

## Chapter 4 Miss Honey

Most children begin school when they are five years old, or just before, but Matilda's parents forgot to send her. She was five and a half when she went for the first time. Crunchem Hall School had about two hundred and fifty children, and the head teacher was called Miss Trunchbull. She was a terrible woman who frightened the children and the teachers. When she came near, you could almost feel danger coming from her; and if four or five children got in her way, she crashed straight through them, pushing them right and left.

Matilda found herself in a group with eighteen other small boys and girls about her age. Their teacher was Miss Honey, and she was about twenty-three. She had a pretty face, with blue eyes and brown hair. She never shouted, but she did not seem to smile. But all the children loved her.

After calling all their names, Miss Honey said, 'This is your first day at Crunchem Hall, children. The head teacher is Miss Trunchbull, and when she tells you to do something, you must do it. Never argue with her. If you make her angry she will break you into little pieces and turn you into fish-food. Don't laugh, Lavender! It's nothing to laugh about. Do you all understand?'

'Yes, Miss Honey,' replied nineteen little voices.

'I want to help you to learn quickly,' said Miss Honey. 'By the end of this week I want you all to be able to multiply by two. Can any of you do that already?'

Matilda put up her hand. She was the only one.

Miss Honey looked carefully at the small girl with the dark hair and the round serious face. 'Wonderful,' she said. 'Please stand up and show us.'

Matilda stood up and said, 'Two twos are four, two threes

are six ... ' And when she got to two twelves are twenty-four, she went straight on with, 'Two thirteens are twenty-six, two fourteens are twenty-eight ... '

'Stop!' said Miss Honey. 'How far can you go?'

'I don't really know,' said Matilda.

Miss Honey thought for a second or two. Then she said, 'Can you tell me what two twenty-eights are?'

'Fifty-six, Miss Honey,' answered Matilda.

'What about something much more difficult?' said the teacher. 'Something like four hundred and eighty-seven multiplied by two.'

'Nine hundred and seventy-four,' said Matilda.

Miss Honey tried to speak calmly. 'Th-that is really wonderful,' she said. 'But can you multiply by any other numbers? Three? Four?'

'Yes, Miss Honey,' said Matilda.

'Well, can you multiply all the way up to twelve?' said Miss Honey. 'What are twelve sevens?'

'Eighty-four,' said Matilda.

Miss Honey tried to stay calm. 'Multiply fourteen by nineteen ... no, that's too difficult,' she said.

'It's two hundred and sixty-six,' said Matilda.

Miss Honey was careful not to show that she was very, very surprised.

'Who taught you to multiply like this, Matilda?' she asked.

'Was it your mother?'

'No, Miss Honey,' said Matilda.

'Was it your father?' asked Miss Honey.

'No, Miss Honey,' Matilda said again.

'Did you teach yourself?' asked Miss Honey.

'I don't quite know,' said Matilda. 'I just don't find it difficult to multiply one number by another. It's hard to explain ... I

just put the fourteen down in my head and multiply it by nineteen.'

Miss Honey was feeling quite strange. But she had to find out more about this surprising little girl.

'Well,' she said, looking at all the children. 'Let's leave numbers for a minute or two and see if any of you can spell. Hands up anyone who can spell cat.'

Three hands went up. They belonged to Lavender, a small boy called Nigel and to Matilda.

'Spell cat, Nigel,' said Miss Honey.

Nigel spelled it.

Then Miss Honey asked a question that she had never asked a group of children before on their first day. 'Can any of you three read a book?' she said.

'I can, Miss Honey,' said Matilda. 'I've read all the children's books in the library in the High Street.'

Miss Honey's voice was shaking when she asked, 'And — and what are you going to read now, Matilda?'

'I'm reading other books,' said Matilda. 'Mrs Phelps at the library helps me to choose them.'

'What ... other books?' asked Miss Honey. Her legs and her voice were shaking now.

'I like Charles Dickens's books,' said Matilda.

Miss Honey suddenly found that she had to sit down.

### **Task 1. Are these statements true or false?**

1. Matilda started school when she was 4.
2. Miss Trunchbull was a nice kind person.
3. If four of five children got in her way, she crashed straight through them.
4. Miss Honey was young, pretty and happy.

5. Matilda could multiply all the way up to 12 and more.
6. Mum and dad taught Matilda to multiply.
7. Matilda didn't know how she was doing it.
8. Matilda could multiply well but she had problems with spelling.
9. Miss Phelps at the library helped Matilda to choose books.
10. Matilda's favourite author was Jonathan Swift.

## Task 2

1 Matilda surprises Miss Honey a lot. Why?

2 Answer these questions. The answers are all numbers.

(a) How old is Matilda when she goes to school for the first time?

(b) How many children are there in Matilda's group?

(c) How old is Miss Honey?

(d) What is fourteen multiplied by nineteen?

(e) How many children in the group can spell 'cat'?

3 'Never argue with her. If you make her angry she will . . .'

(a) Who says this?

(b) Who is she talking about?

(c) Complete the sentence '**If you make her angry, she will. . .**

Now write five more endings for the sentence.

For example: *If you make her angry, she will eat you for breakfast.*