

I

It all began in a history lesson.

It all began with a buzz.

Buzz buzz!

Buzz buzz!

'*Who,*' hiccoughed Mr Halitosis (Mr Halitosis is our teacher), '*who – who* among you – *who* – against all the school rules – *who* – exposing himself or herself to the risk of being severely punished – *who* could possibly have brought a vibrating device – which, I can only conclude, is a *mobile phone* – to this classroom? *Who? Who? Who?*

I must explain that 'who' is not a good word for Mr Halitosis to pronounce. Being endowed with the toxic breath of a nuclear power station,



Mr Halitosis produces the deadliest *whos* on Earth. In this particular case, no less than nine of those powerful stink bombs were fired at us. By the time our eyes had stopped watering, it appeared that Mr Halitosis had located the criminal, and planted himself in front of her.

And she was me.

'Sophie Seade!'

'Yes, Mr Barnes?'

'You are buzzing.'

'Do you mean buzzing with excitement at the thought of studying the Victorian era?'

'I do *not* mean that, and you know

it. You have brought your mobile phone with you, and it has buzzed.'

The other kids started sniggering a little bit, because my mobile phone is legendarily awful. While everyone else has a phone with a touch screen and a camera, my parents bought



me one that looks like I won it in a Christmas cracker.

'Give me your bag!' ordered Mr Halitosis.

'No, Mr Barnes, listen,' I said. 'It's not my phone. It's my pet hornet.'

'Give me your bag.'

'Honestly, it's Herbert the hornet. Sometimes he gets a bit bored and buzzes a lullaby or two.'

'Sophie Seade, if you don't give me your bag ...' said Mr Halitosis. He reached down, which had the effect of squashing his beer belly like a space hopper, and he bounced up again, clutching my bag. 'Right,' he said, 'where's that phone?'

'Nowhere. I'm telling you, it's Herbert.'

'A likely story. Oh, surprise, surprise – look what I've found!'

And he fished out of my bag a red metal tin, shaped like a phone box, on which was written PHONE BOX.

In the manner of a coal miner who's found a diamond, he slowly twirled around with it so the whole class could see it properly and gape.



Gemma interrupted the general gaping. 'If I were you, Mr Barnes, I wouldn't open it. Herbert isn't the friendliest of Sesame's pets. I preferred Dinah the dormouse, but she got gobbled up by Peter Mortimer.'

That brought a tear to my eye, because as much as I love my cat, I hadn't quite forgiven him for leaving Dinah's cleanly-licked skull on my pillow a week earlier as if he thought I collected rodent skeletons.

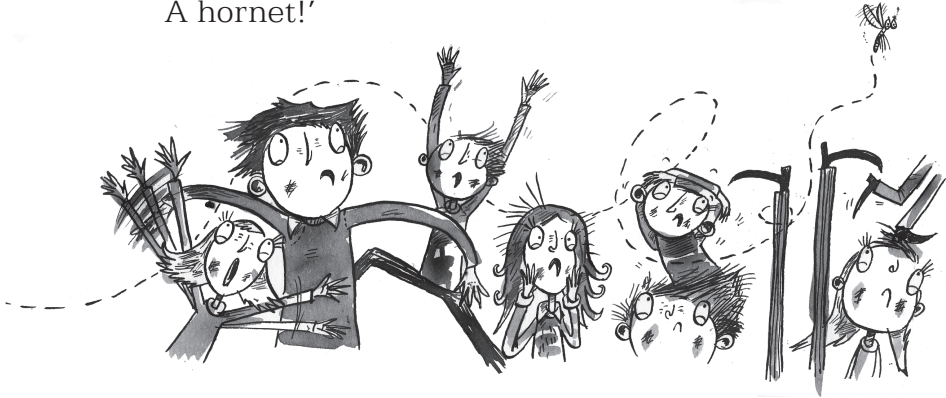
Mr Halitosis said, 'Not very clever of you, Sophie, to carry your phone around in a tin marked PHONE BOX. It will be confiscated immediately and you can count yourself lucky I'm not sending you straight to the Head.'

'It's Herbert that's going to go straight to *your* head if you open that box,' warned Toby next to me.

But Mr Halitosis didn't listen. Instead, he fiddled with the little lock, and suddenly the tin opened. I think he should have listened, because Herbert clearly wasn't chuffed to be woken up



by the poisonous stench of Mr Halitosis's 'Oh!
A hornet!'



'Like I said,' I said, and we all dived under our tables as if an earthquake had struck. Mr Halitosis, unprepared, dropped the tin and rushed out of the classroom surprisingly fast for someone who doesn't eat any of his five a day.

Herbert, having run out of prey, swirled around the ceiling light for a while, then aimed for the window, crashed comically against the glass, and spent a good minute crashing into it again and again and again and increasingly angrily, before he found the next window-pane, which was open, and escaped into the sunny afternoon.



We emerged from our makeshift fallout shelters and Emerald crossed the classroom to open the door, revealing a Mr Halitosis who looked just as furious as Herbert, though less stripy.

'That's it,' he bellowed, 'I've had enough! Sophie Seade, I am writing a note to your parents.'

Everyone gasped with terror, for my parents have topped the Petrifying Parents list every year since school began. I have to admit I paled a little bit. Mr Halitosis's ruthless pen had already started dancing the fandango on a piece of paper.

'*Dear Mr and Mrs Seade,*' he said out loud.

'It's *Reverend and Professor,*' I pointed out politely. 'They don't go by *Mr and Mrs.*'

'I couldn't care less if they're the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Empress of Mount Popocatépetl,' thundered Mr Halitosis. '*Dear Mr and Mrs Seade, I regret to inform you that your daughter Sophie is an ambulant menace to the peace and quiet of Goodall School. When she*



is not setting fire to her rubber or cutting her friend's fringe with nail scissors ...'

'I'd asked her to do it!' pleaded Gemma.

'... she thinks it is acceptable to smuggle phone boxes full of live wild beasts into the classroom.'

'Wait a minute,' I said, 'that's not the clearest way of explaining it ...'

But Mr Halitosis ranted on, *'I am sorry to say I believe it necessary for you to have a serious talk with Sophie – and I have underlined 'serious' – in order to make her understand that being a gifted and intelligent young girl is no excuse for bringing chaos and desolation to the classroom. Yours sincerely, Joel Barnes.'*

He crossly crossed the classroom and slammed the piece of paper on to my desk. 'Get this note back to me tomorrow, signed by both your parents.'

'Yes, Mr Barnes.'

'And if I have any reason to suspect that you have forged their signatures, I will call them myself.'



I had to admit he'd won that battle. I was one hornet down, and a few hours from a very unpleasant conversation with Professor and Reverend Seade. Distraught, I slouched on to my desk and prepared for dark thoughts to invade my brain, but just then Gemma passed me a little note in red felt-tip that said:

So, why was your phone buzzing?

Only then did I remember that it had *actually* been my phone buzzing, not Herbert the hornet. I discreetly squeezed my ridiculous mobile out of my skirt pocket and clicked VIEW MESSAGE.

And this message cheered me up to no end, because it was from Jeremy Hopkins, and it said:

Mystery disappearance at Gonville & Caius.

Meet me there at three thirty. J.

