

Chapter 5 Miss Trunchbull

A little later, when the children went outside to play, Miss Honey went to Miss Trunchbull's office.

'What do you want, Miss Honey?' said Miss Trunchbull, in a voice like an angry dog. 'I'm busy.'

'There is a little girl in my group called Matilda Wormwood ...' Miss Honey began.

'That's the daughter of that nice man who has the garage in the village — Wormwood Cars,' said Miss Trunchbull. 'I was in there yesterday. He sold me a car. It's only got ten thousand miles on the clock. It belonged to an old woman who only took it out once a year. Yes, I like Wormwood. But the daughter is a bad girl. "Watch her," he said. "If anything bad happens in the school, it will be my daughter who did it." I haven't met the little snake yet. What does she look like? Dirty, oily little thing, probably. Was it her who put those bad eggs under my desk this morning? I'm sure it was. Terrible smell — !'

'Oh, no, I'm sure you're wrong,' said Miss Honey.

'I'm never wrong, Miss Honey!' shouted Miss Trunchbull. 'Don't argue with me! Now, what do you want? Why are you wasting my time?'

'I came to talk to you about Matilda,' said Miss Honey.

'What did she do? Put broken glass on your chair?'

'No!' said Miss Honey. 'Matilda is very, very clever.'

Miss Trunchbull's face went purple. 'Don't be stupid!' she shouted. 'Her father says she's a little criminal!'

'Her father is wrong,' said Miss Honey. And she went on to describe some of the wonderful things that Matilda could do. Finally, she said. We must put her in with the group of eleven-year-old children.'

'Oh! So she's too difficult for you, I see' said Miss Trunchbull. 'Too unpleasant! You want to send her to the top group so that she can do terrible things to them, don't you? Well, the answer is no! Matilda stays with you.'

'But Miss Trunchbull, please ...' began Miss Honey.

'Don't say another word!' shouted Miss Trunchbull.

So Miss Honey turned and walked out of the office. 'I'm going to do something for this child,' she told herself. 'I'm going to find a way to help her.'

She went to see the teachers who taught the older children, and borrowed several books from them. Then she found Matilda and asked her to come inside.

'You can't sit and do nothing while I'm teaching the rest of the children to multiply by two and to spell cat,' she said. 'During each lesson I'm going to give you one of these books to study. Then you can come and ask me any questions and I'll try to help you. All right?'

‘Yes, thank you very much, Miss Honey,’ said Matilda.

‘What a nice child she is,’ thought Miss Honey. ‘I’ll go and have a secret talk with her mother and father this evening. They must understand that their daughter is very special.’

Miss Honey got Matilda’s address from the school office and walked to the Wormwood’s house just after nine o’clock that evening. She waited until then to be sure that Matilda was in bed.

She found the house in a pleasant street and knocked on the door. A small, ratty-looking man wearing an orange and red jacket opened it. ‘If you’re selling something, we don’t want any,’ he said.

‘I’m not,’ said Miss Honey. ‘I’m Matilda’s teacher, and it’s important that I speak to you and your wife.’

‘Has she got into trouble already?’ he said.

‘No!’ said Miss Honey. ‘I have *good* news. Can I come in and talk to you about her for a few minutes?’

‘We’re watching our favourite programme on TV,’ said Mr Wormwood. ‘Come back some other time.’

Miss Honey began to get angry. ‘Is a TV programme more important than your daughter?’ she said. ‘Then perhaps you aren’t very good parents! Why don’t you switch the thing off and listen to me!’

That surprised Mr Wormwood. ‘Oh, all right,’ he said. ‘Come in and be quick about it.’

Miss Honey followed him inside.

‘Who is it?’ said Mrs Wormwood. She was looking at the TV and did not turn round.

‘A school teacher,’ said Mr Wormwood. ‘She wants to talk to us about Matilda. It’s all right, you can watch TV while we’re talking.’

‘My name is Jennifer Honey,’ said Miss Honey. Nobody asked her to sit down, but she chose a chair and sat on it. ‘Mrs Wormwood, did either you or your husband teach Matilda to read? Perhaps you’re both great readers. Do you love books, Mr Wormwood?’

‘No! Nobody ever got rich reading books!’ said Mr Wormwood. ‘We don’t keep them in the house.’

‘Well, I just came to tell you that Matilda is very clever,’ said Miss Honey. ‘But you probably know that.’

‘I knew that she could read,’ said Matilda’s mother. ‘She’s always up in her room with a stupid book.’

‘A five-year-old girl is reading books by Dickens and Hemingway,’ said Miss Honey. ‘Aren’t you excited?’

‘Not specially,’ said Mrs Wormwood. ‘A pretty face is more important than books for a girl,

Miss Hunky . . . ’

‘The name is Honey,’ said Miss Honey.

Mrs Wormwood pointed at the TV. ‘Look at that handsome man kissing that girl,’ she said. ‘Do you think she got him to do that by reading books? Of course not! Now he’s going to marry her, and they’re going to live in a big house and have lots of money’

‘I can’t believe I’m hearing this!’ thought Miss Honey. ‘These are terrible parents! Oh, poor Matilda!’

She tried again. ‘I think that Matilda will probably be ready to go to university in two or three years from now, with the right teaching,’ she said. ‘And -’

‘University?’ shouted Mr Wormwood. ‘Nobody learns anything sensible there!’

‘That’s not true,’ said Miss Honey. ‘But I can see that we’re not going to agree about this.’ And she got up from her chair and walked out of the house.

Task 1. Answer the following questions:

1. How did Miss Trunchbull speak?
2. Did she know Matilda’s family? How well did she know them?
3. Why did Miss Honey come to Miss Tunchbull’s office?
4. What did Matilda’s father say about her?
5. Where would Miss Honey like Matilda to study?
6. How did Miss Honey decide to help Matilda?
7. Who opened the door to Miss Honey?
8. Did Mr Wormwood welcome the young teacher?
9. How different were Matilda’s parents from their daughter?
10. What were Matilda’s mother’s ideas about a girl’s happiness/ beautiful life?
11. Did Mr Wormwood know anything about universities?

Task 2. Mr and Mrs Wormwood are bad parents. Write down **five** things that **bad** parents do. Then write down **five** things that **good** parents do.

Things BAD parents do	Things GOOD parents do