CHAPTER SIX



SPORTS DAY loomed ahead like a black cloud for Mildred, as did anything where competition was called for. She hated the idea of trying to beat other people, mainly because she never won and it was all so humiliating, but also because it just wasn't her way of doing things.

As well as this, Maud was being very trying. Just because Mildred had been put in charge of Enid, which meant that she *had* to take Enid around with her, Maud had gone off in a jealous huff

and had even gone as far as teaming up with Ethel.

Mildred could hardly believe it when she saw the two of them together. She knew Maud was just doing it because of Enid, so she pretended not to take any notice, but in fact it nearly killed her to see her best friend arm-in-arm with her old enemy.

There were various events on the Sports Day agenda: pole-vaulting, sack-racing, cat-balancing, relay broomstick-racing, and a prize for the best trained cat.

Everyone practised very hard in the



weeks leading up to the Sports Day. Mildred had long sessions with her little tabby cat trying to teach it to sit up straight instead of hanging on with its eyes shut, but little progress was made. Mildred and Enid ran races against each other and always tied but this was no indication of merit as they were equally bad.

The weeks soon slid by and Sports Day dawned grey and misty. For once Mildred was wide awake when the rising-bell sounded, as she had been tossing and turning for most of the night with dreadful nightmares. One was about finding a monster on the back of her broom in the middle of the relay-race and it turned into Miss Cackle who said, 'Mildred! You've done it again!'

As the first peals of the bell rang out, Mildred dragged herself out of bed and rummaged around for her sports kit. She found it crumpled up at the bottom of her sock drawer and tried to smooth it out

so it would look a bit more presentable.

Some mornings were worse than others, she reflected, as she pulled on the dingy grey aertex shirt and black divided skirt which hung limply to her knees. The grey socks and black plimsolls completed the picture of gloom as she plaited her hair tightly.

There was a knock at the door and for a happy moment she thought it must be Maud, but Enid put her head round the door and Mildred remembered Maud had gone off with Ethel.

'Don't laugh,' said Enid as she brought the rest of herself into the room.

Mildred obliged with a snort of mirth at the sight of Enid's sports kit.

'I said *don't* laugh,' said Enid smiling. 'I know they're funny, but I haven't got a proper pair.'

She was wearing a vast pair of black knickers which were pulled up under her arms.

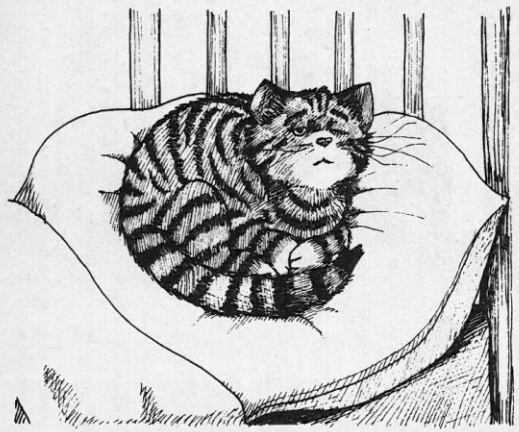


'Haven't you got a smaller pair?' asked Mildred.

'No,' replied Enid. 'My mother buys everything with growing room because I'm so big. You should see my vests! Some of them trail on the floor when they aren't tucked in.'

'I shan't be able to keep a straight face with you in those,' said Mildred. 'Still, it might put the others off. How's your cat?'

'I'm not bringing it,' said Enid. 'It's been a bit off-colour since the monkey incident. I don't think it could cope with broomstick riding.'



'I'm bringing Tabby,' said Mildred, taking the cat from its position curled up on the pillow. 'I've been training it every day, but I don't know if it's done any good.'

CHAPTER SEVEN



ENID and Mildred sat in the cloakroom waiting to be called for the first event, which was the pole-vault. To their great consternation they discovered that they had been entered for everything, mainly because they were both so tall, and this gave rise to the completely false idea that they must be good at sports.

'We're *bound* to come last,' said Enid despairingly.

'We don't have to,' said Mildred, stroking the tabby cat's head which was sticking

out of the top of her shoe-bag. 'We're taller than everyone else, we *ought* to be better than them.'

'*Exactly*,' said Enid miserably. 'But we aren't. What we need is a touch of magic.'

'Oh, Enid,' said Mildred anxiously. 'I can't even do *that* properly. You weren't here when I made the wrong potion in the potion-lab and Maud and I disappeared. It was dreadful.'

'Leave it to me,' said Enid with disarming confidence.

Mildred watched as her friend took the two poles to the window and waved her arms around them muttering words under her breath.

'What are you doing?' asked Mildred.

'Shhh,' said Enid. 'You'll mess up the spell.'

A minute later, Enid handed Mildred's pole back to her . . .

'Come on,' she said. 'We'll beat the lot of them now.'

Mildred felt distinctly uneasy as they joined the contestants for the pole-vault. She looked up at the bar which seemed to be at least a mile high.

'I'll never get over that,' she whispered to Enid.

'Mildred Hubble!' announced Miss Drill.

'Oh, no!' gasped Mildred. 'I'm first.'

'Just jump,' said Enid with a wink. 'You'll be all right.'

So Mildred jumped. She charged along the run-up strip, banged the pole on to the ground and, as she did so, an extraordinary thing happened. The ground suddenly seemed to be made of a strong, springy material, and both Mildred and the pole went soaring up into the air.

From somewhere far below she heard Enid shout, 'Let go of the pole!'

Glancing down, Mildred saw to her horror that everything was way below her, including the pole-vault bar and the school



walls. She was so shocked that she hung on even more tightly and saw that a turret was looming up in front of her with gathering speed. Like a guided missile,



Mildred and the pole shot straight through one of the windows (fortunately the castle-like school did not have glass in any of them) and crash-landed in the middle of a table all set out ready for somebody's tea.

Lying dazed on the floor amid shattered teacups and pools of milk, Mildred saw to her dismay that she had hurled herself into Miss Hardbroom's private study. The pole

was neatly broken in two, with one half embedded in a portrait of Miss Hard-broom, and the other half in the cat basket, having just missed Miss Hardbroom's cat, now snarling and spitting on top of a cupboard.

It wasn't very long before the door





opened and Miss Hardbroom, Miss Cackle and Miss Drill all came bursting in through the door. The terrified cat leapt on to its owner's shoulders with a yowl.

'Nice of you to drop in, Mildred,' sneered Miss Hardbroom. 'However, it was hardly necessary to use such an unorthodox method of getting here. Everyone else seems to find the stairs perfectly adequate.'

'I'm sure I do not have to remind you, Mildred,' said Miss Drill, 'that it is against the rules to use magic in any sporting event.'

'I just cannot understand it,' sighed Miss Cackle, removing a squashed jam tart from Mildred's hair and absentmindedly feeding it to Miss Hardbroom's cat.

'I can hardly believe that one of my girls would cheat, and that poor new girl witnessing such an example. Shocking, shocking.'

Mildred silently ground her teeth when she thought of the number of times 'the poor new girl' had got her into trouble since term began.

'This *must* be positively the last time that

anything of this sort happens,' said Miss Cackle sternly. 'You are disqualified from the rest of the events, and if I see you in trouble even once more this term then I shall have to disqualify you from the school itself.'

Mildred gasped.

'Yes, Mildred,' Miss Cackle continued, 'I shall be forced to expel you if this reckless behaviour continues. Now go to



your room for the rest of the day and ponder upon all I have told you.'

Mildred was only too glad to escape to her room. She curled up on her bed with the little cat and listened to the rest of the school laughing and cheering outside as Sports Day continued.

'It's impossible, Tabby,' she said. 'I shall never get right through to the end of term without *anything* happening.'

There was a tap at the door and in came Enid.

'What happened?' she asked. 'Where did you land?'

'Oh, it was awful!' said Mildred. 'I ended up in Miss Hardbroom's study. Miss Cackle said she'll expel me if I do anything else this term. What about you? Did you go too high as well?'

'Oh, no,' said Enid. 'I realized that I must have over-magicked the poles, so I pretended to faint and got sent off to the

rest-room. I'll have to nip back in a minute. Did you get hurt?'

'Not much,' said Mildred ruefully. 'Just twisted my ankle a bit. I'm all right.'

'Well, cheer up,' said Enid brightly, opening the door. 'At least nothing else can go wrong today. I'll see you later.'

Mildred managed a weak smile as Enid disappeared into the corridor.

'Oh, Tabby,' she said miserably to the little cat. 'We've got one more chance, that's all.'

