



'Got You Guessing?'

'Oh that?' Lloyd shrugged. 'Didn't you know about that? Why should we get excited about it? It only means more glory for the Headmaster. And none of *us* is going to be in the team. What's that got to do with anything?'

Typical of a girl, he thought. She was just trying to distract them, because she'd messed up the business with the tape-recorder.

But Dinah was staring at him as if he were an idiot. 'Can't you see how peculiar it is?' she said softly. 'Think what the Eddy Hair Show's like. Mess. Chaos. They fling things all over the place. Flour, soot, chickens – all

sorts of things. Sometimes they even break windows.'

'I expect they pay for them afterwards,' Ian said. 'But look.' Dinah leaned forwards, anxious that they should see things her way. 'Think what the school's like. If you put your knife and fork down out of line, someone's on to you. If you throw snow at someone, the whole place goes mad. Why should the Headmaster have *invited* the Eddy Hair Show to come? Because he must have done.'

'You're right,' Mandy said slowly. 'I never thought of it like that before. It is odd.'

Lloyd banged the table. 'What does it matter if it's odd? It's got nothing to do with what we're talking about.'

'I'm not so sure,' Dinah said softly. 'You see – the Headmaster knows it was me that did those sums for Harvey.' Harvey gasped and she smiled at him reassuringly. 'No, it's all right. They were a trap. I was meant to do them. But so that you don't get into trouble for it – I've got to be in the Quiz team for the Eddy Hair Show.'

'So?' Lloyd said disagreeably. 'That just goes to prove what I've said all along. You're one of Them, not one of Us.'

'Oh, do be quiet!' For once, Ian was roused out of his usual lethargy, positively snarling at Lloyd. 'Can't you see Dinah's got more to say? And if she thinks it's important it must be worth listening to.'

Lloyd subsided, sulking, and Dinah went on, choosing her words carefully.

'It was Mr Venables who told me about being in the team. And the really odd thing was that he kept saying, "You must see to it that the team wins. The Headmaster says that the team *must* win. Otherwise, there'll be trouble for Harvey Hunter."'

'You can do it, can't you?' Harvey said, in a worried voice. 'You are clever enough, Di?'
'Oh, I expect so,' Dinah said vaguely. 'But that's not the point. The point is – why is the Headmaster so desperate for us to win? Why should it be important to him?'

Lloyd snorted. 'More honour and glory for his precious school.'

Dinah shook her head, frowning. 'No, I don't think that's it. It doesn't seem to fit, somehow. There's something else. Something at the back of my mind that makes it all make sense. But I can't catch hold of it.'

'Look,' Ian said suddenly. 'It's Friday today, isn't it? Well, the Eddy Hair Show's on at six o'clock. We'll watch it and see if that helps.'

'Oh, good-oh!' Ingrid chirped. 'I love it. Especially the Great School Quiz. The questions are so hard, I can never do any of them.'

'That's because we're all taught parrot-fashion,' said Dinah. 'The questions in the Quiz are puzzles, and no one in our school's encouraged to think. It's quite the wrong quiz for our sort of school. So why did the Headmaster get us into it?'

'It's just the fame he wants,' Lloyd said. 'I told you.

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You know what they say about the Eddy Hair Show. Everyone in the country switches on at six o'clock on a Friday to watch it.'

'But –' began Dinah. Lloyd flung his hands up in despair, ready to argue with her.

'Let's forget it for now,' Mandy said hastily. 'Who's for a game of I-Spy?'

The television set flickered briefly and then the picture swelled into colour. Six girls, apparently with no heads, danced across the screen, chased by a large gorilla.

'Yes, folks,' said a cheerful voice from nowhere, 'it's what you've all been waiting for. Your weekly dose of craziness in a sane, sad world. The Great, the Magnificent, the *only* – EDDY HAIR SHOW!'

The gorilla jumped into a dustbin. Then it reached up and pulled its head off, revealing Eddy Hair's purple-painted face.

'It's all rubbish,' he said severely. 'Only idiots watch this show. Tests prove that ninety-nine point nine per cent of our viewers have no heads.'

Bounding from the dustbin, he waggled his purple hair at the audience. 'And just you wait till you see what a vintage load of rubbish is on the show today. If you had any sense, you'd switch off now. Got you guessing? *That's* how I like it!'

At manic speed, the show swung into its usual succession of gags, sketches and disasters. Some of it was pre-recorded, like the piece where Eddy Hair swung from a helicopter, dropping balloons shaped like fat ladies

over a Beauty Contest. But most of it was live, and one or two of the disasters were obviously completely unexpected. Whatever happened, Eddy Hair laughed his raucous laugh and all over the country people fell about, clutching their sides helplessly.

Only in the Hunters' sitting room was there total, grim silence. All the members of SPLAT were watching the show like detectives, trying to see why the Headmaster was interested in it. And the more they watched, the more baffled they became.

At last, there was a fanfare of trumpets, accompanied by wild grunts from a pig.

'At last!' bellowed Eddy Hair. 'Now you'll see that the people round here are not only mad but stupid. It's – the Great School Quiz.'

Immediately, the cameras panned round the school hall where the show was taking place. Two teams, each of three children, were sitting facing each other and beside each, on a throne, sat a cheerful-looking Head Teacher. Eddy Hair walked across the stage with his knees knocking dramatically.

'Can't stand teachers!' he whispered at the camera. 'They terrify me.'

Then, with a grin, he was squatting on top of a barrel, reaching for the first question.

'Right. It's a question for the Manor Junior School. You have thirty seconds to think, and anyone can answer – if you're not all too thick to work it out. Here goes. "I want to buy roller skates for my chickens. Twelve per cent of them have only one leg, and half the rest refuse

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to wear roller skates. So how many skates do I need to buy?"'

'That's impossible,' Mandy said. 'He hasn't said how many chickens there are.'

'It's the same number of skates as the number of chickens,' Dinah said calmly. 'It works out to one leg each.'

Almost thirty seconds later, a brainy-looking boy with glasses faltered, 'The same as the number of chickens?' Eddy Hair beamed at him. 'Watch you don't burn your mind out, genius. Thinking's bad for your football, remember. Now, the next question . . .'

As the Quiz went on, the questions grew harder and harder, but Dinah answered them all, hardly pausing to think. And the more she answered, the crosser Lloyd grew.

'Oh, shut up!' he yelled, as the last question was asked. 'We know you've got brains the size of the Eiffel Tower. No need to rub it in. I vote we turn off this stupid programme.'

'Not yet,' wailed Ingrid. 'It's just getting to my favourite bit. With the Head Teachers. Let's watch that.'

On the screen, Eddy Hair was wagging a finger at the Headmaster of Shillingstone Street School.

'Your lot,' he said cheerfully, 'are the Dimmest School of the Week. Prepare to receive your reward.'

In a flash, a giant panda appeared behind the Headmaster's chair and tipped a bucketful of flour over his head. As he emerged from the white cloud, brushing it from his beard, his pupils cheered wildly.

'I can just see our Headmaster liking that,' Ian said with relish. 'Perhaps the whole thing will be fun.'

'No,' murmured Mandy. 'We're going to win. Remember?'

'That's even better,' chuckled Ingrid. 'Do listen. What's the other Headmaster going to say?'

For Eddy Hair was now pointing at the Headmaster of the winning school.

'You seem to have a crowd of geniuses,' he said sourly. 'Suppose you tell us how you do it.'

This Headmaster was a large, cheerful man with a red face. The camera panned in on him, so that his face filled the whole screen.

'Doughnuts,' he said, perfectly gravely. 'We fill them full of doughnuts every morning before school. Good for the brain. You should try some, Eddy. And if anyone refuses to eat the doughnuts, we ...'

He went on for a full minute, with the camera to himself, explaining the magical qualities of doughnuts, before the panda reappeared and jammed three doughnuts into his open mouth.

Lloyd reached forward and switched off the set. 'You see?' he said contemptuously. 'There's nothing for us to go on. It's just a red herring that Dinah's dreamed up.'

'Wait.' Dinah had gone white, and she was still staring at the empty screen, with her mouth open. Then, as if she were being strangled, she said, 'It's always like that, isn't it? The Headmaster of the winning team gets a whole minute to talk. To say whatever rubbish comes

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into his head. With most of the people in the country watching.'

Ian nodded.

'Well,' Dinah gulped. 'Think what our Headmaster could do with that.'

Mandy gasped.

'Would a minute be enough?' Harvey said.

'Probably,' Dinah considered. 'I don't think it took him nearly as long as a minute to hypnotize me the first time.'

'But that's *devilish!*' spluttered Ingrid. 'He'd have the whole country in his power. Do you think that's really what he's planning?'

'I don't see how he could resist it,' Dinah said miserably. 'Do you, Lloyd?'

Lloyd would dearly have liked to say she was wrong. Just to show her up. But the more he thought about it, the more certain it seemed. 'I think you've got it,' he said grudgingly.

'But *why?*' Dinah chewed her bottom lip.

Lloyd jumped to his feet. 'That's obvious! Don't be so dumb, Dinah. He'll be able to make his fortune. All he has to do is to tell everyone to send him a hundred pounds, or go out and rob a bank, or something. He'll be the richest man in the world.'

'Of course!' said Ian and Harvey together.

But Dinah looked doubtful. 'I'm not sure. It doesn't seem quite —'

'Oh, you!' Lloyd said bitterly. 'You want to have all the inspirations. Just because I thought of this one —'

Mandy interrupted him, ready to make peace as always. 'I can't see that it matters why he's doing it. The important thing is – what are we going to do about it?'

'Couldn't Dinah just lose the Quiz?' Ingrid said helpfully.

'No!' Harvey went white. And Dinah shook her head as well.

'That's too dangerous. He planned all this before I came, so he must have some scheme even if the team loses. No, the only safe thing is to stop the Eddy Hair Show coming to the school at all.'

'Right.' Lloyd decided that they had all listened to her for long enough. His head was suddenly bursting with ideas, and he was determined to take charge. 'I'm the Chairman, and I'm going to make the plans.' Everyone looked round at him and he grew more confident. This was better. Like before Dinah came. Everyone waiting for him to tell them what to do. 'We'll keep quiet for a week. So that no one suspects anything. Then, on the day of the show, this is what will happen ...'

CHAPTER 13



SPLAT Goes into Action

When Lloyd, Harvey and Dinah arrived at school the next Friday morning, there was something slightly different about the atmosphere in the playground. A feeling of suppressed excitement. No one pranced about, or did imitations of Eddy Hair, or boasted about being in the Quiz team. The children were standing in their usual circles, chanting away. But the chant was a bit faster and, from time to time, people looked at each other, breathlessly. It was plain what they were thinking. At six o'clock that evening they would be sitting in the Hall and they would be on television.

The members of SPLAT kept well away from each

other. There was no need to speak. They knew what they had to do. For a whole week, they had been going over it at their meetings until the arrangements were perfect. This morning there were only five of them in the playground. Ian had hidden on the way to school, ready to carry out the first part of Lloyd's plan, and Mandy carried a note, forged by Dinah, which said that Ian would not be at school that day because he had a cold.

As the prefects gathered on the steps and the children started to move into line, Lloyd glanced round quickly to check that Mandy and Ingrid were there. As he glanced at them, they crossed their fingers quickly and moved off. Lloyd drew a deep breath. Nothing must go wrong. He only hoped that he had thought of everything.

The big outside-broadcast lorries trundled through the town, carrying the equipment needed to set up that evening's Eddy Hair Show. Inside, the drivers and technicians were laughing and chatting to each other. This was the easy part of their job. Once the show started, they were tense, not knowing what was going to happen from one moment to the next. Whatever Eddy Hair sprang on them, they had to cope with, somehow. But if they got the cameras and lights and microphones set up in good time, they could cope with anything.

At the traffic lights in the middle of the town, the first driver paused and pulled out a map. 'Right,' he said. 'We turn left here, and -'

He stopped suddenly. A tall, fair-haired boy in immaculate school uniform was jumping up and down

beside his cab, trying to attract his attention. He wound the window down and leaned out. 'Yes, sonny?'

Ian put on his most virtuous and reliable expression. 'Are you the television people? Coming to do the Eddy Hair Show at our school?'

'Yes, that's right. You looking for us?'

Ian nodded. 'The Headmaster sent me. He asked if you would take the lorries round the back way. You go left here, right up the little lane, over the bridge and - Here, would you like me to come along and show you? I've got to go back to school anyway.'

'Sure. Hop up.' The driver grinned at him. 'Nice to come to a school where we get looked after so well.'

Ian climbed up into the cab and began to direct. Behind, he heard the other lorries start up and his mouth went dry. If only it worked. If only they did not suspect anything.

'Left here,' he said, his voice completely calm. 'Then right.'

'You're sure you've got it straight, sonny?' As the man beside him swung the wheel, he glanced sideways, doubtfully. 'I don't see any sign of a school.'

'That's all right,' Ian said airily. 'You can't see it from here. Go through those gates, and I'll hop out and tell the Headmaster you've come. Then you can bring the lorries up to the door one by one.'

Still frowning, the driver turned the wheel again. Slowly the lorry crunched through a pair of tall gates into the disused quarry. In front of them, tall cliffs of chalk stretched up on every side, cutting off any view.

Ian threw the door open and slipped down, out of the cab.

'Wait here. Won't be a moment.'

As he ran back to the entrance, the other two lorries were rolling through the gates. He waved cheerfully at the drivers and waited until they were clear, then began to shove at the heavy gates. For one panicky moment, he thought they were not going to move, but they swung together suddenly, with a clang, and he pulled out of his pocket the two big padlocks that Lloyd had given him. Quickly, he clipped them shut.

'Hey!' said a voice from inside the quarry. 'What're you doing?'

Not waiting to hear any more, Ian ran off down the road. Mission One was safely completed. Now came the tricky bit. He found the bush where he had hidden a bottle of cooking oil, pulled it out and set off towards the school. Somehow, he had to sneak in and out again, without being seen.

Mandy and Ingrid were not feeling so cheerful. Their part of the plan was next, but they had to wait until the end of the afternoon to start it, and they were not at all sure that it would work. They sat in their separate classrooms, biting their nails, and when they met at lunchtime, Mandy whispered, 'I'm scared. Suppose it all goes wrong?'

Ingrid glanced round to see if anyone was watching, then thumped her crossly. 'It had better not go wrong. You know what Lloyd said. We must get all possible

enemies out of the way. Now shut up about it. I'll see you outside the staffroom at four o'clock.'

Mandy fretted her way through the afternoon, but at four o'clock she was standing bravely in the corridor outside the staffroom when Ingrid appeared.

'There's a terrible racket going on in the Headmaster's office,' Ingrid whispered. 'He's on the phone to the television headquarters, wanting to know why the cameras and things haven't arrived. I could hear him right through the door.'

Mandy grinned. 'At least Ian's first bit went OK. Let's hope the second bit did too, or we might be in trouble. All the teachers are in the staffroom. I've been watching them go in. Give me a couple of minutes to get down to the swimming pool and then knock on the door.'

She ran off, and a minute or two later, Ingrid rapped sharply on the staffroom door, panting as if she had been hurrying. When Mr Venables opened it, she began to speak quickly.

'Please, sir, I've got a message from the Headmaster. Eddy Hair wants to talk to all the teachers in the swimming pool building.'

'The swimming pool?' Mr Venables raised his eyebrows.

'It's a stunt he's got planned.' Ingrid gave her most innocent, frightened smile. 'He wants you all to join in, and the Headmaster's sounding rather cross and -'

Her lip trembled, from genuine nervousness, and that appeared to convince Mr Venables. He called over his shoulder, 'Come on, everyone. We've got to go

Simon Headmaster
down to the swimming pool. Some mad stunt of Eddy Hair's.'

Groaning wearily, the teachers began to emerge from the staffroom. They trooped out of the building and across the playground, towards the single-storey block where the swimming pool was housed. When they were halfway there, Ingrid said anxiously, 'Oh, do please hurry. Run. The Headmaster was so impatient!'

The group of teachers broke into a trot, making for the open door of the swimming pool. As the first few of them hurried through the door, their feet slipped on the oil which Ian had spread carefully all over the tiles. Slithering towards the water, they began to yell, but this only brought the other teachers running faster. As the last of them slipped through the door, the splashes began. One after another, they fell into the swimming pool, skidding uncontrollably over the edge.

Immediately, Mandy appeared from her hiding place round one corner, waving the swimming pool key. As Ingrid pushed the doors shut, she slid it into the lock. The shouting, splashing teachers had still not realized that they were not involved in one of Eddy Hair's crazy pranks. It would be some time before they discovered that they were prisoners. Ingrid winked at Mandy. 'That should keep them busy. Let's get out of here.'

At the same moment, Lloyd and Dinah were crouching round the corner from the prefects' room, quarrelling in whispers.

'They're not all there,' Dinah was saying. 'Rose and

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Jeff are still around the school somewhere. If we don't get them, it could be very dangerous.'

'Don't be so bossy.' Lloyd frowned. 'All the other four are there, but they might come out once they've eaten their sandwiches. And if we don't lock them in and get down to the Hall, someone's going to notice that we're not eating ours. We'll just have to do without Rose and Jeff.'

'But they're the worst.'

'Oh, shut up!' Lloyd knew she was right really, but it did not make him better tempered. 'You're always interfering.'

Dinah shut her mouth tight. No use saying she had only been trying to help. She knew what Lloyd was like now. He wanted to be in charge all the time. Well, let him. She did not really think trapping the prefects would make any difference anyway.

'Go on, then,' she said quietly. 'Let's get it over with.'

Like a shadow, Lloyd stepped forwards and locked the door of the prefects' room. Then he put his ear to it.

'Hey,' he mouthed, 'they're saying something.'

Dinah came up beside him. Through the wood of the door, she heard Simon's voice reciting, as if he had learnt it by heart, 'And I take charge of transport. With twenty children to help me. According to Master Plan, Section C.'

Lloyd frowned. 'What are they on about?' he said noiselessly.

Dinah put a finger to her lips and leaned closer, hearing Sarah's voice now.

'I'm in charge of work camps. Master Plan, Section F. With fifty children to help. All people to be split up according to age. Museums and public buildings to be used for housing them and -'

'Oh, come on.' Lloyd pulled Dinah's sleeve. 'I don't know what they're up to, but it doesn't sound as though it's got anything to do with today. Let's go and eat our sandwiches. Then we can sneak off again and see how Harvey's doing.'

Dinah dragged her ear away from the door, feeling frustrated. She was sure she was missing something very important, but Lloyd was right. They could not risk being seen with their ears to the door.

'OK,' she said. 'They sound as though they'll go on talking for hours. And I don't suppose it'll matter about Rose and Jeff.'

'Of course it won't matter,' Lloyd said angrily. But he was not very happy as they crept off down the corridor. It was the first thing that had gone wrong.

Back in the middle of the town again, Ian was beginning to grow restless. Perhaps he had missed Eddy Hair. He might have been looking for the wrong sort of person. Perhaps the purple curls were just a wig and the crazy clothes were only for wearing on television. In that case, Eddy Hair could have slipped past a hundred times without being noticed. What an idiot he was not to have thought of that before! He frowned, and marched up and down by the traffic lights, stamping his feet to keep them warm.

Then he saw it. A little, low sports car, zooming along the main road towards him. There was no mistaking it. Even if the number plate had not been EH 1. Even if the car had not been painted in stripes of red, yellow and mustard colour. For there, at the wheel, was Eddy Hair himself, his huge bunch of purple curls almost filling the windscreen and a cheerful grin on his loony face.

Bounding with relief, Ian started to leap up and down beside the red traffic light, ready with his next set of false directions.

And for a moment it looked as though it was going to work. The sports car squealed to a stop and Eddy Hair leaned over and wound down the window.

'Please -' Ian started.

But Eddy Hair was obviously used to being stopped by waving children. He did not even give Ian a chance to finish his sentence. Instead, beaming all over his face, he shouted, 'Want an autograph, do you? Bless you, boy, you don't suppose I can *write*, do you?'

With a great screech of laughter, he banged the car into gear, roared the engine and was away as the lights changed, leaving only a cloud of exhaust fumes.

'Blast it,' Ian said softly. 'Blast, blast, blast!'

Then he began to run as fast as he could towards the school. He had to warn the others that the plan was not working perfectly. Luckily, he knew where he would find them all.

In the school boiler room, Harvey was shaking with fright, reading over and over again the instructions that

Dinah had given him. 'It's quite safe if you do it in the right order,' she had said firmly. 'But if you don't, you might kill yourself.'

He looked at his watch. Why didn't the others come? It was after half past four. He could not leave it any longer. Oh well, he would have to do without their help. Pulling a torch out of his pocket, he looked nervously up at the big red handle on the wall which said MAINS SUPPLY.

'Here goes,' he murmured.

Gripping the handle tightly with his right hand, he pulled it hard down.

Instantly, the cellar was pitch black. Harvey switched on the torch and wrenched open the door of the fuse box. With his left hand he began to tug out the fuses, cramming them into his pockets.

There was a quick clatter of feet outside the door. Glancing nervously over his shoulder, he saw Mandy and Ingrid run in.

'Smashing!' Ingrid said enthusiastically. She leaped for the fuse box. 'We'll give you a hand.'

As her fingers reached for a fuse, Lloyd and Dinah came creeping in.

'OK, H?' Lloyd muttered. 'Everything else is going according to plan. Well – nearly. Ian's on his way. I saw him racing through the gate while we were on our way up here. Now let's get a move on with those fuses. Once we've chucked them away, they won't be able to do anything, even if they do get the lights and cameras here.'

They had just cleared the fuse box when Ian arrived.

He pulled a face, gasping for breath. 'I couldn't stop Eddy Hair,' he panted. 'He really is as crazy as he seems on TV. But I've got the lorries locked up in the quarry OK, and – hey, Harvey!'

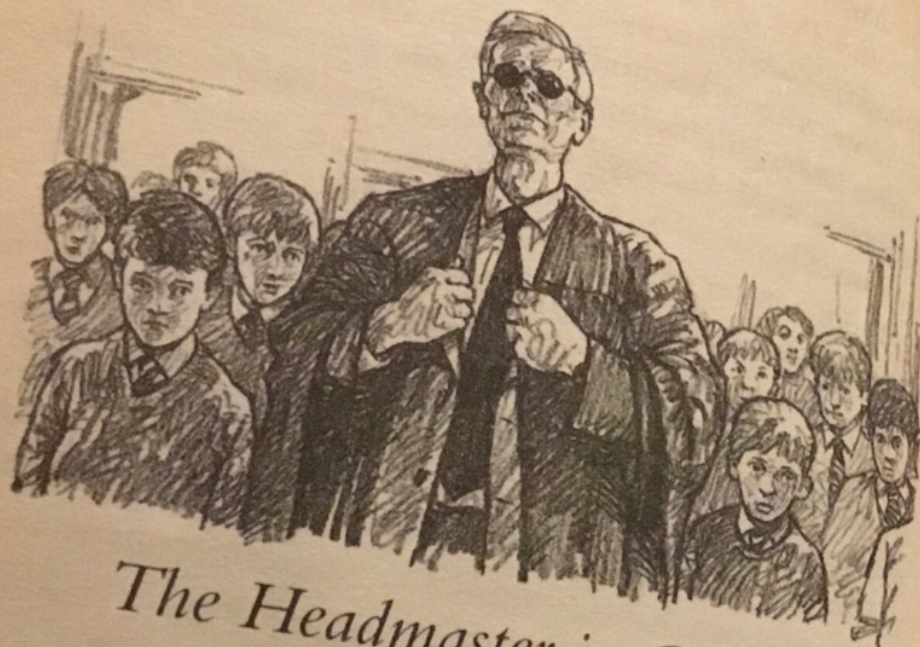
Harvey's hand, holding the torch, had begun to shake wildly, flashing light distractingly into everyone's eyes. 'Knock it off, Harvey!' Lloyd snapped. 'We've got to get out of here.'

'B – b – but –' stuttered Harvey, 'oh – look!'

He gestured despairingly towards the door, and the others spun round.

There, outlined in the doorway, was a tall figure in a gown. On either side of him stood Rose and Jeff, smirking.

'Well, well,' said the Headmaster. 'You've all been very busy today, haven't you?'



The Headmaster in Control

For a whole minute there was complete, horrified silence in the crowded boiler room. Then the Headmaster said, very quietly, 'Put the fuses back.'

'We won't!' Ingrid shouted. 'You're evil and wicked and we won't do anything to help you.'

The Headmaster smiled. 'I think you will.' He raised his voice slightly. 'Children – come along to the door.'

There was a tramping of feet in the corridor outside and suddenly the space behind the Headmaster was full of faces with blank, glazed eyes. Thirty or forty hypnotized children.

'We'd better do it,' Ian groaned. 'Otherwise they'll just make us. Come on, everyone.'

Despairingly, they began to push the fuses back into the box. Then Harvey switched on the mains supply again and they were all blinking in the sudden glare of light.

'That's better,' said the Headmaster, in a satisfied voice. 'Now we had better repair the rest of the damage you have done. Rose, where are all the teachers?'

'I saw Mandy and Ingrid lock them into the swimming pool.'

'And the prefects, Jeff?'

'Locked in their room,' Jeff said.

The Headmaster nodded and glanced back at the miserable members of SPLAT. 'I have had you watched, you see. I am not entirely stupid. The only thing I did not know was what had happened to the camera crew. But from what I heard as we arrived, I would guess that they are shut up in the old quarry. If you are sensible, you will hand over all the keys to me. Now.'

Sullenly, Lloyd, Ian and Mandy tossed the keys on to the floor. At a signal from the Headmaster, Rose and Jeff scooped them off and ran away down the corridor. The Headmaster did not speak again until the sound of their feet had died away. Then he stepped further into the room and looked at Dinah.

'I think,' he said, 'that we had better discuss what is going to happen next.'

'I know what you want,' Dinah said stiffly. 'You want me to win the Great School Quiz for you. So that you

can have a chance to hypnotize everyone in the country. Well, I won't do it. If it's the only way to stop you, I'll make sure I get all the questions wrong.'

The Headmaster raised his eyebrows. 'You have worked things out very cleverly. I can see that I have not over-estimated your intelligence. But you have underestimated my determination. You cannot refuse to do what I want.'

'Can't I?' Dinah stepped forward belligerently, but the Headmaster did not look in the least worried. Turning to the children massed in the doorway, he snapped at them in a brisk voice.

'Listen to my orders. In front of you are six straw dolls. They are no longer needed. You will advance on them and,' he drew a deep breath, 'you will tear them to pieces.'

Simultaneously, all the children swivelled their eyes to look into the boiler room. They showed no signs of recognition. It was plain that they were seeing precisely what they had been told to see. As they started to advance, Dinah watched Lucy, who was in the middle of the front row. Her face was as calm and cheerful as if she had been going out to pick daisies.

Knowing it would be no use, Dinah began to yell at her as the children marched into the boiler room.

'Lucy! It's me, Dinah! And there's Lloyd and Harvey and the others. You can't hurt us!'

'She won't hear you,' the Headmaster said icily. 'She is programmed to listen only to me and the prefects.'

Dinah and the others cowered against the wall behind

them as the children came steadily tramping towards them.

'Think, Dinah, think!' Lloyd yelled. 'There must be some way out of this. Otherwise they'll kill us.'

The foremost children had reached them now. Slowly they raised their arms, hands outstretched like claws.

'Oh, help!' Harvey yelled. 'Someone, help!'

The claw-like hands grabbed. Dinah found her blazer gripped firmly by Lucy and she heard Mandy's blouse rip. From beside her, Ingrid wailed, 'Oh, I'm frightened.'

More and more hands were pulling at them. Glancing across the room, Dinah saw the Headmaster smiling calmly, with no sign of wavering. Coldly, she realized that he would not relent. If he had to kill them, he would kill them. As someone started to tug at her hair, she shouted, 'All right, I'll do it! Whatever you say! Just stop them!'

At once, with a triumphant smile, the Headmaster said softly, 'Stop, children.'

Slowly, the arms dropped. Mandy gave a quick gasp of relief and Harvey drew a sobbing breath.

'You will be in the Quiz?' the Headmaster murmured. Dinah nodded, hanging her head.

'And you will win?'

'If that's what I have to do.'

'Very well.' The Headmaster's mouth twisted in an unpleasant expression. 'But do not suppose that I shall be so foolish as to trust you. Your friends will be in the Hall, surrounded by these children. If you break your

can have a chance to hypnotize everyone in the country. Well, I won't do it. If it's the only way to stop you, I'll make sure I get all the questions wrong.'

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'Lucy! It's me, Dinah! And there's Lloyd and Harvey and the others. You can't hurt us!'

'She won't hear you,' the Headmaster said icily. 'She is programmed to listen only to me and the prefects.'

Dinah and the others cowered against the wall behind

them as the children came steadily tramping towards them.

'Think, Dinah, think!' Lloyd yelled. 'There must be some way out of this. Otherwise they'll kill us.'

The foremost children had reached them now. Slowly they raised their arms, hands outstretched like claws.

'Oh, help!' Harvey yelled. 'Someone, help!'

The claw-like hands grabbed. Dinah found her blazer gripped firmly by Lucy and she heard Mandy's blouse rip. From beside her, Ingrid wailed, 'Oh, I'm frightened.'

More and more hands were pulling at them. Glancing across the room, Dinah saw the Headmaster smiling calmly, with no sign of wavering. Coldly, she realized that he would not relent. If he had to kill them, he would kill them. As someone started to tug at her hair, she shouted, 'All right, I'll do it! Whatever you say! Just stop them!'

At once, with a triumphant smile, the Headmaster said softly, 'Stop, children.'

Slowly, the arms dropped. Mandy gave a quick gasp of relief and Harvey drew a sobbing breath.

'You will be in the Quiz?' the Headmaster murmured.

Dinah nodded, hanging her head.

'And you will win?'

'If that's what I have to do.'

'Very well.' The Headmaster's mouth twisted in an unpleasant expression. 'But do not suppose that I shall be so foolish as to trust you. Your friends will be in the Hall, surrounded by these children. If you break your

The Demon Headmaster

promise, all I have to do is to say, "Destroy the dolls!" and they will be dead. Is that clear?

Dumb with despair, Dinah nodded again. Beside her, she heard Lloyd's familiar snort, comforting in its ordinariness.

'We may not be able to stop you,' Lloyd said scornfully, 'but we still think you're wicked. Wicked and pathetic. Fancy being prepared to *kill* us. Just for money.'

For the first time, the Headmaster looked startled. 'What do you mean?'

'That's what you're after, isn't it?' Lloyd said stoutly. 'You want to hypnotize everyone so that you can get their money and be the richest man in the world. Well, I think it's pathetic.'

To their amazement, the Headmaster suddenly flung back his head and laughed, soundlessly and horribly. When he stopped, he shook his head at them sadly.

'Money? Oh yes, I should be really pathetic if that was all I wanted. No wonder you have been my enemies. No wonder you think I am wicked.'

'Well you are, aren't you?' Ingrid said stoutly. He shook his head at her again.

'No, I am not wicked. My plans are for the good of everyone.' His voice rose, almost hysterically. 'My plans are glorious and splendid!'

'But you aren't going to tell us what they are?' said Dinah.

'You will see soon. Very soon now.' He looked round at them all. 'And when you do, you will understand how wrong you have been. Until then, I must remember that

The Headmaster in Control

it is the fate of great men always to be misunderstood. Now – let us go to the Hall.'

They began to walk along the corridor, the Headmaster gripping Dinah's shoulder and the others marching in the middle of the crowd of hypnotized children. As she walked, Dinah was thinking busily. What was it that the Headmaster wanted? He, at least, must believe that it *was* good. But – *what was it?*

In the Hall, everything was in chaos. The television men had just arrived and they were leaping about at high speed, hanging lights, positioning microphones and connecting wires. In the centre of it all, a wiry figure with a crop of purple curls was dancing wildly from place to place.

'Come on, lads!' Eddy Hair was shouting. 'You can just do it. If you work hard.'

The Headmaster walked straight up the middle of the Hall, with all the children following. Dinah saw his face twitch with distaste as he stared round at the crazy scene. Then he forced a jovial smile and tapped Eddy Hair on the arm.

'Aaaagh!' With a scream, Eddy Hair fell to the ground as if he had been shot. 'You got me!' He lay on the floor, looking up at the Headmaster.

'I beg your pardon,' the Headmaster said gravely. 'I didn't mean to startle you.'

'Good for the soul, being startled,' chuckled Eddy Hair. 'Nothing like the unexpected for keeping people on their – TOES!' As he said the last word, he bounded to his feet. 'What can I do for you, O Master?'

'Do you want me to bring the school into the Hall yet?'

'Why not, why not?' Eddy Hair flapped a hand. 'Good for the lads here to have an audience. And I don't suppose they'll be finished until thirty seconds before the show starts. No time to set the audience up then. Yes, get the kids in now. And have your Quiz team ready at the side of the stage. But make sure they're all quiet. We don't want a racket.'

'Oh yes,' the Headmaster said, with an amused smile, 'I think I can assure you that all my pupils will be perfectly quiet.'

Dinah stood at the side of the stage, out of range of the cameras, with the rest of the children taking part in the Quiz. It had not occurred to her to wonder before who would be picked to make up the rest of the team. Now she discovered that it was to be Rose and Lucy. Rose was her usual unpleasant self, but Lucy, woken out of her hypnotized trance, was bubbling with excitement, hardly able to keep silent. She grinned merrily at Dinah. It was all that Dinah could do to grin back.

You nearly killed me an hour ago, she thought. But, looking at Lucy now, she found it almost impossible to believe. And if she could barely believe it, who else would?

The Manor Road Quiz team had just arrived and Lucy smiled at the boy with glasses. 'You're Alec Bates, aren't you?' she whispered. 'I saw you on television last week. You were very good.'

The boy grinned back at her, cockily. 'I've been practising since then. I'm even better now. You'll never beat us.'

One of the sound engineers frowned at them and wagged a finger. 'Ssh,' he said loudly. 'The show's just about to start.'

As the first notes of the opening music filled the Hall, Dinah craned her neck to see what was going on. In the front row of chairs were the other members of SPLAT, surrounded by wooden-faced children, all ready to attack them if the instruction was given. She shuddered and looked sideways at the Headmaster, who was next to her.

He was staring across at the stage. Out there, Eddy Hair had begun a fight with a giant plateful of spaghetti. And the spaghetti was fighting him back, huge white strands slapping slimily round his neck and spoonfuls of sauce splattering messily all over the stage. The Headmaster's face was white. His fingers twitched and he looked as though he were going to be sick.

He can't stand it, thought Dinah suddenly. *Mess actually makes him ill*. Somehow, that thought was rather comforting. At least he had weaknesses. The knowledge made her feel bold and, in a very soft voice, she asked the question that had been bothering her for days. 'If you hadn't got me in the school, how would you have arranged to win the Quiz?'

The Headmaster dragged his eyes away from the stage, and glanced at the other team. 'I should have hypnotized

The Demon Headmaster

them and made them lose,' he murmured. 'But I shan't have to do that now. Shall I?'
'No. No, of course not,' Dinah said quickly, afraid. But she was not too afraid to risk another question. 'And what *will* you do after – after you've had your minute on television?'

But he just smiled at her and turned back to the stage, with a shudder. Eddy Hair had started to fling pepper at the spaghetti. He had three or four huge scarlet pepperpots with black stripes and he was shaking them frantically, spraying showers of pepper everywhere. And the spaghetti was sneezing. Its pale strands whirled everywhere like the arms of an octopus.

Dinah was left to wonder, desperately, what was going to happen. She was so deep in her own thoughts that she jerked with shock when the sound engineer prodded her.

'Quick!' he said. 'On to the stage.'

'What?'

'Didn't you hear? The Quiz is about to start.'

CHAPTER 15



The Great School Quiz

Lloyd, slumped in his chair at the front of the Hall, watched as the two teams filed out. The stage was a disgusting mess. Bits of spaghetti, broken eggs and torn paper lay all over the floor. On Dinah's chair lay one of the huge scarlet pepperpots which Eddy Hair had used in his fight with the spaghetti. Lloyd saw Dinah pick it up and put it on the table in front of her while the Headmaster, with an expression of revulsion, kicked away a squashed banana from near his foot.

'Ghastly, isn't it?' Eddy Hair said cheerfully. 'The