CHAPTER
EIGHT



MILDRED had not felt so anxious about being expelled since the day when she had ruined the broomstick formation team at Hallowe'en. She remembered all the promises to her family about being good, and thought how dreadful it would be if she arrived home with her cat and suitcases to break the dreadful news to them. She looked at her calendar and decided to struggle through each day as it came, making every effort to reach the end of term without any more incidents.

Enid tried to tempt her to every imaginable escapade during the weeks

that followed, but with admirable strength of mind Mildred resisted. Ethel was being particularly provoking because Maud was still her friend, but Mildred withstood all teasing and managed to battle through to the last week of term without any more trouble at all.

Miss Cackle's birthday celebration was to be held as usual on the last day of term and each class had chosen a little chant or poem to be performed on the day. Maud had been chosen to represent Form One and Mildred was relieved not to be involved apart from having to sit and listen.

'This is going to be awful,' announced Enid as they sat in class waiting to be called to the Great Hall. 'Why don't we skip it? I don't know if I can stand a whole morning of recitation.'

'No,' replied Mildred flatly.

'Oh, go on, Mil,' said Enid persuasively. 'You aren't any fun any more. No one is

going to see if we sneak off. The whole school's there. No one will notice if *we* aren't.'

'They will, and I'm not,' said Mildred. 'I've only got another three or four hours to get through, then I can go home for the holidays without being expelled. I just can't risk it.'

'Oh, all right,' agreed Enid sounding very disgruntled.

Miss Hardbroom appeared in the doorway and signalled the class to march down to the Great Hall. As they filed down the corridor Enid suddenly grabbed Mildred's arm.

'Quick!' she hissed. 'In here!'

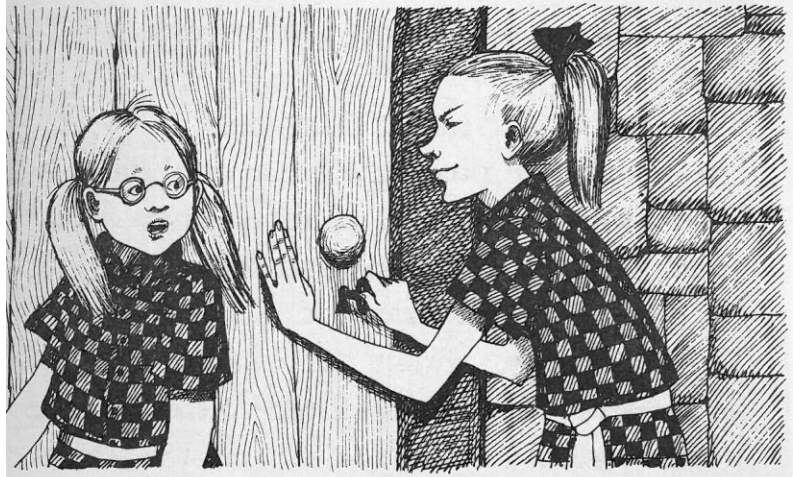
They were passing a store cupboard at the time, and before Mildred knew what had happened Enid had dived inside, pulling Mildred with her.

'What on earth are you doing?' whispered Mildred as Enid hastily closed the door.

'Shhh,' said Enid. 'All we have to do is to stay in here till they're all in the Assembly Hall, then we can go off and spend the morning as we like.'

'But – oh, Enid!' said Mildred hopelessly. 'We're bound to get caught.'

Meanwhile outside, Ethel's eagle eye had seen Mildred and Enid vanishing into the cupboard; so had Maud, who secretly wished she had been with them. Life had been such fun with Mildred as her best friend, and a whole term in Ethel's



company had been very unpleasant indeed, especially as Ethel *would* keep going on about how dreadful Mildred was.

As Maud and Ethel passed by the cupboard, Ethel turned the key and locked the door.

'Ethel!' said Maud as they marched on into the Assembly Hall. 'That was mean. You'll get them into trouble. Miss Cackle said she'd expel Mildred if she did anything else.'

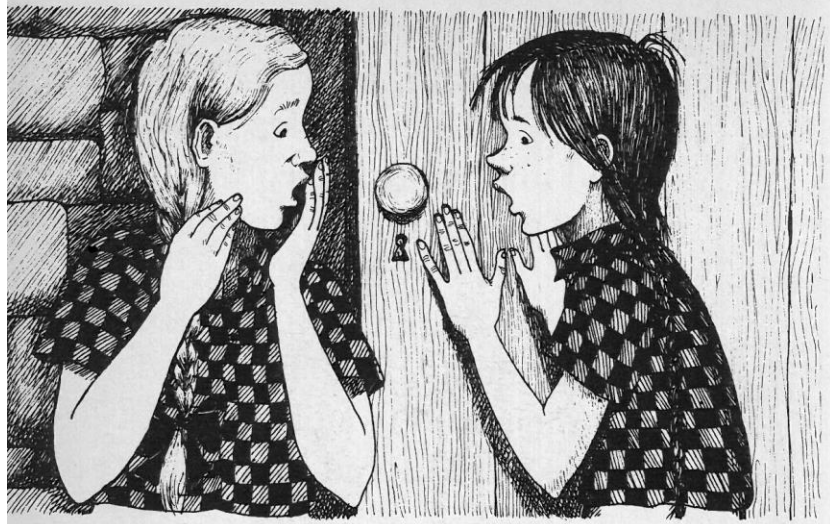
'Exactly,' said Ethel triumphantly.

'I think you're a beast,' said Maud. 'I'm going to creep back and let them out.'

But at that moment Miss Hardbroom swept along the corridor and escorted Maud's section of the line into the hall, so there was no way in which she could get back to unlock the cupboard door.

Inside the cupboard, the two young witches heard the key turn.

'I knew it,' said Mildred. 'We can't get out now and it's the last day of term. We'll



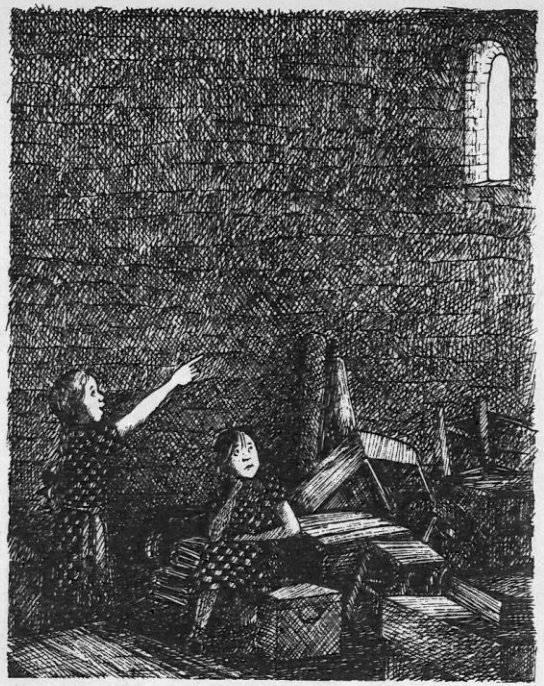
have to bang on the door when they all come out of the hall or we'll be in here for the whole of the holiday. They'll open the door at the beginning of next term and all they'll find will be a little heap of bones.'

Mildred burst into tears at this distressing thought.

'Oh, Mil, I am sorry,' said Enid. 'I'll tell them it's my fault. Don't cry. You won't be expelled, I promise.'



CHAPTER NINE



WHEN their eyes had become accustomed to the dim light in the cupboard, Mildred and Enid looked around and saw that they were in a very large, high-ceilinged room which was obviously used for storing old furniture. The light was filtering in from an arched window high up in one corner.

'We're saved!' shrieked Enid, snapping her fingers. 'There's a window. All we have to do is get up there.'

'Oh, that's easy,' said Mildred sarcastically. 'It's only about ten feet up the wall. Why don't we fly?'

'Perhaps we could pile some of these things and climb up,' said Enid desperately, rummaging through the old desks, broken benches and cardboard boxes full of rubbish. 'Look, Mildred!' she exclaimed. 'It's a broomstick!'

She hauled from a wooden chest an ancient broomstick, almost snapped in two but for a few splinters of wood still holding it together. Enid took off her sash and bound it as tightly as possible.

'There!' she said. 'Now we *can* fly up. The window looks big enough for us both to squeeze out of. Come on.'

They commanded the broomstick to hover, which it did, and the two worst witches in the school balanced them-

selves on it. Enid sat in front and Mildred hung on round her waist. They made the broom rise like a helicopter which is done by saying, 'Up, up, up!' over and over again until you get as high as you want to go. It is a very jerky process and the two witches found it very hard to stay on, but at last they reached the window-sill.

'What can you see on the other side?'





asked Enid, concentrating on keeping the broom steady.

Mildred peered through and saw a long indoor wall and part of a ceiling stretching away before her.

'That's odd,' she said to Enid, 'it isn't an outside window. It seems to lead into a huge stone room.'

'Well, we'd better go through before this broom gives up on us,' said Enid sneezing from the dust and cobwebs draped all over

them. 'Duck your head as we go through.'

'I wonder where we'll come out?' mused Mildred as they flew awkwardly through the window.

