



Dinah's Secret

Dinah had not expected them to be nice to her. It had cost her quite a lot to push the door open. But at the sight of Harvey sobbing among the cushions, she was sure she had done the right thing.

'Please may I see the sums?'

'No you may not!' Lloyd snapped. 'You only want to gloat, don't you? You're just a mean, horrible –'

Harvey raised a tear-stained face from the cushions. 'Oh, let her,' he said wearily. 'What difference can it make? I don't think she's horrible enough to gloat, even if you do. There you are, Di. There are the beastly sums. On the floor.'

Dinah bent down and picked up the pieces of paper. Her cheeks had turned red and her heart was thudding uncomfortably. *Be quiet!* a voice in her head was saying. *Don't be too clever. Don't give yourself away.* She looked at Harvey and then at Lloyd's wretched, worried face. And then at the sums.

'Aren't they impossible?' Lloyd said.

Dinah took a deep breath. 'There's no way either of you could do them.'

'Ha, ha,' Lloyd sneered. 'And I suppose you could, clever clogs.'

'Yes,' Dinah said slowly. 'Yes, I can.'

Lloyd stared at her.

'It's all right, Harvey,' said Dinah. '*I can do your sums.*'

There was total silence. Harvey's mouth fell open and Lloyd went on staring.

'I can do them,' Dinah said again.

Harvey sat up, blinking at them. His hair flopped over his eyes and his cheeks were red.

'Honest?'

'Honest,' said Dinah reluctantly. 'Give me a pen and some paper and I'll do them now.'

She felt their eyes watching her as she sat down at the table and read the first sum.

'You need to use Probability Theory for that one,' she said briskly. Her eye travelled on down the page. 'And Spherical Geometry for that one. And this one – phew!' She whistled. 'You need Tensor Calculus for that. He *really* didn't mean you to do them, did he?'

'But *you* can do them?' Harvey said anxiously.

'I told you.' Her pen started to move across the paper and, behind her, she heard Lloyd gasp in disbelief. Taking no notice, she plunged into the sums, completely absorbed. One or two of the problems were so difficult that she had to think hard and she began to hum softly, enjoying herself. By the time she had finished, the two boys were staring at her with awed curiosity.

'How – how on earth did you do them?' Lloyd said awkwardly.

Dinah sat back in her chair. 'I'm clever.'

Lloyd's mouth twitched, as if he were going to jeer, and she laughed suddenly. 'No, I'm not boasting. I'm *really* clever. At sums and all sorts of things like that.'

'Nobody told us,' Lloyd said sulkily.

'Nobody knows.' Dinah pulled a face. 'Can't you imagine how other children would treat me? They'd be *beastly*. I found that out when I was about five. So – I decided to play stupid. I kept quiet and I just went on finding out about things by myself, at the library and so on. And no one's ever guessed. Nobody's known about me. Until now.'

Lloyd still looked dubious, but Harvey gave a sudden crow of delight. 'So you've done the rotten sums. Whoopee!' He jumped to his feet and did a little jig. 'I'm starving!'

'Should just think you are,' Lloyd said gruffly. 'After all that stupid fuss you made. Here – have this.' He pulled a Mars bar out of his pocket and tossed it over. Tearing off the paper, Harvey began to cram it into his mouth greedily, but Lloyd was still staring at Dinah.

'You didn't want anyone to know you were clever,' he said slowly, 'You've hidden it all these years. But you've told us now. Why?'

Dinah looked down at her fingers, feeling embarrassed. 'I couldn't let Harvey – well, I was sorry for him.'

'But we've been foul to you!'

She grinned wryly. 'You've been foul to me. Harvey's been quite nice.'

Lloyd frowned. 'But it doesn't make any sense. You've just got Harvey out of trouble. But it was you that got him into it. It must have been you that told about him going into school early and spying on the Assembly. No one else knew.'

Dinah shook her head. 'It wasn't me that told. Anyway, Rose saw him going in for the registers. She was watching through the window. Perhaps someone saw him outside the Hall as well.'

'But you lied about the snowballs, and you keep saying how marvellous the school is, and telling about the films you see in Assembly. And it's all lies. You know it is. I can't understand you at all.'

Dinah put her face in her hands. 'It's worse than that,' she said slowly. Then she paused for a moment. Somehow, talking about it made it seem realer, more frightening. But if she did not talk about it now, she never would. She forced herself to go on. 'I don't understand me. All those things you've described – they come out mechanically. Before I've decided what I'm going to say. And when I say how marvellous the school is – I know what I really think, but I can't say it.'

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Headmaster
'But that's ridiculous.' Lloyd began to march up and down the room. 'Why should you say things you don't want to?'
Harvey had finished eating the Mars bar and was watching them both with quiet interest. All of a sudden, he said, 'Assembly.'
'What?' Lloyd stopped pacing and looked at him.
'What do you mean?'

Harvey wiped his chocolate-covered fingers on the arm of the chair. 'It must be something to do with Assembly. It's the only place Dinah goes where neither of us does. What happened in Assembly today, Di?'
'In Assembly this afternoon,' Dinah chanted, 'we saw a film about coal-mines and -' She clapped a hand over her mouth and, with a visible effort, stopped speaking.

'That's right,' Harvey said. 'You didn't. I felt so rotten this afternoon I hardly did any work. Just looked out of the window. And the lights never went out.'

Dinah looked distressed. 'Don't you see?' she said urgently. 'It's the same thing again. I've said that something happened. A long explanation that came reeling out before I could think about it. And you say it's not true. Just like you said about the snowball fight.'

'And we're right,' insisted Lloyd.

Slowly, Dinah nodded. 'I think you might be. But why should I say these things? And if we don't see films in Assembly - what happens?' Her eyes were big and worried.

'You must remember, Di,' Harvey said. 'If you were there, you must remember it somehow, with some part

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of your brain. Go on. Remember it, remember it.'
'Say that again,' Dinah muttered, in an odd voice.
Harvey was puzzled. 'I just said - go on, remember it, remember it.'
'Go on,' Dinah said. 'Don't stop. It's coming.'
'Remember it, remember it, remember it,' chanted Harvey.

Dinah's forehead creased, as if she were making a mammoth effort.

'Remember it, remember it, remember it.'
As if she were in a daze, she started to mumble and stutter. 'Hyp -, hyp -, hypno -'

Then her face flooded with joyful excitement. 'Hypnotism!' she yelled, banging her fist down on the table. 'That's it! Hypnotism.'

Lloyd looked at her doubtfully.

'That's it!' she said again, her eyes glowing. 'The first day, when I went into Assembly, I didn't look at the Headmaster's eyes when the others did. I closed mine. And I heard him hypnotize everyone else. But then he caught me. I just had time to think *remember it, remember it* - and then I was hypnotized and I forgot. Until Harvey brought it back. *The Headmaster hypnotizes everyone in Assembly.*' She stared round triumphantly at them.

'But why?' Harvey said dubiously. 'What's the point?'

Dinah shrugged. 'It's a good way to keep everyone in order. And you know how he likes order. While they're hypnotized, he tells them what to do when they wake up. And they can't help doing it. Like me saying those things. And I think -' she paused, considering '- I think

he probably makes us learn things, parrot-fashion, while we're hypnotized. Then, when we're awake, we can remember them and write them down.'

'A quick way to produce a school full of geniuses,' Lloyd said sourly. But Dinah shook her head.

'We're not learning to *think*. We're just learning to repeat things. Like robots. It looks good, but it's no use at all.'

Harvey shuddered. 'It's horrible.'

'It's all right for you,' Dinah said. 'He doesn't do it to you. I wonder why not.'

'He can't,' Harvey said. 'We're invulnerable.'

He was only joking, but Dinah looked serious. 'I think you might be right. Some people can't be hypnotized. Has he ever tried it with you? Gazed into your eyes and told you you were tired?'

'Yes,' Lloyd said slowly. 'He did once. When I first came to the school. He took off his glasses and stared at me and said, "Lloyd, you are very tired. You are very, very sleepy."'

'And what happened?'

'Nothing much. I just said, "No, sir, I'm fine, thank you."'

'So did I,' put in Harvey. 'He did it to me, too. I just thought he was being silly.'

'Oh no,' Dinah said slowly, 'I don't think he's silly at all. He's cruel and terrifying, and he's got an obsession with tidiness, but he's not silly. He's very, very clever. He's got a whole school full of children who will do precisely what he wants. He must feel very powerful.'

Her voice was awed. 'Very powerful,' she said again. 'If I were him, I don't think I'd be satisfied with having one measly school in my power!'

'What do you mean?' Harvey said.

She looked round at them. 'Think of it. He's got a whole army of people – people like me – who'll do and say exactly what he wants. Why should he stop there? Sooner or later, he's going to want to do something with his army.'

There was a long, tense pause. Then Harvey said, 'L, don't you think – we should bring the others in on this?'

Lloyd looked carefully at Dinah. 'Think she can be trusted?'

'Of course,' Harvey said impatiently. 'Look what she's just done for me.' He flapped the paper with the sums on. 'We'll swear her to secrecy. Tomorrow. After school.'



SPLAT

‘We always go in separately,’ Lloyd said in a mysterious voice. ‘Just in case anyone’s watching. You go first, H. I’ll bring Dinah in a moment.’

Harvey nodded and slipped away down an alley between the houses opposite. Lloyd prodded Dinah. ‘Go on. Keep staring in the shop window. As if you’re interested.’

‘In baths and basins?’ Dinah said lightly. ‘Who’d believe that? Go on, Lloyd. Tell me what’s happening.’

‘Wait and see.’ Lloyd looked even more mysterious. ‘You’ll find out soon enough.’

He went on examining a purple soap dish with every

appearance of enthusiasm for a couple more minutes. Then he glanced at his watch and looked up and down the road. ‘OK. I think it’s all right now. Come on.’

He led the way, with elaborate casualness, down the alley. At the bottom was a gate into a garden. He pushed it open and they were facing a little wooden shed. He rapped on the door.

‘The man who can keep order can rule the world,’ said a voice from inside.

Beside him, Lloyd felt Dinah start with surprise, and he grinned. ‘But the man who can bear disorder is truly free,’ he answered.

The wooden door opened. ‘Pass, friend.’

He slid through, motioning Dinah to follow him. She bent her head sideways, to avoid the garden tools hanging round the opening, and walked in, to find herself confronting four pairs of eyes. Ian, Mandy and Ingrid looked frankly hostile. Only Harvey gave her an encouraging smile.

‘Have a box.’ He pushed one towards her, and she sat down, like the others, squashed uncomfortably close in the confined space. The shed was dark and dusty, and the box creaked perilously underneath her.

Ian looked at her, raising one elegant, fair eyebrow. ‘Well, well, Lloyd,’ he murmured. ‘Who have you brought with you, then? I hope you have a good excuse.’

‘He’d better have,’ little Ingrid said hotly. ‘He’s broken all the rules and put us all in danger.’

Mandy smiled gently. ‘Suppose we hear what he’s got

to say. Lloyd doesn't usually do things without a good reason.'

Lloyd nodded. 'I'm glad Mandy said that. I didn't really want to bring Dinah, but I think she's got some important information to give you.'

'But she's one of Them,' Ingrid said crossly. 'One of the Headmaster's goody-goodies. Why should we believe anything she says?'

'You will when you've heard it,' Harvey broke in. 'Oh, go on, Di. Tell them.'

'Wait a minute.' Dinah had sat quietly, listening to them arguing. Now she sat up straighter. 'You want to know that I won't get you into trouble. That's fair enough. But how do I know that you won't get me into trouble? What is all this, and why do you meet here, in secret?'

Ingrid bridled again, but Ian said, 'It's a fair enough question. Why don't you explain, Mr Chairman? Now she's seen this much, it can't do any more harm.'

'All right,' Lloyd said. 'If no one minds.' He turned to Dinah. 'This is the Society for the Protection of our Lives Against Them.'

'SPLAT for short,' Harvey put in.

'Us against the Headmaster and the teachers and all the goody-goodies,' Ingrid said with relish. She frowned. 'And we're Us and you're one of Them, so I can't think what you're doing here.'

'But what do you *do*?' Dinah said.

Ian grinned. 'Ah, the crucial question. Well, we all keep an eye out for the prefects, so we can warn each

other, and we swap details of all the new rules the Headmaster invents, so that we don't get caught out.'

'And Mandy helps us with our sums and things,' Ingrid added.

Mandy blushed. 'It's not just that, though. Mostly it's to keep our spirits up. So we don't feel we're all alone in the horrible school, with no one to help us.'

'I see.' Dinah nodded. 'Well, I think you'll feel better when you've heard what I want to say. You see -'

'Wait a moment.' Ian held up his hand. 'I think you should take the oath first. Mr Chairman?'

'Yes, of course,' Lloyd said shortly, annoyed that he had not thought of it himself. 'Dinah Glass, do you swear to honour the secrecy of SPLAT, to protect its members and never willingly to reveal anything about any of Us to any of Them?'

'I do,' Dinah said solemnly.

'Right,' said Lloyd. 'Now tell them.'

'It's about Assembly,' Dinah began. 'You see . . .'

She leaned forwards eagerly and began to explain, answering their questions clearly and briefly. Lloyd watched her. He supposed she could be trusted, but somehow he had not expected the others to believe her so quickly. If he had had to put in a good word for her, to plead for her to be heard, he would have felt more friendly towards her. But the others seemed to be on her side straight away. Rather crossly, he studied them.

Ian was looking at her with cool approval and Mandy was grinning her shy, pleasant grin. Even Ingrid had been convinced. She was still raging, but now her rage was all

directed at the Headmaster. She bounced up and down on her box and banged her fist into the palm of her hand.

'He's *evil!* *Wicked!* Do you mean all the others are victims really? It's him that makes them behave like that? Oh, it's fiendish, it's —'

'Calm — down — Ingrid.' Ian patted her annoyingly on the back. 'Think how pleased the Headmaster will be if you choke to death.'

She stopped abruptly and everyone laughed. Lloyd decided that it was time he took charge of the meeting again. After all, he was the Chairman. But before he could say anything, Harvey burst out, 'But you haven't heard the most important part yet — what Dinah thinks.'

'She has important thoughts, does she?' Ian said teasingly.

Mandy gave a reproachful look. 'Of course she does. You heard Harvey say how clever she was. Come on, Di. What is it?'

'Well, I'm worried about what's going to happen next.' Earnestly, Dinah began to explain her fears about the Headmaster's plans.

Lloyd chewed irritably at the end of his finger. He had meant to do this bit himself. Get them all organized, the way he usually did. But it was no use interrupting yet. He waited until Dinah had finished and then rapped smartly on the floor to call the meeting to order.

'Right now, you've all heard what Dinah has to say. There's no evidence for it, of course, but it makes sense. The question is — what are we going to do about it?'

Mandy looked thoughtful. 'We really need a way of finding out what actually happens in Assembly. Apart from the hypnotism, I mean. If the Headmaster's going to use the children for anything, that'll be where he tells them all about it.'

'Can't you stay awake somehow, Di?' Ingrid said. Dinah sighed. 'I told you. I've tried that. But he can tell.' She looked at them, one by one. 'But he can't hypnotize any of you. Couldn't one of you sneak into the Hall and hide?'

Ian shook his head. 'Not a chance. We always have a prefect watching us. They treat us as if we were criminals. I don't suppose they'll even let us go to the toilet. Not now they know what Harvey did.'

'Anyway,' Harvey said quickly, 'there's nowhere to hide in the Hall. You know what it's like.'

Dinah nodded silently and there was a long pause. Lloyd was straining to think of a good idea. He was usually the one with the brainwaves. He had taught the others to mouth, so that they could talk in secret when no one was looking. And he was the one who had started the Register of Rules and persuaded the others to copy bits out of encyclopaedias so that they could keep up with the goody-goodies at school. But now his mind felt like a piece of soggy cottonwool.

'It's a pity we can't bug the Hall,' he said at last, in a flippant voice.

'Lloyd — that's it!' Dinah bounced on her seat, looking unusually excited for her. Her cheeks were very faintly pink. 'We can't bug the Hall very easily, but we can bug

me! Has anyone got a little tape-recorder? A battery one?' 'Yes,' Ian and Mandy said together.

'Well then, it's easy. I'll put it in my blazer pocket and turn it on when I go into the Hall. It won't record very well in there, but it'll probably pick up enough to tell us . . .'

She launched into a long discussion with Ian about the best way to do it. Mandy put in a suggestion from time to time and Harvey and Ingrid were nodding away in agreement.

Lloyd watched them all, totally disgusted. He might have known how it would be. He had told Harvey that there would never be any peace and quiet again if a girl came to live with them, and he had been right, for all she looked so meek and docile. There had been nothing but trouble ever since she walked into the house.

And now she had walked into her first SPLAT meeting – where she had no business to be anyway – and taken it over. No one would guess *he* was the Chairman, or that bugging the Hall had been *his* idea. He sat hunched over on his box, sulking.

Suddenly, Ingrid prodded him. 'Hey, wake up, Lloyd. We're taking a decision.' She turned to Dinah. 'It's one of our rules. Everything we do has to be agreed by all of us. Otherwise we don't do it. There are so few of us that we can't afford to argue.'

Grumpily, Lloyd looked round at them. 'Right, let's take a vote. The proposal is that Dinah should take a tape-recorder into Assembly. Ian? Harvey? Mandy? Ingrid?' All four of them nodded.

'And Dinah,' Harvey said. 'You've forgotten her. She's a sworn-in member too.'

'Dinah?' Lloyd said reluctantly. Dinah nodded slowly, watching Lloyd's face. 'What about you?' she murmured. 'You haven't said anything yet.'

'I'm not sure I do agree,' Lloyd said. 'It's a very dangerous plan, and we've always tried to keep out of danger. That's what this society's for, not for solving mysteries. What happens if something goes wrong?'

'I'm the only one who'll be in danger then,' Dinah said mildly. 'If I'm not afraid, why should you be? I won't tell on the rest of you. I swore. Remember?'

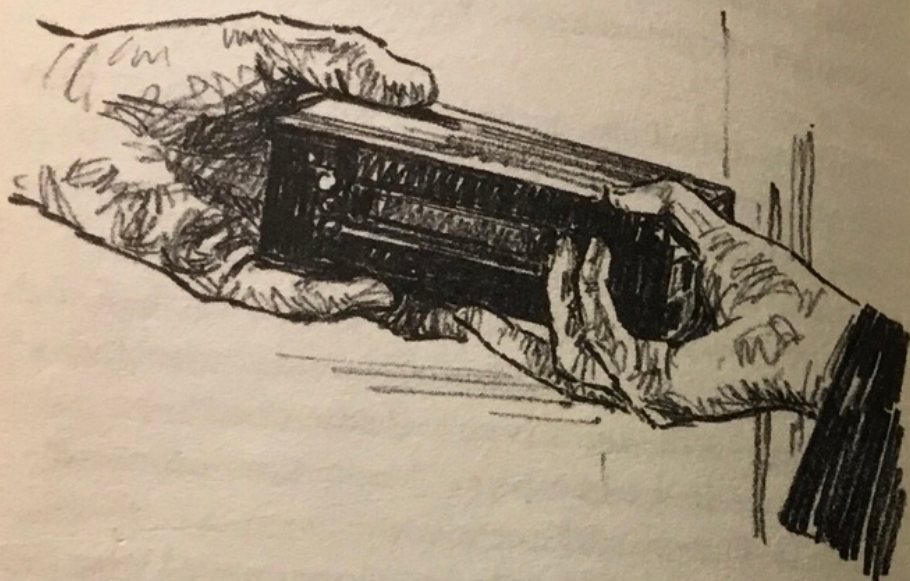
'But how do we know you'll keep your promise?'

'Oh L!' Harvey said impatiently.

Lloyd could see the others growing annoyed with him as well. He would have to give in. 'All right, all right,' he said with bad grace. 'We'll try it. Tomorrow. And we'll all meet at our house afterwards, to listen to the tape. But I bet we don't find out anything useful.' Ingrid glared at him, and he banged on the floor again before she could say anything. 'Meeting dissolved.'

He stamped home at high speed, trying to leave Dinah behind. But Harvey chose to walk with her and chat, instead of catching up, and that did not improve Lloyd's temper one little bit.

CHAPTER II



Dinah the Spy

As Dinah swallowed her last mouthful of cheese flan, she felt more lonely than she had ever felt in her life before. All the other members of SPLAT were sitting together, on their usual isolated table in the dining hall, but they had decided that it would seem suspicious if she sat with them. So she was next to Lucy, on a table full of good, well-behaved pupils, all of them munching their way through the same-sized platefuls of cheese flan, watery cabbage and lumpy mashed potato. Chop, scrape, lift, chop, scrape, lift, went the knives and forks, in regular rhythm. No one complained about the terrible food. No one asked to leave any. No one spoke at all. Even Lucy

Dinah the Spy

was chewing stolidly.

Her stomach fluttering nervously, Dinah reached out for her dish of rice pudding. As she did so, she slipped her other hand into her pocket, feeling the shape of the little cassette recorder underneath the cover of her handkerchief.

'Dinah Glass!' said Rose's voice over her shoulder.

Dinah froze, rigid.

'Well?' Rose snapped.

'Well what?' muttered Dinah guiltily.

'Your knife and fork!'

Glancing at her empty plate, Dinah saw that she had left the knife and fork lying untidily askew. Trying not to look too relieved, she twitched them straight, so that they lay at the same neat angle as everyone else's. Then she ate her rice pudding quickly, feeling, with every mouthful, that she might choke with fright. The tape-recorder seemed to be making a gigantic bulge in her pocket, visible to anyone.

Ten minutes later, as if at a signal, everyone on her table stood up, ready to walk off to Assembly. Lloyd, Harvey and the others were still finishing their puddings. As Dinah passed their table, she glanced quickly sideways. Not one of them looked at her. But each of them had a hand on the table and, momentarily, they all crossed their fingers. Even Lloyd. Slightly comforted, Dinah marched out of the dining room and into the Hall and sat down beside Lucy, who gave her a cautious smile.

'Hallo,' Dinah whispered. 'How are things?'

Lucy smiled again and shrugged. Then, greatly daring,

she whispered back. 'How are you getting on?' 'Good question.' Dinah glanced round at Them, at the children and teachers, all of whom would give her away if they knew what she had in her pocket. She grinned wryly. 'I feel like Winston Smith.'

'Winston Smith?' whispered Lucy, puzzled.

'He was a man who was spied on all the time. In a book called *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.'

'Oh.' Lucy still looked bewildered. 'Funny name for a book.'

'It means -' Dinah started, but Lucy nudged her sharply.

'Ssh! Here he comes.'

The Headmaster was walking slowly up the middle of the Hall, his long gown swirling and his head erect. He looked neither to right nor to left, but as he passed all fidgeting stopped. Children sat up straighter in their chairs and faced the front. While he climbed the steps of the stage, the men teachers pulled their ties smooth and the women patted their hair.

'Good afternoon, school,' he said.

'Good afternoon, sir,' replied everyone, voices perfectly together.

He looked gravely down on the rows of heads in front of him and reached up to take off his glasses. Dinah felt a sudden spurt of revulsion at the thought of letting herself be hypnotized again. But there was nothing she could do. It had to happen if the plan was to succeed. Her finger, in her blazer pocket, twitched once, turning on the tape-recorder, and then the voice began.

'I'm pleased to learn that you have all been working very hard this morning. You have done well, but now you must be weary. Weary and sleepy . . .'

Crossing her fingers hard in her pockets, Dinah shut her eyes and felt the heavy, inexorable tide of sleep start to wash over her.

She was already unconscious when the Headmaster gave his first orders, so she never knew quite what happened next. She was not aware of the Headmaster's steady voice, nor of her own, repeating what they were all told to repeat. She could not even feel the shape of the tape-recorder, clutched tightly in her fingers, inside her pocket.

'Right!' said the Headmaster suddenly. 'Now move to the groups I divided you into yesterday and prepare to receive instructions.'

Their eyes open but glazed, two hundred children rose to their feet, completely silently except for the shuffling of chairs, and started to move along the rows like robots, rearranging themselves into six groups in different parts of the Hall.

Dinah's feet took her mechanically up on to the stage. As she walked across it, she passed the Headmaster, but although her eyes passed over his face she was not aware of the irritable way it twitched.

'Dinah Glass - stop.'

Obediently, she stood to attention.

'You look slovenly. Take your hand out of your pocket at once.'

Without any hesitation, she drew out her hand, still

tightly clutching the tape-recorder. The Headmaster had begun to turn away, but out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of it. He whirled back.

'Give me what you have in your hand.'

Her face blank and calm, Dinah held out the tape-recorder and he took it from her. For a moment or two, he turned it over thoughtfully in his hands.

'Well, well,' he said softly, 'so that's the way the wind blows, is it? I can see I shall have to deal with you at once, and not leave it until next week.' Briefly his fingers moved, pressing switches. Then he said in a louder voice, 'Mr Venables. Come here.'

Automatically, Mr Venables marched up on to the stage and, with an expression of careful calculation on his face, the Headmaster began to whisper in his ear.

When Dinah opened her eyes again, blinking, she had a second of complete, distracted panic. She was not quite sure where she was. Somehow, she had expected to be somewhere else . . . Then, gradually, the pieces of the room swam into place and she realized that she was sitting in her own classroom. It was totally empty, except for Mr Venables, who was at his desk, facing her.

'Good afternoon, Dinah,' he said briskly. She blinked again. 'What – what am I doing here?'

'You are here because I have something to say to you. Come up to my desk.'

Still dazed, she stood up and walked towards him. It was only when she was standing beside the desk that she noticed what was lying on top of it. Three sheets of paper covered with sums worked in her own tiny figures. Very

difficult sums. She was too controlled to catch her breath, but her face became completely wooden.

Mr Venables tapped the papers with one finger. 'You did these sums. Didn't you?'

'They were Harvey's sums, not mine,' Dinah said carefully. Mr Venables gave an impatient sigh.

'There was never any chance that Harvey could do them. They were set to see if you would do them to help him. If you *could* do them. And he will be punished for letting you help him unless –'

'But that's not fair!' Dinah broke in. 'He would have been punished if they weren't done and now he's going to be punished because they *are* done. He never had any chance.'

'Fairness is an illusion, designed to create disorder,' Mr Venables said calmly. 'Besides, I did not say that he would be punished. Only that he would be punished unless – unless you decide to help him by cooperating.'

Dinah stood stubborn and silent. Mr Venables looked at her.

'You are a clever girl, Dinah, however much you may have tried to hide it. You must see that you have no choice.'

'What do you want me to do?' she said stiffly.

Briskly, Mr Venables began to explain, and Dinah stared at him, completely amazed.

She walked home alone, in a dream, so wrapped up in what she was thinking that she did not see anything around her. When she pushed open the kitchen door,

Mrs Hunter smiled at her.

'The others are all in the playroom. They wondered what had happened to you.'

'The others?' Dinah said, still vague. Mrs Hunter looked at her.

'Are you all right, dear?'

'What? Oh yes.' Suddenly, Dinah remembered what was supposed to be happening. She slid her fingers into her pocket and felt the solid shape of the cassette recorder. 'I just walked home rather slowly, that's all.'

'Do you want something to eat?'

'No. No thanks. I'd better go and talk to them.'

As she reached the playroom door, a voice from inside said, 'The man who can keep order can rule the world.'

For one moment she could not drag the right reply out of her memory. Then it came. 'But the man who can endure disorder is truly free.'

Ingrid wrenched open the door excitedly. 'Hallo, Brains. What happened? Hey, you look terrible.'

Silently, Dinah walked in and put the tape-recorder down on the table. Mandy touched her hand gently.

'What's the matter? Did you get caught?'

'No. I mean, I don't know.'

'You don't know?' Lloyd spluttered. 'Christmas puddings! Don't be silly. You must know.'

'No she mustn't,' Ian said. 'She's been hypnotized. Remember? Let's listen to the tape.'

Dinah nodded. Best to get that over first. Then she could talk properly.

Ian reached for the switch, and they all sat watching

the tape run through for two or three minutes. Then he pressed another switch and ran it on a bit and they listened again.

There was no sound.

'You didn't switch it on!' Lloyd said accusingly. 'You forgot.'

'No I didn't. I remember doing it. I don't remember anything after that, but I did switch it on.'

'Perhaps it didn't pick up anything,' Mandy said soothingly. 'It was in her pocket, after all.'

Lloyd looked stubborn. 'I think she mucked it up.'

'Oh, leave her alone!' Harvey thumped him. 'You're always getting at her, Lloyd. Look, you've upset her.'

'No,' Dinah murmured. 'No, it's not that. I don't know why the recording didn't work. But something else happened.'

Suddenly they were all looking at her curiously.

'Come on,' Ingrid urged. 'Don't spin it out. Tell us.'

Dinah took a deep breath.

'Why,' she said quietly, 'didn't anyone tell me that the school was going to be on the Eddy Hair Show next week? In the Great School Quiz?'