

"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 pigtails 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?"

"The Trunchbull."

"No, I don't think she's mad," Matilda said. "But she's very dangerous. Being in this school is like being in a cage with a cobra. You have to be very fast on your feet."

They got another example of how dangerous the Headmistress could be on the very next day. During lunch an announcement was made that the whole school should go into the Assembly Hall and be seated as soon as the meal was over.

When all the two hundred and fifty or so boys and girls were settled down in Assembly, the Trunchbull marched on to the platform. None of the other teachers came in with her. She was carrying a riding-crop in her right hand. She stood up there on centre stage in her green breeches with legs apart and riding-crop in hand, glaring at the sea of upturned faces before her.

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

"I don't know," Matilda whispered back.

The whole school waited for what was coming next.

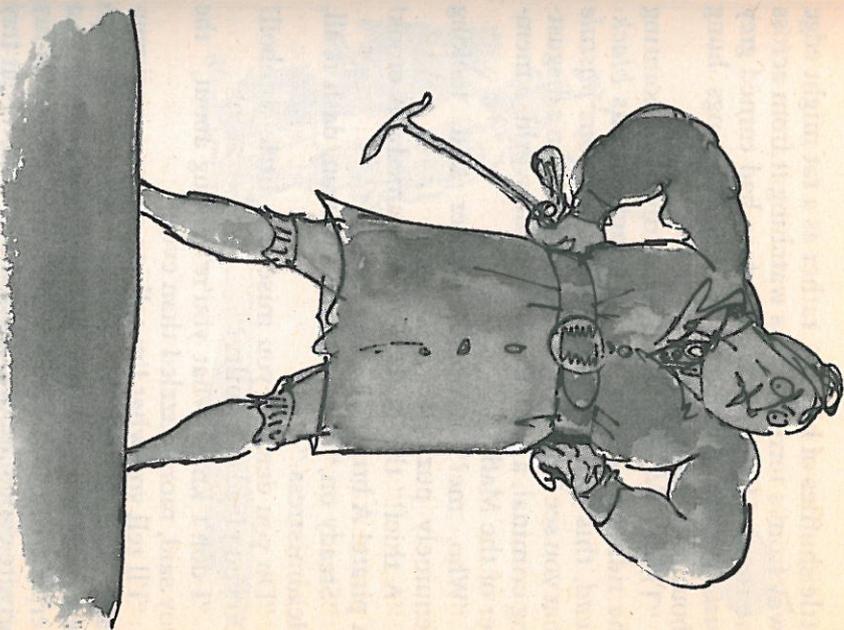
"Bruce Bogtrotter!" the Trunchbull barked suddenly. "Where is Bruce Bogtrotter?"

A hand shot up among the seated children.

"Come up here!" the Trunchbull shouted. "And look smart about it!"

An eleven-year-old boy who was decidedly large and round stood up and waddled briskly forward. He climbed up on to the platform.

"Stand over there!" the Trunchbull ordered, pointing. The boy stood to one side. He looked



nervous. He knew very well he wasn't up there to be presented with a prize. He was watching the Headmistress with an exceedingly wary eye and he kept edging farther and farther away from her with

little shuffles of his feet, rather as a rat might edge away from a terrier that is watching it from across the room. His plump flabby face had turned grey with fearful apprehension. His stockings hung about his ankles.

"This *clot*," boomed the Headmistress, pointing the riding-crop at him like a rapier, "this *black-head*, this *foul carbuncle*, this *poisonous pustule* that you see before you is none other than a disgusting criminal, a demizen of the underworld, a member of the Mafia!"

"Who, me?" Bruce Bogtrotter said, looking genuinely puzzled.

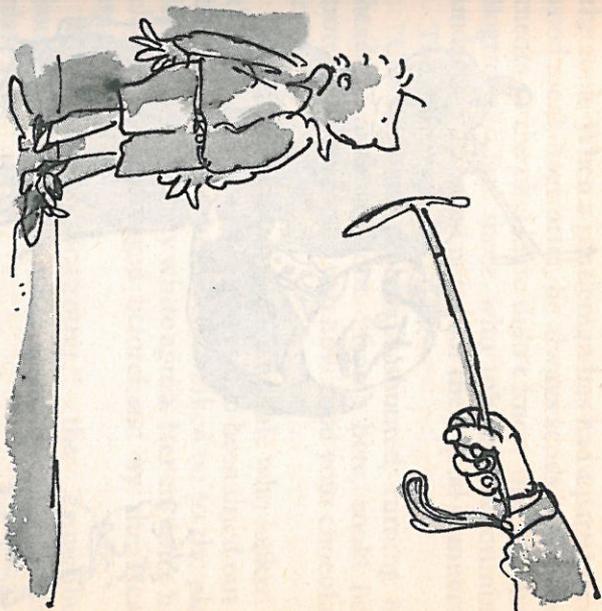
"A thief!" the Trunchbull screamed. "A crook! A pirate! A brigand! A rustler!"

"Steady on," the boy said. "I mean, dash it all, Headmistress."

"Do you deny it, you miserable little gumboil? Do you plead not guilty?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," the boy said, more puzzled than ever.

"I'll tell you what I'm talking about, you suppurating little blister!" the Trunchbull shouted. "Yesterday morning, during break, you sneaked like a serpent into the kitchen and stole a slice of my private chocolate cake from my tea-tray! That tray had just been prepared for me personally by the cook! It was my morning snack! And as for the cake, it was my own private stock! That was not boy's cake! You don't think for one minute I'm going to eat the filth I give to you? That cake was made from real butter and real cream! And he, that



robber-bandit, that safe-cracker, that highwayman standing over there with his socks around his ankles stole it and ate it!"

"I never did," the boy exclaimed, turning from grey to white.

"Don't lie to me, Bogtrotter!" barked the Trunchbull. "The cook saw you! What's more, she saw you eating it!"

The Trunchbull paused to wipe a fleck of froth from her lips.



When she spoke again her voice was suddenly softer, quieter, more friendly, and she leaned towards the boy, smiling. "You like my special chocolate cake, don't you, Bogtrotter? It's rich and delicious, isn't it, Bogtrotter?"

"Very good," the boy mumbled. The words were out before he could stop himself.

"You're right," the Trunchbull said. "It is very

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good. Therefore I think you should congratulate the cook. When a gentleman has had a particularly good meal, Bogtrotter, he always sends his compliments to the chef. You didn't know that, did you, Bogtrotter? But those who inhabit the criminal underworld are not noted for their good manners."

The boy remained silent.

"Cook!" the Trunchbull shouted, turning her head towards the door. "Come here, cook! Bogtrotter wishes to tell you how good your chocolate cake is!"

The cook, a tall shrivelled female who looked as though all of her body-juices had been dried out of her long ago in a hot oven, walked on to the platform wearing a dirty white apron. Her entrance had clearly been arranged beforehand by the Headmistress.

"Now then, Bogtrotter," the Trunchbull boomed. "Tell cook what you think of her chocolate cake."

"Very good," the boy mumbled. You could see he was now beginning to wonder what all this was leading up to. The only thing he knew for certain was that the law forbade the Trunchbull to hit him with the riding-crop that she kept smacking against her thigh. That was some comfort, but not much because the Trunchbull was totally unpredictable. One never knew what she was going to do next.

"There you are, cook," the Trunchbull cried. "Bogtrotter likes your cake. He adores your cake. Do you have any more of your cake you could give him?"

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"I do indeed," the cook said. She seemed to have learnt her lines by heart.

"Then go and get it. And bring a knife to cut it with."

The cook disappeared. Almost at once she was back again staggering under the weight of an enormous round chocolate cake on a china platter. The cake was fully eighteen inches in diameter and it was covered with dark-brown chocolate icing. "Put it on the table," the Trunchbull said.

There was a small table centre stage with a chair behind it. The cook placed the cake carefully on the table. "Sit down, Bogrotter," the Trunchbull said. "Sit there."

The boy moved cautiously to the table and sat down. He stared at the gigantic cake.

"There you are, Bogrotter," the Trunchbull said, and once again her voice became soft, persuasive, even gentle. "It's all for you, every bit of it. As you enjoyed that slice you had yesterday so very much, I ordered cook to bake you an extra large one all for yourself."

"Well, thank you," the boy said, totally bemused.

"Thank cook, not me," the Trunchbull said.

"Thank you, cook," the boy said.

The cook stood there like a shrivelled bootlace, tight-lipped, implacable, disapproving. She looked as though her mouth was full of lemon juice.

"Come on then," the Trunchbull said. "Why don't you cut yourself a nice thick slice and try it?"

"What? Now?" the boy said, cautious. He knew



there was a catch in this somewhere, but he wasn't sure where. "Can't I take it home instead?" he asked.

"That would be impolite," the Trunchbull said, with a crafty grin. "You must show cookie here how grateful you are for all the trouble she's taken."

The boy didn't move.

"Go on, get on with it," the Trunchbull said.

"Cut a slice and taste it. We haven't got all day."



The boy picked up the knife and was about to cut into the cake when he stopped. He stared at the cake. Then he looked up at the Trunchbull, then at the tall stringy cook with her lemon-juice mouth. All the children in the hall were watching tensely, waiting for something to happen. They felt certain it must. The Trunchbull was not a person who would give someone a whole chocolate cake to eat just out of kindness. Many were guessing that it had been filled with pepper or castor-oil or

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some other foul-tasting substance that would make the boy violently sick. It might even be arsenic and he would be dead in ten seconds flat. Or perhaps it was a booby-trapped cake and the whole thing would blow up the moment it was cut, taking Bruce Bogtrotter with it. No one in the school put it past the Trunchbull to do any of these things.

"I don't want to eat it," the boy said.

"Taste it, you little brat," the Trunchbull said.

"You're insulting the cook."

Very gingerly the boy began to cut a thin slice of the vast cake. Then he levered the slice out. Then he put down the knife and took the sticky thing in his fingers and started very slowly to eat it.

"It's good, isn't it?" the Trunchbull asked.

"Very good," the boy said, chewing and swallowing. He finished the slice.

"Have another," the Trunchbull said.

"That's enough, thank you," the boy murmured.

"I said have another," the Trunchbull said, and now there was an altogether sharper edge to her voice. "Eat another slice! Do as you are told!"

"I don't want another slice," the boy said.

Suddenly the Trunchbull exploded. "Eat!" she shouted, banging her thigh with the riding-crop.

"If I tell you to eat, you will eat! You wanted cake! You stole cake! And now you've got cake! What's more, you're going to eat it! You do not leave this platform and nobody leaves this hall until you have eaten the entire cake that is sitting there in front of you! Do I make myself clear, Bogtrotter? Do you get my meaning?"

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The boy looked at the Trunchbull. Then he looked down at the enormous cake.

"Eat! Eat! Eat!" the Trunchbull was yelling.

Very slowly the boy cut himself another slice and began to eat it.

Matilda was fascinated. "Do you think he can do it?" she whispered to Lavender.

"No," Lavender whispered back. "It's impossible. He'd be sick before he was halfway through."

The boy kept going. When he had finished the second slice, he looked at the Trunchbull, hesitating.

"Eat!" she shouted. "Greedy little thieves who like to eat cake must have cake! Eat faster boy! Eat faster! We don't want to be here all day! And don't stop like you're doing now! Next time you stop before it's all finished you'll go straight into The Chokey and I shall lock the door and throw the key down the well!"

The boy cut a third slice and started to eat it. He finished this one quicker than the other two and when that was done he immediately picked up the knife and cut the next slice. In some peculiar way he seemed to be getting into his stride.

Matilda, watching closely, saw no signs of distress in the boy yet. If anything, he seemed to be gathering confidence as he went along. "He's doing well," she whispered to Lavender.

"He'll be sick soon," Lavender whispered back. "It's going to be horrid."

When Bruce Bogtrotter had eaten his way through half of the entire enormous cake, he

paused for just a couple of seconds and took several deep breaths.

The Trunchbull stood with hands on hips, glaring at him. "Get on with it!" she shouted. "Eat it up!"

Suddenly the boy let out a gigantic belch which rolled around the Assembly Hall like thunder. Many of the audience began to giggle.

"Silence!" shouted the Trunchbull.



The boy cut himself another thick slice and started eating it fast. There were still no signs of flagging or giving up. He certainly did not look as though he was about to stop and cry out, "I can't, I can't eat any more! I'm going to be sick!" He was still in there running.

And now a subtle change was coming over the two hundred and fifty watching children in the audience. Earlier on, they had sensed impending

disaster. They had prepared themselves for an unpleasant scene in which the wretched boy, stuffed to the gills with chocolate cake, would have to surrender and beg for mercy and then they would have watched the triumphant Trunchbull forcing more and still more cake into the mouth of the gasping boy.

Not a bit of it. Bruce Bogtrotter was three-quarters of the way through and still going strong. One sensed that he was almost beginning to enjoy himself. He had a mountain to climb and he was jolly well going to reach the top or die in the attempt. What is more, he had now become very conscious of his audience and of how they were all silently rooting for him. This was nothing less than a battle between him and the mighty Trunchbull. Suddenly someone shouted, "Come on Bruciel! You can make it!"

The Trunchbull wheeled round and yelled, "Silence!" The audience watched intently. They were thoroughly caught up in the contest. They were longing to start cheering but they didn't dare.

"I think he's going to make it," Matilda whispered.

"I think so too," Lavender whispered back. "I wouldn't have believed anyone in the world could eat the whole of a cake that size."

"The Trunchbull doesn't believe it either," Matilda whispered. "Look at her. She's turning redder and redder. She's going to kill him if he wins."

The boy was slowing down now. There was no



doubt about that. But he kept pushing the stuff into his mouth with the dogged perseverance of a long-distance runner who has sighted the finishing-line and knows he must keep going. As the very last mouthful disappeared, a tremendous cheer rose up from the audience and children were leaping on to their chairs and yelling and clapping and shouting, "Well done, Bruciel! Good for you, Bruciel! You've won a gold medal, Bruciel!"



The Trunchbull stood motionless on the platform. Her great horsey face had turned the colour of molten lava and her eyes were glittering with fury. She glared at Bruce Bogtrotter who was sitting on his chair like some huge overstuffed grub, replete, comatose, unable to move or to speak. A fine sweat was beading his forehead but there was a grin of triumph on his face.

Suddenly the Trunchbull lunged forward and grabbed the large empty china platter on which the cake had rested. She raised it high in the air and brought it down with a crash right on the top of the wretched Bruce Bogtrotter's head and pieces flew all over the platform.

The boy was by now so full of cake he was like a sackful of wet cement and you couldn't have hurt him with a sledge-hammer. He simply shook his head a few times and went on grinning.

"Go to blazes!" screamed the Trunchbull and she marched off the platform followed closely by the cook.