

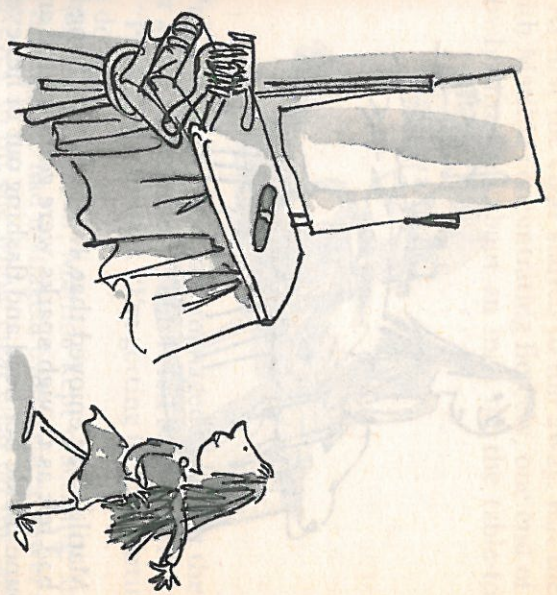
The Practice

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!*"

212

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.

213



"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.

214

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."

215