CHAPTER FIVE



MISS CACKLE was not pleased when Mildred entered her study.

'Good morning, Mildred,' she said wearily, motioning the hapless pupil to sit down. 'I suppose it is too much to hope for that you are sent here with a message, or for some innocent reason?'

'Yes, Miss Cackle,' murmured Mildred. 'Miss Bat sent me to you because I was laughing in the chanting lesson. One of my friends was singing out of tune and I couldn't stop laughing.'

Miss Cackle looked at Mildred over the top of her spectacles and Mildred wondered why Enid's singing didn't sound in the least bit funny now, in front of the headmistress.

'I wonder,' said Miss Cackle, 'if there is any hope at all for you in this Academy. You take one pace forward then four paces backward; it's the same old story, Mildred, isn't it? And the term's only just begun. I see that Miss Hardbroom was right when she disagreed with my plan to put you in charge of the new girl. I have put you in a position of responsibility, Mildred, and you must live up to it, not let me down.'

'Yes, Miss Cackle,' agreed Mildred fervently.

'It would be a sad thing indeed,' continued Miss Cackle, 'if you were to lead this innocent new pupil up the garden path with you, would it not? Now, child, for the last time, pull yourself together and let me

hear no more about you for the rest of the term.'

Mildred assured Miss Cackle of her good intentions and meekly left the room.

As there was still a good hour of chanting left and Miss Bat had told her not to come back, Mildred decided to sneak up to Enid's room and take a look at the monkey.

Mildred could hear her fellow-pupils chanting in the music-room as she crept up the spiral staircase to Enid's room. It gave her a delicious sense of freedom to have a whole hour stretched before her while everyone else in the school was imprisoned in a stuffy classroom.

For once the sun had filtered through the shroud of mist, and shafts of sunlight fell dramatically through the slit-windows on to the cool stone steps.

'Well, I certainly made a mistake about Enid,' thought Mildred. 'She's worse than I am.'

She giggled again at the thought of the



tuneless chanting and opened the door of Enid's room.

As she did so the monkey, which had been sitting on the bedpost, made a dive for the door straight over Mildred's head and off down the corridor screeching with delight. Mildred saw its long tail whip round the corner as it plunged down the spiral staircase.







'Oh, no!' thought Mildred, setting off after the creature as fast as she could.

She arrived breathless at the bottom of the staircase, only to find that the monkey was nowhere to be seen.

'Oh, dear,' she muttered aloud. 'What *am* I going to do?'

'What *should* you be doing, Mildred?' asked a chilling voice behind her.

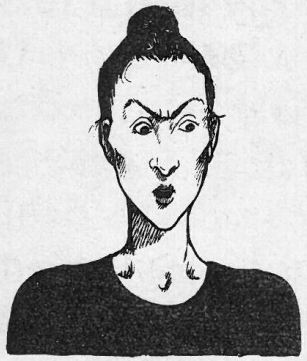
'Oh! Er – nothing, Miss Hardbroom,' replied Mildred, for it was her form-mistress who had appeared from nowhere.

'Nothing,' echoed Miss Hardbroom frostily. 'At this time of day? Why, I ask

myself, should Mildred Hubble be hurtling around the corridors when everyone else is usefully employed in a lesson somewhere? And why, I ask myself, should Mildred Hubble's socks be trailing round her ankles?'

Mildred bent down and hastily pulled them up.

'I was sent out of chanting, Miss Hardbroom,' she explained. 'Miss Bat told me not to come back so I've got nothing to do for the next hour.'



'*Nothing to do*?' exploded Miss Hardbroom, her eyes flashing so wildly that Mildred backed away. 'Well, I would

suggest that you take yourself to the library and brush up on your spells and potions for a start, and then perhaps if there is any time left – which I doubt – you can come and find me in my room and I will give you a test on what you have learned.'

'Yes, Miss Hardbroom,' said Mildred.

Desperately trying to work out where the monkey could have got to, Mildred took the corridor which led towards the library. She looked back over her shoulder and saw that Miss Hardbroom had vanished, which was very confusing as you were never sure if she was watching invisible, or if she had walked away.

Mildred walked on for a few more corridors, then waited and listened. All she could hear was the faint chanting of Form One in the distance, so she set off in search of the lost monkey again.

Something moving caught her eye through one of the windows. It was the monkey, halfway up one of the towers,



swinging about by its tail. It had managed to get hold of a hat from somewhere and was wearing it rammed down over its ears. If Mildred hadn't been quite so horrified she would have seen how funny the animal looked.

'Oh, come down, Monkey, please!' she called as softly as possible. 'I've got a nice banana for you.'

But the monkey only let out a shriek and climbed a bit higher. Mildred ran as fast as she could and fetched her broomstick. As

far as she could see, the only way to get the monkey down was to fly across and catch it.

Nervously she stepped on to the window-ledge and lowered herself on to the broom-stick. She gave the command for it to fly, but unfortunately, as she gave it a tap (which was the signal for it to start), she slipped and the broom zoomed off with Mildred hanging on by her arms.

'Stop!' yelled Mildred, at which the



broom stopped and hovered in mid-air. Mildred tried to haul herself on to it, but that was impossible with nothing to push her feet against. Her arms were practically out of their sockets, but she was so near the monkey that she decided to give it a try and commanded the stick to fly on. As luck would have it, the monkey was



fascinated by the sight of the broom and jumped on to it, where it proceeded to run up and down and swing by its tail.

'Down!' Mildred commanded the broom and the extraordinary little group whooshed downwards.

As they came in to land, Mildred was shocked to see that the yard was full of people. Form Three had been having a broomstick lesson with Miss Drill the gym-mistress, and had witnessed the whole episode on the tower. Even worse, Miss Hardbroom was standing next to Miss Drill with her arms folded and both eye-brows raised. Mildred felt quite ridiculous as she floated to the ground in such an ungainly position with the monkey swing-ing beside her.

'Well?' asked Miss Hardbroom, as Mildred took the monkey from the broom and stood holding it tightly in case it should escape.

'I – er – I found it!' exclaimed Mildred.

'On the tower,' sneered Miss Hardbroom, 'wearing a hat.'

'Yes,' said Mildred, almost dying of embarrassment. 'It was up there so I ... thought I ought to bring it down.'

'And where did it come from?' demanded Miss Hardbroom, narrowing her eyes. 'You haven't been arguing with Ethel again, have you?' (She was thinking of the time last term when Mildred had changed Ethel into a pig during an argument.)

'No, Miss Hardbroom!' said Mildred.

'Well, then, Mildred, where did you get the monkey from?'

This was a very tricky situation. Mildred could not possibly sneak on Enid but Miss Hardbroom's terrifying stare made Mildred feel that she probably knew anyway. Perhaps it was just as well that a member of Form Three stepped forward.

'She got it from the new girl's room'

announced the girl. 'I saw her coming out of there earlier on.'

'Enid's room?' queried Miss Hardbroom. 'But Enid has a regulation black cat. There is no other animal in her room.'

She sent the girl to fetch Enid from the chanting lesson and Enid soon arrived looking bewildered. She did not flinch when she saw Mildred with the monkey.

'Is this your monkey, Enid?' asked Miss Hardbroom.

'I only have a cat, Miss Hardbroom,' replied Enid.

Mildred's eyes widened in disbelief.

'Are you *quite* sure it isn't Ethel?' asked Miss Hardbroom severely.

'Yes, Miss Hardbroom,' said Mildred.

Miss Hardbroom, however, did not believe her and she muttered the spell which would change the animal back to its original form. To Mildred's surprise the monkey vanished and in its place stood a little black cat.

'That's my cat!' cried Enid, as the cat jumped into her arms.

'Mildred!' said Miss Hardbroom, 'you've been told about this before. First Ethel, now Enid's cat. For goodness' sake, when is this nonsense going to stop?'

Mildred was astonished.

'But Miss – I –' she gasped.

'Silence,' said Miss Hardbroom. 'Two days you have been back at school and already twice in disgrace. At least this encounter has allowed Enid to see what a bad example you are. I hope you will take care not to follow in Mildred's footsteps, Enid. Now run along, both of you, and *take care*, Mildred. Just think before you embark on such an escapade again.'

The minute the two girls were round the corner Mildred asked Enid what on earth was going on.

'Simple,' said Enid, 'it really *is* my cat. I changed it into a monkey before breakfast this morning, for fun. I was going to



change it back tomorrow when we go for Sports Day practice. I didn't know you were going to go and let it out, did I?'

