

"Well," Hortensia said, "a few days later, during prayers, the Trunchbull suddenly started scratching herself like mad down below. A-ha, I said to myself. Here we go. She's changed for gym already. It was pretty wonderful to be sitting there watching it all and knowing that I was the only person in the whole school who realised exactly what was going on inside the Trunchbull's pants. And I felt safe, too. I knew I couldn't be caught. Then the scratching got worse. She couldn't stop. She must have thought she had a wasp's nest down there. And then, right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer, she leapt up and grabbed her bottom and rushed out of the room."

Both Matilda and Lavender were enthralled. It was quite clear to them that they were at this moment standing in the presence of a master. Here was somebody who had brought the art of skulduggery to the highest point of perfection, somebody, moreover, who was willing to risk life and limb in pursuit of her calling. They gazed in wonder at this goddess, and suddenly even the boil on her nose was no longer a blemish but a badge of courage.

"But how *did* she catch you that time?" Lavender asked, breathless with wonder.

"She didn't," Hortensia said. "But I got a day in The Chokey just the same."

"Why?" they both asked.

"The Trunchbull", Hortensia said, "has a nasty habit of guessing. When she doesn't know who the culprit is, she makes a guess at it, and the trouble is she's often right. I was the prime suspect this

time because of the Golden Syrup job, and although I knew she didn't have any proof, nothing I said made any difference. I kept shouting, 'How could I have done it, Miss Trunchbull? I didn't even know you kept any spare knickers at school! I don't even know what itching-powder is! I've never heard of it!' But the lying didn't help me in spite of the great performance I put on. The Trunchbull simply grabbed me by one ear and rushed me to The Chokey at the double and threw me inside and locked the door. That was my second all-day stretch. It was absolute torture. I was spiked and cut all over when I came out."

"It's like a war," Matilda said, overawed.

"You're darn right it's like a war," Hortensia cried. "And the casualties are terrific. We are the crusaders, the gallant army fighting for our lives with hardly any weapons at all and the Trunchbull is the Prince of Darkness, the Foul Serpent, the Fiery Dragon with all the weapons at her command. It's a tough life. We all try to support each other."

"You can rely on us," Lavender said, making her height of three feet two inches stretch as tall as possible.

"No, I can't," Hortensia said. "You're only shrimps. But you never know. We may find a use for you one day in some undercover job."

"Tell us just a little bit more about what she does," Matilda said. "Please do."

"I mustn't frighten you before you've been here a week," Hortensia said.

"You won't," Lavender said. "We may be small but we're quite tough."

"Listen to this then," Hortensia said. "Only yesterday the Trunchbull caught a boy called Julius Rottwinkle eating Liguorice Allsorts during the scripture lesson and she simply picked him up by one arm and flung him clear out of the open classroom window. Our classroom is one floor up and we saw Julius Rottwinkle go sailing out over the garden like a Frisbee and landing with a thump in the middle of the lettuces. Then the Trunchbull turned to us and said, 'From now on, anybody caught eating in class goes straight out the window.'"

"Did this Julius Rottwinkle break any bones?" Lavender asked.

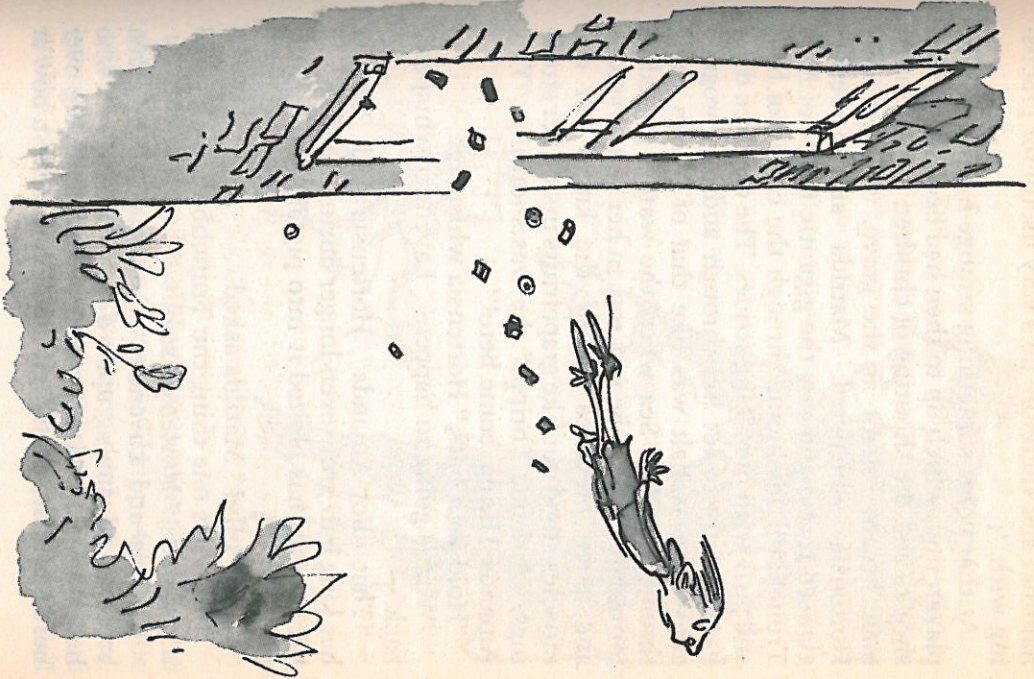
"Only a few," Hortensia said. "You've got to remember that the Trunchbull once threw the hammer for Britain in the Olympics so she's very proud of her right arm."

"What's throwing the hammer?" Lavender asked.

"The hammer," Hortensia said, "is actually a ruddy great cannon-ball on the end of a long bit of wire, and the thrower whisks it round and round his or her head faster and faster and then lets it go. You have to be terrifically strong. The Trunchbull will throw anything around just to keep her arm in, especially children."

"Good heavens," Lavender said.

"I once heard her say," Hortensia went on, "that a large boy is about the same weight as an Olympic



hammer and therefore he's very useful for practicing with."

At that point something strange happened. The playground, which up to then had been filled with shrieks and the shouting of children at play, all at once became silent as the grave. "Watch out," Hortensia whispered. Matilda and Lavender glanced round and saw the gigantic figure of Miss Trunchbull advancing through the crowd of boys and girls with menacing strides. The children drew back hastily to let her through and her progress across the asphalt was like that of Moses going through the Red Sea when the waters parted. A formidable figure she was too, in her belted smock and green breeches. Below the knees her calf muscles stood out like grapefruits inside her stockings. "Amanda Thripp!" she was shouting. "You, Amanda Thripp, come here!"

"Hold your hats," Hortensia whispered.

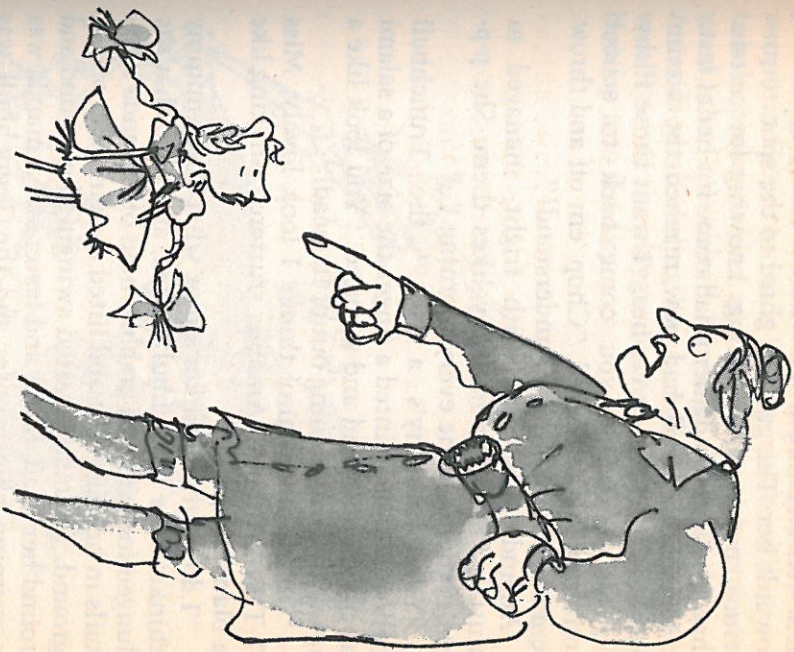
"What's going to happen?" Lavender whispered back.

"That idiot Amanda", Hortensia said, "has let her long hair grow even longer during the hols and her mother has plaited it into pigtails. Silly thing to do."

"Why silly?" Matilda asked.

"If there's one thing the Trunchbull can't stand it's pigtails," Hortensia said.

Matilda and Lavender saw the giant in green breeches advancing upon a girl of about ten who had a pair of plaited golden pigtails hanging over her shoulders. Each pigtail had a blue satin bow at



the end of it and it all looked very pretty. The girl wearing the pigtails, Amanda Thripp, stood quite still, watching the advancing giant, and the expression on her face was one that you might find on the face of a person who is trapped in a small

field with an enraged bull which is charging flat-out towards her. The girl was glued to the spot, terror-struck, pop-eyed, quivering, knowing for certain that the Day of Judgment had come for her at last.

Miss Trunchbull had now reached the victim and stood towering over her. "I want those filthy pigtales off before you come back to school tomorrow!" she barked. "Chop 'em off and throw 'em in the dustbin, you understand!"

Amanda, paralysed with fright, managed to stutter, "My m-m-mummy likes them. She p-p-plats them for me every morning."

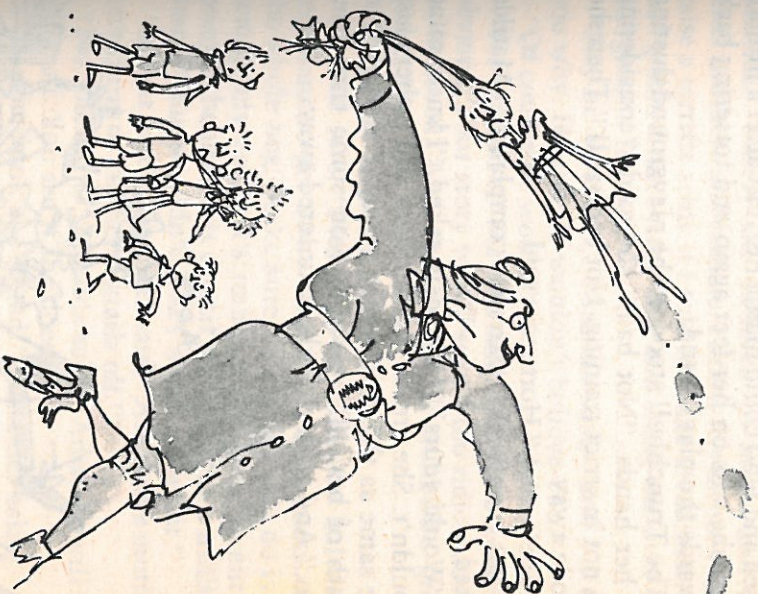
"Your mummy's a twit!" the Trunchbull bellowed. She pointed a finger the size of a salami at the child's head and shouted, "You look like a rat with a tail coming out of its head!"

"My m-m-mummy thinks I look lovely, Miss T-T-Trunchbull," Amanda stuttered, shaking like a blancmange.

"I don't give a tinker's toot what your mummy thinks!" the Trunchbull yelled, and with that she lunged forward and grabbed hold of Amanda's pigtales in her right fist and lifted the girl clear off the ground. Then she started swinging her round and round her head, faster and faster and Amanda was screaming blue murder and the Trunchbull was yelling, "I'll give you pigtales, you little rat!"

"Shades of the Olympics," Hortensia murmured. "She's getting up speed now just like she does with the hammer. Ten to one she's going to throw her." And now the Trunchbull was leaning back against the weight of the whirling girl and

pivoting expertly on her toes, spinning round and round, and soon Amanda Thripp was travelling so fast she became a blur, and suddenly, with a mighty grunt, the Trunchbull let go of the pigtales and Amanda went sailing like a rocket right over the wire fence of the playground and high up into the sky.



"Well thrown, sir!" someone shouted from across the playground, and Matilda, who was mesmerised by the whole crazy affair, saw Amanda Thripp descending in a long graceful parabola on to the playing-field beyond. She landed on the grass and bounced three times and finally came to rest. Then, amazingly, she sat up. She looked a trifle dazed and who could blame her, but after a minute or so she was on her feet again and tottering back towards the playground.

The Trunchbull stood in the playground dusting off her hands. "Not bad," she said, "considering I'm not in strict training. Not bad at all." Then she strode away.

"She's mad," Hortensia said.

"But don't the parents complain?" Matilda asked.

"Would yours?" Hortensia asked. "I know mine wouldn't. She treats the mothers and fathers just the same as the children and they're all scared to death of her. I'll be seeing you some time, you two." And with that she sauntered away.



## Bruce Bogtrotter and the Cake

"How can she get *away* with it?" Lavender said to Matilda. "Surely the children go home and tell their mothers and fathers. I know my father would raise a terrific stink if I told him the Headmistress had grabbed me by the hair and slung me over the playground fence."

"No, he wouldn't," Matilda said, "and I'll tell you why. He simply wouldn't believe you."

"Of course he would."

"He wouldn't," Matilda said. "And the reason is obvious. Your story would sound too ridiculous to be believed. And that is the Trunchbull's great secret."

"What is?" Lavender asked.

Matilda said, "Never do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it's unbelievable. No parent is going to believe this pigtail story, not in a million years. Mine wouldn't. They'd call me a liar."

"In that case", Lavender said, "Amanda's mother isn't going to cut her pigtailed off."

"No, she isn't," Matilda said. "Amanda will do it herself. You see if she doesn't."

"Do you think she's mad?" Lavender asked.  
"Who?"