Miss Trunchbull is on the floor!"

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!"

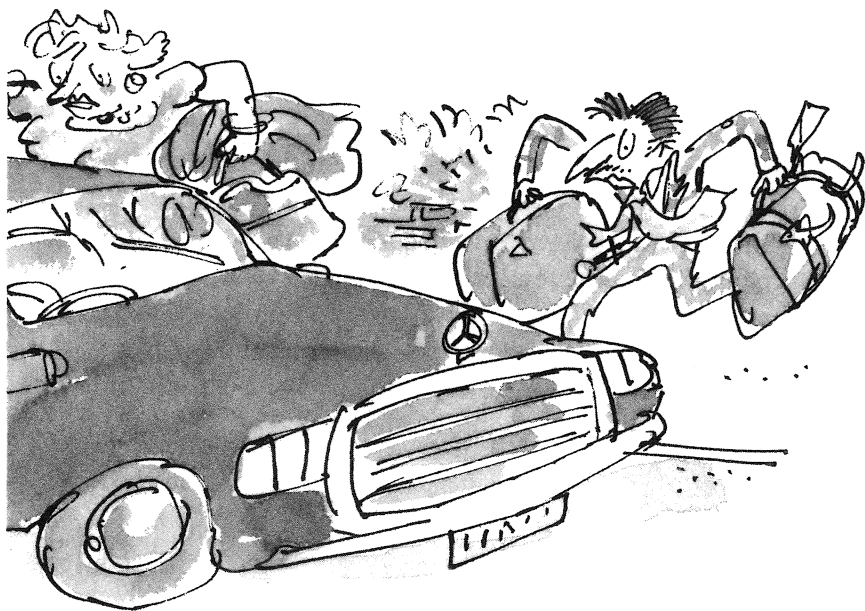
The next moment the two of them were running down the drive together and then out on to the road, and Matilda was ahead, pulling Miss



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.

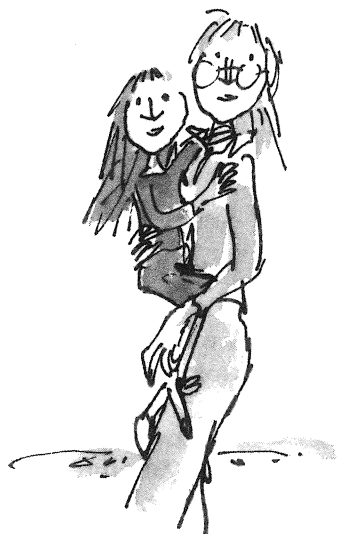
His wife said to him, "This one'll have to go on the back seat. There's no more room in the boot."

"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."

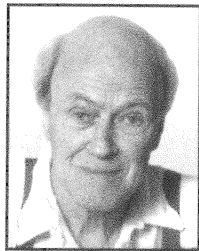
"Come on, Harry," the mother said, pushing a suitcase into the back seat. "Why don't we let her go if that's what she wants. It'll be one less to look after."

"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.



ROALD DAHL (1916–1990) was born in Wales of Norwegian parents. He spent his childhood in England and, at age eighteen, went to work for the Shell Oil Company in Africa. When World War II broke out, he joined the Royal Air Force and became a fighter pilot. At the age of twenty-six he moved to Washington, D.C., and it was there he began to write. His first short story, which recounted his adventures in the war, was bought by *The Saturday Evening Post*, and so began a long and illustrious career.



After establishing himself as a writer for adults, Roald Dahl began writing children's stories in 1960 while living in England with his family. His first stories were written as entertainment for his own children, to whom many of his books are dedicated.

Roald Dahl is now considered one of the most beloved storytellers of our time. Although he passed away in 1990, his popularity continues to increase as his fantastic novels, including *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, *The BFG*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, delight an ever-growing legion of fans.

Learn more about Roald Dahl on the official Roald Dahl Web site: www.roalddahl.com.

QUENTIN BLAKE is a well-known artist whose work has made him popular on both sides of the Atlantic. He has illustrated most of Roald Dahl's children's books, as well as many others. He lives in London, where he teaches illustration at the Royal College of Art.