CHAPTER TEN



SILENCE had been called in the Great Hall. Maud, who was the first performer, stood on the stage with Miss Cackle and all the mistresses behind her and the rest of the school facing her in the lower part of the hall. She was so worried about Mildred being locked in the cupboard that she could not remember the beginning of the poem though she had been rehearsing it for weeks. As she stood

there wildly searching her memory, there was a loud sneeze and a strange scuffling sound at the back of the hall, and suddenly from a high window in the far corner Mildred and Enid came sailing out, covered in dust and holding on for dear life. The pupils all turned to look, and the teachers froze.

It took a split second for Maud to realize that she was not imagining things and that the window must face into the cupboard. Quick as a flash she cleared her throat.

'Miss Cackle and staff!' she announced importantly, her voice trembling. 'I am proud to announce a surprise item from Mildred Hubble and Enid Nightshade. A double broomstick display on a solo broomstick!'

She waved an arm in the direction of Mildred and Enid who looked positively thunderstruck when they realized exactly what they had flown into.

'I don't believe it,' muttered Mildred,



as every pair of eyes in the school turned on the unlucky pair.

'If we manage to get out of this one, we deserve a medal,' said Enid.

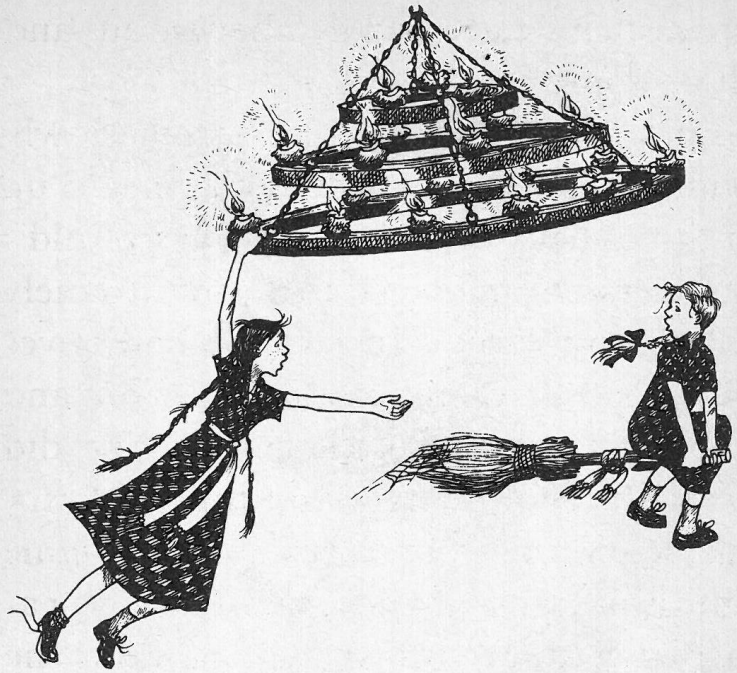
'Let's at least have a try, and do as Maud said,' whispered Mildred. 'Hold the

broomstick steady and fly about a bit, and I'll do some fancy-work if I can.'

Enid started to fly the broom slowly round the hall and Mildred clambered up on to the back of it. Clinging on to Enid's shoulders, she managed to do an extremely wobbly arabesque. In fact she had never even stood up on a broomstick before and was rather pleased with herself. She did one with the other leg, and then got very daring and raised one arm up at the same time. Enid, who was not good at steering at the best of times, was not looking where she was going and saw the chandelier approaching just above her head.

'Mildred!' she exclaimed, but it was too late. Mildred crashed straight into it and Enid flew on leaving her friend dangling from the vast chandelier by one arm. She turned the broom and came back to pick Mildred up.

'That was a narrow squeak,' gasped Mildred, settling on to the broom. 'For



goodness' sake watch where you're going!'

'What?' said Enid, turning her head.

'I said watch out!' yelled Mildred as a wall came looming up in front of them.

Enid swerved violently and Mildred fell off just catching the broom by her fingertips and swinging in the air. At that moment, the long-suffering broomstick began to creak ominously in the middle where the sash was loosening.



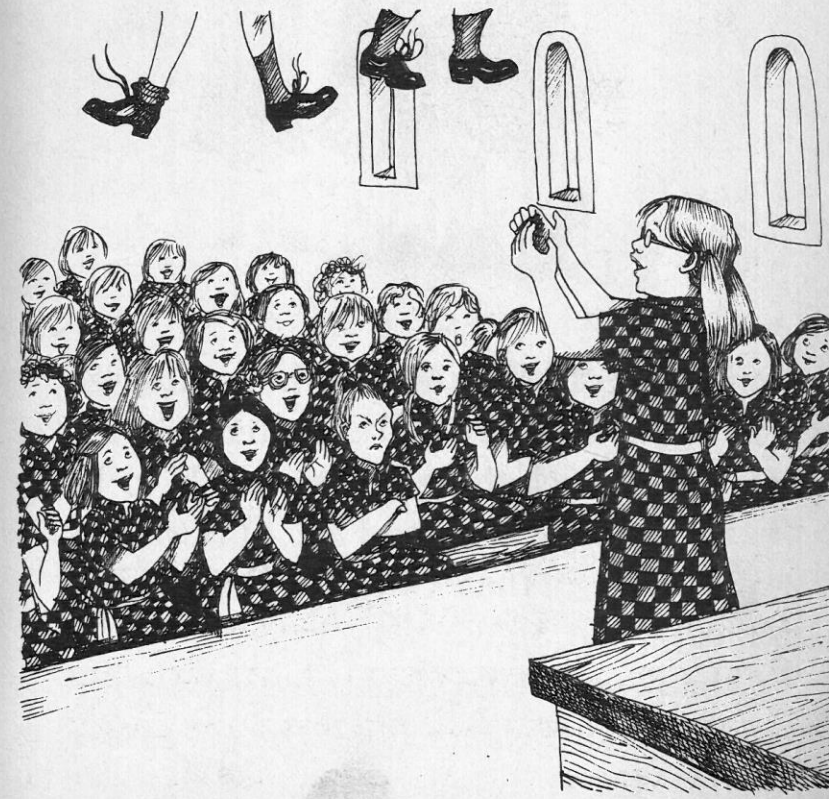
'Quick, Enid!' said Mildred in despair. 'Take it in to land before it falls to bits!'

Enid guided the broom on to the stage next to Maud who, with great presence of mind began applauding, joined heartily by the rest of the school.

Miss Cackle and Miss Hardbroom stepped forward. Miss Cackle had a slightly puzzled expression on her face, but Miss Hardbroom had one eyebrow raised like a dagger.

'Mildred Hubble,' she began in her most terrifying tone of voice, but before she could launch into the attack Miss Cackle put an arm around both Mildred's and Enid's shoulders.

'Thank you, children,' she said, smiling





short-sightedly through her horn-rimmed spectacles. 'Not very well executed, and the state of your clothing leaves much to be desired, but it was a good *try*. This is what we like to see in the Academy. Team spirit, initiative, but above all, *effort*.'

'Thank you, Miss Cackle,' said Mildred and Enid, not daring to look up in case they caught Miss Hardbroom's eye.

Miss Cackle smiled mistily and motioned the girls back to their seats. Of course there weren't any seats for Mildred and Enid who hadn't been there in the first place, but luckily benches had been used, so Maud squashed up and Enid and Mildred crammed in next to her.

As they filed out of the hall into the yard to wait for the bell which signalled the end of term, Maud told them about Ethel turning the key and the following events, and suddenly they all saw the funny side of it.

'Thanks, Maud,' giggled Mildred.

'It's all right,' said Maud awkwardly. 'Can we be friends again, Mildred?'

'We already are,' said Mildred, feeling a bit embarrassed. 'You've just saved us from a fate worse than death. Did you see her face?'

'*Whose* face, Mildred?' asked Miss Hardbroom's voice.

The three girls jumped in alarm as Miss



Hardbroom materialized in the doorway.

'I – I was just saying,' said Mildred, 'that we didn't do our surprise item very well and you didn't look too pleased.'

'I wasn't,' snapped Miss Hardbroom. 'However, I do think that the prize for initiative should go to Maud here. You have her to thank for saving you from a fate worse than death, whatever that may have been!'

She stood aside and waved a hand towards the sunny yard and the girls dived gratefully outside.

'She can see through walls,' whispered Maud.

'Shhh!' said Enid, glancing round. 'She really can.'

The bell rang out across the school telling the pupils that it was time to go and collect their cases. Mildred let out a cry of delight and danced her two friends round in a circle.

‘I’ve done it!’ she announced. ‘It’s the last day of term and I’m not expelled!’

