

me.'

Thoroughly bewildered now, Dinah walked into the school after him and along a straight corridor.

At her old school, all the walls had been covered with pictures and drawings done by the pupils, but these walls were completely blank, except for a framed notice hung halfway along. Dinah swivelled her head to read it as she passed.

The man who can keep order can rule the world.

Frowning slightly, she went on following Jeff until he came to a stop in front of a door which had the single word HEADMASTER painted on it.

He knocked.

'Come in.'

Jeff pushed the door open and waved Dinah inside, pulling it shut behind her.

As she stepped through, Dinah glanced quickly round the room. It was the tidiest office she had ever seen. There were no papers, no files, no pictures on the walls. Just a large, empty-topped desk, a filing cabinet, and a bookcase with a neat row of books.

She took it all in in one second and then forgot it as her eyes fell on the man standing by the window. He was tall and thin, dressed in an immaculate black suit. From his shoulders, a long, black teacher's gown hung in heavy folds, like wings, giving him the appearance of a huge crow. Only his head was startlingly white. Fair hair, almost as colourless as snow, lay round a face with paper-white skin and pallid lips. His eyes were

hidden behind dark glasses, like two black holes in the middle of all the whiteness.

She cleared her throat. 'Hello. I'm Dinah Glass and I—'

He raised a long, ivory-coloured hand. 'Please do not speak until you are asked. Idle chatter is an inefficient waste of energy.'

Unnervingly, he went on staring at her for a moment or two without saying anything else. Dinah wished she could see the eyes behind the dark lenses. With his eyes hidden, his expression was unreadable.

Finally, he waved a hand towards an upright chair, pulled round to face the desk. 'Sit down.' He sat down himself, facing her, and pulled a sheet of paper out of a drawer.

'Dinah Glass,' he said crisply, writing it down in neat, precise script. 'You are being fostered by Mrs Hunter?'

Dinah nodded.

'Answer properly, please.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And why is she not here, to introduce you?'

'She couldn't come, but she's sent you a letter.'

Reaching across the desk, the Headmaster twitched it out of her hand and slit the envelope with a small steel paperknife. As he read the letter, Dinah settled herself more comfortably, expecting to be asked a string of questions.

But there were no questions. Instead, he pushed a sheet of paper across the desk towards her. 'This is a test,' he said. 'It is given to all new pupils.'

'Haven't you got a report on me?' Dinah said. 'From my other school?'

'No one else's reports are of any use to me,' said the Headmaster. 'Please be quiet and do the test.'

His voice was low, but somehow rather frightening. Dinah took a pen out of her pocket and looked down at the paper.

The questions were fairly hard. Mostly sums, with a bit of English thrown in and one or two brain-teasers. She knew that most children would have found them difficult to answer and she paused for a moment, working out where she was going to make her deliberate mistakes. Not too many. Just enough to avoid trouble.

Then she picked up the pen and began to write. As she scribbled, she could feel him watching her and every time she glanced up he was the same. Pale and motionless, with two black circles where his eyes should have been. She was so nervous that she stumbled once or twice, getting some of the answers right where she had meant to make mistakes. To keep the balance, she had to botch up all the last three questions. Not very good. It did not look as convincing as it should have done. Her hand trembled slightly as she passed the paper back across the table.

The Headmaster scanned it carefully for a moment, then looked up at her.

'You are an intelligent girl.'

Dinah's heart sank, but, with an effort, she kept her face calm, meeting the Headmaster's gaze steadily. At last, he said, 'But you make too many mistakes. I wonder—' He chewed for a moment on his bottom lip. Then he shrugged. 'It doesn't matter. I dare say we shall find out all about you in due course.'

She looked down to the floor, trying not to seem too relieved, and waiting to be told which class she should go to. But the Headmaster did not seem in any hurry to get rid of her. He crumpled the test paper in his hand and dropped it into the rubbish bin. Then, slowly, he reached up a hand to take off his glasses.

Dinah found herself shivering. Ridiculously, she expected him to have pink eyes, because the rest of his face was so colourless. Or perhaps no eyes at all . . .

But his eyes were not pink. They were large and luminous, and a peculiar sea-green colour. She had never seen eyes like them before, and she found herself staring into them. Staring and staring.

'Funny you should be so tired,' he said, softly. 'So early in the morning.'

She opened her mouth to say that she was not tired, but, to her surprise, she yawned instead.

'So tired,' crooned the Headmaster, his huge, extraordinary eyes fixed on her face. 'You can hardly move your arms and legs. You are so tired, so tired. You feel your head begin to nod and slowly, slowly your eyes are starting to close. So tired and sleepy.'

He's mad, Dinah thought muzzily. The whole school's raving mad. But she felt her eyes start to close, in spite of all she could do. She was drifting, drifting . . . All she could see was two pools, deep green like the sea, and she seemed to sink into them as she drifted off and off . . .

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She opened her eyes again and gave a nervous laugh. 'I'm sorry. What did you say?'

'You fell asleep,' the Headmaster said coldly. 'You have been asleep for a long time.' He put his glasses on again.

'Asleep?' Dinah stared.

'For the whole morning.'

She looked at him in bewilderment and then glanced round at the clock on the wall. To her amazement, the hands pointed to twelve o'clock. 'But I don't understand.'

'Perhaps you should go to bed earlier,' he said, with a strange smile. 'Now go and have some dinner. The dining hall is at the end of this corridor. After dinner, you will go into the Hall with Year Seven.'

Still puzzled, Dinah nodded.

The Headmaster looked disagreeably at her. 'Your uniform,' he said, 'is not what I require.'

'It's what I had for my other school. When I was at the Children's Home.'

His lips narrowed. 'I dislike argument. It serves no useful purpose. You will appear in the correct school uniform by next Monday. I am sending a list to Mrs Hunter to ensure that she buys the proper items. I like to see all my pupils dressed in an orderly manner.' His voice rose a tone. 'I will not *endure* disorder. It is inefficient. Now go and have some dinner.'

Shakily, Dinah stood up and made for the door. As she reached out her hand for the handle, the Headmaster spoke again.

'I have put you in the same class as Lloyd Hunter, but I wish you to have as little as possible to do with Lloyd and Harvey. They are not a good example. They do not fit in at this school.'

'That—' Dinah had been going to say that it would be difficult. But just in time she remembered that he did not like argument. Better to be quiet and obey. Until she had had time to think everything over, to try and work out why the school was so strange. 'Yes, sir,' she murmured.

As she went out and shut the door, her head was humming with thoughts. Asleep? All the morning? It did not make sense. And had the