

The Demon Headmaster

Gillian Cross

Something is very wrong indeed at DINAH's new school. The children are strangely neat and much too well behaved. She asks herself why is this, and why does she find herself conforming? Determined to find out the secret of the Headmaster's control and aided by her foster brothers, Lloyd and Harvey, she gradually unravels the mystery of the sinister Headmaster.

Young Harvey has found out that something very odd is going on at morning assembly. He and Lloyd are never allowed to join in with the other children but have to stay outside doing maths under the supervision of the Prefects. Next morning he excuses himself on the pretext of having to go to the toilet and creeps up to the Hall and looks in. The whole school are staring fixedly at the Headmaster and chanting in a regular monotone. When he asks DINAH about this she tells him that they have been watching a film, but he knows this is not true.

In this scene the two boys are questioning DINAH about what actually happens in assembly and gradually she begins to realise that she and the rest of the school are being hypnotised.

DINAH

That's it! 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 hypnotise everyone else. But then he caught me. I just had time to think *remember it, remember it* - and then I was hypnotised and I forgot. Until Harvey brought it back. *The Headmaster hypnotises even/one in Assembly* ... It's a good way to keep everyone in order. And you know how he likes order. While they're hypnotised, 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 - I think he probably makes us learn things, parrot-fashion, while we're hypnotised. Then, when we're awake, we can remember them and write them down . . . 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 . . . Some people can't be hypnotised. Has he ever tried it with you? Gazed into your eyes and told you you were tired? . . . 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. Very powerful. If I were him, I don't think I'd be satisfied with having one measly school in my power! . . . 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'.