

Immediately after lunch, she dashed off to the kitchen and found one of the Trunchbull's famous jugs. It was a large bulging thing made of blue-glazed pottery. Lavender filled it half-full of water and carried it, together with a glass, into the classroom and set it on the teacher's table. The classroom was still empty. Quick as a flash, Lavender got her pencil-box from her satchel and slid open the lid just a tiny bit. The newt was lying quite still. With great care, she held the box over the neck of the jug and pulled the lid fully open and tipped the newt in. There was a plop as it landed in the water, then it thrashed around wildly for a few seconds before setting down. And now, to make the newt feel more at home, Lavender decided to give it all the pond-weed from the pencil-box as well.

The deed was done. All was ready. Lavender put her pencils back into the rather damp pencil-box and returned it to its correct place on her own desk. Then she went out and joined the others in the playground until it was time for the lesson to begin.



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The Weekly Test

At two o'clock sharp the class assembled, including Miss Honey who noted that the jug of water and the glass were in the proper place. Then she took up a position standing right at the back. Everyone waited. Suddenly in marched the gigantic figure of the Headmistress in her belted smock and green breeches.

"Good afternoon, children," she barked.

"Good afternoon, Miss Trunchbull," they chirruped.

The Headmistress stood before the class, legs apart, hands on hips, glaring at the small boys and girls who sat nervously at their desks in front of her.

"Not a very pretty sight," she said. Her expression was one of utter distaste, as though she were looking at something a dog had done in the middle of the floor. "What a bunch of nauseating little warts you are."

Everyone had the sense to stay silent.

"It makes me vomit", she went on, "to think that I am going to have to put up with a load of garbage like you in my school for the next six years. I can see that I'm going to have to expel as many of you as possible as soon as possible to save myself from going round the bend." She paused and

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snorted several times. It was a curious noise. You can hear the same sort of thing if you walk through a riding-stable when the horses are being fed. "I suppose", she went on, "your mothers and fathers tell you you're wonderful. Well, I am here to tell you the opposite, and you'd better believe me. Stand up everybody!"

They all got quickly to their feet.

"Now put your hands out in front of you. And as I walk past I want you to turn them over so I can see if they are clean on both sides."

The Trunchbull began a slow march along the rows of desks inspecting the hands. All went well until she came to a small boy in the second row. "What's your name?" she barked.

"Nigel," the boy said.

"Nigel what?"

"Nigel Hicks," the boy said.

"Nigel Hicks what?" the Trunchbull bellowed. She bellowed so loud she nearly blew the little chap out of the window.

"That's it," Nigel said. "Unless you want my middle names as well." He was a brave little fellow and one could see that he was trying not to be scared by the Gorgon who towered above him.

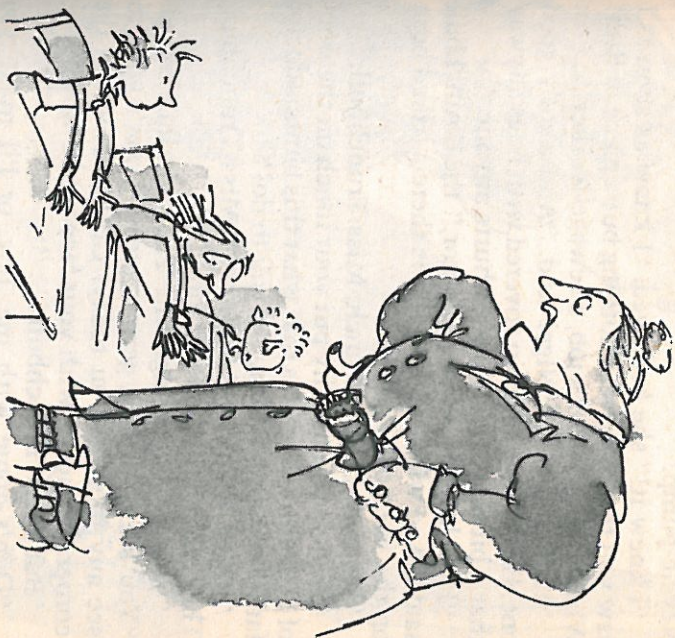
"I do not want your middle names, you blister!" the Gorgon bellowed. "What is my name?"

"Miss Trunchbull," Nigel said.

"Then use it when you address me! Now then, let's try again. What is your name?"

"Nigel Hicks, Miss Trunchbull," Nigel said.

"That's better," the Trunchbull said. "Your



hands are filthy, Nigel! When did you last wash them?"

"Well, let me think," Nigel said. "That's rather difficult to remember exactly. It could have been yesterday or it could have been the day before."

The Trunchbull's whole body and face seemed to swell up as though she were being inflated by a bicycle-pump.

"I knew it!" she bellowed. "I knew as soon as I saw you that you were nothing but a piece of filth! What is your father's job, a sewage-worker?"

"He's a doctor," Nigel said. "And a jolly good one. He says we're all so covered with bugs anyway that a bit of extra dirt never hurts anyone."

"I'm glad he's not my doctor," the Trunchbull said. "And why, might I ask, is there a baked bean on the front of your shirt?"

"We had them for lunch, Miss Trunchbull."

"And do you usually put your lunch on the front of your shirt, Nigel? Is that what this famous doctor father of yours has taught you to do?"

"Baked beans are hard to eat, Miss Trunchbull. They keep falling off my fork."

"You are disgusting!" the Trunchbull bellowed.

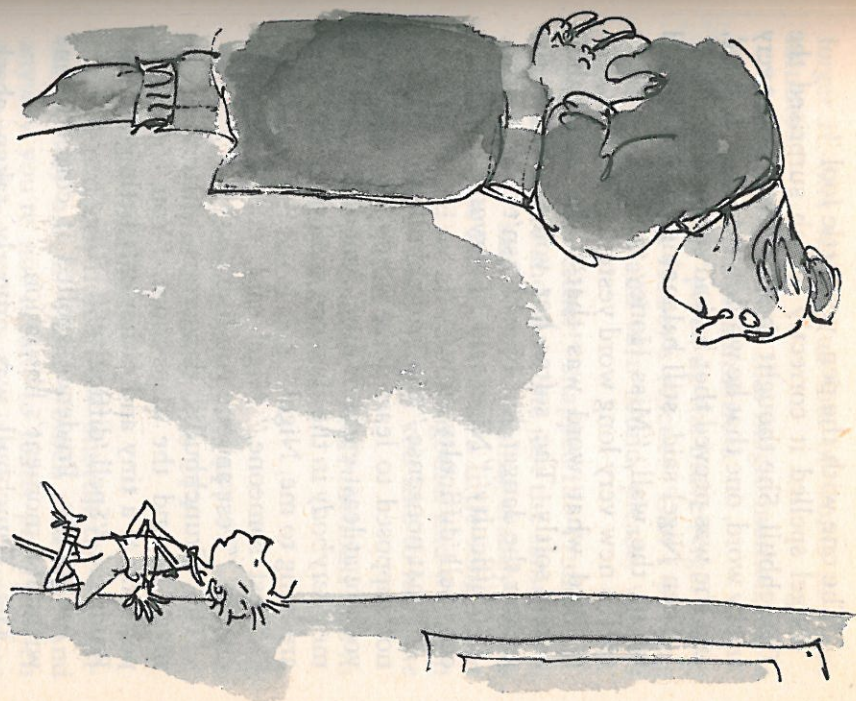
"You are a walking germ-factory! I don't wish to see any more of you today! Go and stand in the corner on one leg with your face to the wall!"

"But Miss Trunchbull . . ."

"Don't argue with me, boy, or I'll make you stand on your head! Now do as you're told!" Nigel went.

"Now stay where you are, boy, while I test you on your spelling to see if you've learnt anything at all this past week. And don't turn round when you talk to me. Keep your nasty little face to the wall. Now then, spell 'write'."

"Which one?" Nigel asked. "The thing you do



with a pen or the one that means the opposite of wrong?" He happened to be an unusually bright child and his mother had worked hard with him at home on spelling and reading.

"The one with the pen, you little fool."

Nigel spelled it correctly which surprised the Trunchbull. She thought she had given him a very tricky word, one that he wouldn't yet have learned, and she was peeved that he had succeeded.

Then Nigel said, still balancing on one leg and facing the wall, "Miss Honey taught us how to spell a new very long word yesterday."

"And what word was that?" the Trunchbull asked softly. The softer her voice became, the greater the danger, but Nigel wasn't to know this.

"'Difficulty,'" Nigel said. "Everyone in the class can spell 'difficulty' now."

"What nonsense," the Trunchbull said. "You are not supposed to learn long words like that until you are at least eight or nine. And don't try to tell me *everybody* in the class can spell that word. You are lying to me, Nigel."

"Test someone," Nigel said, taking an awful chance. "Test anyone you like."

The Trunchbull's dangerous glittering eyes roved around the class-room. "You," she said, pointing at a tiny and rather dait little girl called Prudence, "Spell 'difficulty'."

Amazingly, Prudence spelled it correctly and without a moment's hesitation.

The Trunchbull was properly taken aback. "Humph!" she snorted. "And I suppose Miss Honey wasted the whole of one lesson teaching you to spell that one single word?"

"Oh no, she didn't," piped Nigel. "Miss Honey taught it to us in three minutes so we'll never

forget it. She teaches us lots of words in three minutes."

"And what exactly is this magic method, Miss Honey?" asked the Headmistress.

"I'll show you," piped up the brave Nigel again, coming to Miss Honey's rescue. "Can I put my other foot down and turn round, please, while I show you?"

"You may do neither!" snapped the Trunchbull.

"Stay as you are and show me just the same!"

"All right," said Nigel, wobbling crazily on his one leg. "Miss Honey gives us a little song about each word and we all sing it together and we learn to spell it in no time. Would you like to hear the song about 'difficulty'?"

"I should be fascinated," the Trunchbull said in a voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Here it is," Nigel said.

"Mrs D, Mrs I, Mrs FFI

Mrs C, Mrs U, Mrs LTY.

That spells difficulty."

"How perfectly ridiculous!" snorted the Trunchbull. "Why are all these women married? And anyway you're not meant to teach poetry when you're teaching spelling. Cut it out in future, Miss Honey."

"But it does teach them some of the harder words wonderfully well," Miss Honey murmured.

"Don't argue with me, Miss Honey!" the Headmistress thundered. "Just do as you're told! I shall

now test the class on the multiplication tables to see if Miss Honey has taught you anything at all in that direction." The Trunchbull had returned to her place in front of the class, and her diabolical gaze was moving slowly along the rows of tiny pupils. "You!" she barked, pointing at a small boy called Rupert in the front row. "What is two sevens?"

"Sixteen," Rupert answered with foolish abandon.

The Trunchbull started advancing slow and soft-footed upon Rupert in the manner of a tigress stalking a small deer. Rupert suddenly became aware of the danger signals and quickly tried again. "It's eighteen!" he cried. "Two sevens are eighteen, not sixteen!"

"You ignorant little slug!" the Trunchbull belted. "You witless weed! You empty-headed hamster! You stupid glob of glue!" She had now stationed herself directly behind Rupert, and suddenly she extended a hand the size of a tennis racket and grabbed all the hair on Rupert's head in her fist. Rupert had a lot of golden-coloured hair. His mother thought it was beautiful to behold and took a delight in allowing it to grow extra long. The Trunchbull had as great a dislike for long hair on boys as she had for plaits and pigtails on girls and she was about to show it. She took a firm grip on Rupert's long golden tresses with her giant hand and then, by raising her muscular right arm, she lifted the helpless boy clean out of his chair and held him aloft.



Rupert yelled. He twisted and squirmed and kicked the air and went on yelling like a stuck pig, and Miss Trunchbull bellowed, "Two sevens are

fourteen! Two sevens are fourteen! I am not letting you go till you say it!"

From the back of the class, Miss Honey cried out, "Miss Trunchbull! Please let him down! You're hurting him! All his hair might come out!"

"And well it might if he doesn't stop wriggling!" snorted the Trunchbull. "Keep still, you squirming worm!"

It really was a quite extraordinary sight to see this giant Headmistress dangling the small boy high in the air and the boy spinning and twisting like something on the end of a string and shrieking his head off.

"Say it!" bellowed the Trunchbull. "Say two sevens are fourteen! Hurry up or I'll start jerking you up and down and then your hair really will come out and we'll have enough of it to stuff a sofa! Get on with it boy! Say two sevens are fourteen and I'll let you go!"

"T-t-two s-sevens are f-f-fourteen," gasped Rupert, whereupon the Trunchbull, true to her word, opened her hand and quite literally let him go. He was a long way off the ground when she released him and he plummeted to earth and hit the floor and bounced like a football.

"Get up and stop whimpering," the Trunchbull barked.

Rupert got up and went back to his desk massaging his scalp with both hands. The Trunchbull returned to the front of the class. The children sat there hypnotised. None of them had seen anything quite like this before. It was splendid entertain-

ment. It was better than a pantomime, but with one big difference. In this room there was an enormous human bomb in front of them which was liable to explode and blow someone to bits any moment. The children's eyes were riveted on the Headmistress. "I don't like small people," she was saying. "Small people should never be seen by anybody. They should be kept out of sight in boxes like hairpins and buttons. I cannot for the life of me see why children have to take so long to grow up. I think they do it on purpose."

Another extremely brave little boy in the front row spoke up and said, "But surely you were a small person once, Miss Trunchbull, weren't you?" "I was *never* a small person," she snapped. "I have been large all my life and I don't see why others can't be the same way."

"But you must have started out as a baby," the boy said.

"Me! A baby!" shouted the Trunchbull. "How dare you suggest such a thing! What cheek! What infernal insolence! What's your name, boy? And stand up when you speak to me!"

The boy stood up. "My name is Eric Ink, Miss Trunchbull," he said.

"Eric *what*?" the Trunchbull shouted.

"Ink," the boy said.

"Don't be an ass, boy! There's no such name!" "Look in the phone book," Eric said. "You'll see my father there under Ink."

"Very well, then," the Trunchbull said, "You may be Ink, young man, but let me tell you some-

thing. You're not indelible. I'll very soon rub you out if you try getting clever with me. Spell what."

"I don't understand," Eric said. "What do you want me to spell?"

"Spell what, you idiot! Spell the word 'what!'"

"W . . . O . . . T," Eric said, answering too quickly.

There was a nasty silence.

"I'll give you one more chance," the Trunchbull said, not moving.

"Ah yes, I know," Eric said. "It's got an H in it. W . . . H . . . O . . . T. It's easy."

In two large strides the Trunchbull was behind Eric's desk, and there she stood, a pillar of doom towering over the helpless boy. Eric glanced fearfully back over his shoulder at the monster. "I was right, wasn't I?" he murmured nervously.

"You were *wrong!*" the Trunchbull barked. "In fact you strike me as the sort of poisonous little pockmark that will *always* be wrong! You sit wrong! You look wrong! You speak wrong! You are wrong all round! I will give you one more chance to be right! Spell 'what!'"

Eric hesitated. Then he said very slowly, "It's not W . . . O . . . T, and it's not W . . . H . . . O . . . T. Ah, I know. It must be W . . . H . . . O . . . T . . . T."

Standing behind Eric, the Trunchbull reached out and took hold of the boy's two ears, one with each hand, pinching them between forefinger and thumb.

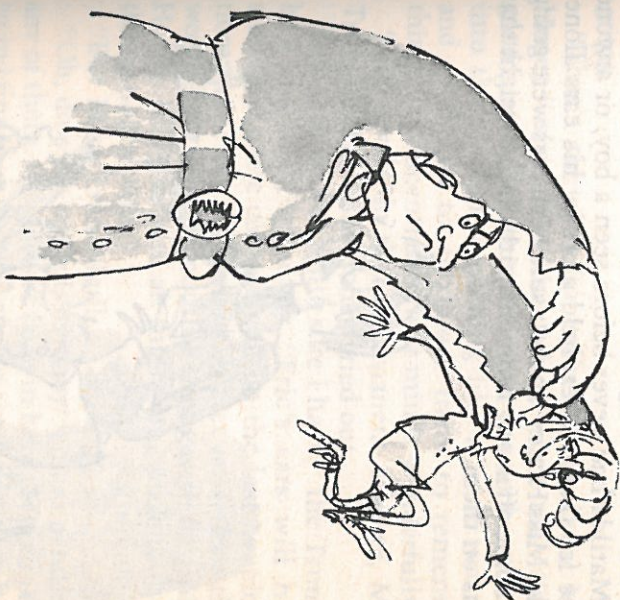
"Ow!" Eric cried. "Ow! You're hurting me!"

"I haven't started yet," the Trunchbull said briskly. And now, taking a firm grip on his two ears, she lifted him bodily out of his seat and held him aloft.

Like Rupert before him, Eric squealed the house down.

From the back of the class-room Miss Honey cried out, "Miss Trunchbull! Don't! Please let him go! His ears might come off!"

"They'll never come off," the Trunchbull



shouted back. "I have discovered through long experience, Miss Honey, that the ears of small boys are stuck very firmly to their heads."

"Let him go, Miss Trunchbull, please," begged Miss Honey. "You could damage him, you really could! You could wrench them right off!"

"Ears never come off!" the Trunchbull shouted. "They stretch most marvellously, like these are doing now, but I can assure you they never come off!"

Eric was squealing louder than ever and pedalling the air with his legs.

Matilda had never before seen a boy, or anyone else for that matter, held aloft by his ears alone. Like Miss Honey, she felt sure both ears were going to come off at any moment with all the weight that was on them.



The Trunchbull was shouting, "The word 'what' is spelled W . . . H . . . A . . . T. Now spell it, you little wart!"

Eric didn't hesitate. He had learned from watching Rupert a few minutes before that the quicker you answered the quicker you were released. "W . . . H . . . A . . . T", he squealed, "spells what!"

Still holding him by the ears, the Trunchbull lowered him back into his chair behind his desk. Then she marched back to the front of the class, dusting off her hands one against the other like someone who has been handling something rather grimy.

"That's the way to make them learn, Miss Honey," she said. "You take it from me, it's no good just *telling* them. You've got to *hammer* it into them. There's nothing like a little twisting and twiddling to encourage them to remember things. It concentrates their minds wonderfully."

"You could do them permanent damage, Miss Trunchbull," Miss Honey cried out.

"Oh, I have, I'm quite sure I have," the Trunchbull answered, grinning. "Eric's ears will have stretched quite considerably in the last couple of minutes! They'll be much longer now than they were before. There's nothing wrong with that, Miss Honey. It'll give him an interesting pixie look for the rest of his life."

"But Miss Trunchbull . . ."

"Oh, do shut up, Miss Honey! You're as wet as any of them. If you can't cope in here then you can go and find a job in some cotton-wool private school

for rich brats. When you have been teaching for as long as I have you'll realise that it's no good at all being kind to children. Read *Nicholas Nickleby*, Miss Honey, by Mr Dickens. Read about Mr Wackford Squeers, the admirable headmaster of Dotheboys Hall. *He* knew how to handle the little brutes, didn't he! He knew how to use the birch, didn't he! He kept their backsides so warm you could have fried eggs and bacon on them! A fine book, that. But I don't suppose this bunch of morons we've got here will ever read it because by the look of them they are never going to learn to read any thing!"

"I've read it," Matilda said quietly.

The Trunchbull flicked her head round and looked carefully at the small girl with dark hair and deep brown eyes sitting in the second row.

"What did you say?" she asked sharply.

"I said I've read it, Miss Trunchbull."

"Read what?"

"*Nicholas Nickleby*, Miss Trunchbull."

"You are lying to me, madam!" the Trunchbull shouted, glaring at Matilda. "I doubt there is a single child in the entire school who has read that book, and here you are, an unhatched shrimp sitting in the lowest form there is, trying to tell me a whopping great lie like that! Why do you do it? You must take me for a fool! Do you take me for a fool, child?"

"Well . . ." Matilda said, then she hesitated. She would like to have said, "Yes, I jolly well do," but that would have been suicide. "Well . . ." she said



again, still hesitating, still refusing to say "No".

The Trunchbull sensed what the child was thinking and she didn't like it. "Stand up when you speak to me!" she snapped. "What is your name?"

Matilda stood up and said, "My name is Matilda Wormwood, Miss Trunchbull."

"Wormwood, is it?" the Trunchbull said. "In