# CHAPTER ONE



SUMMER had arrived at Miss Cackle's Academy for Witches. Not that it made much difference to the grim-looking school which was perched on a mountain amid swirling mist and pine trees.

On the first morning of term the members of Form One sat in class looking a dismal sight in their new summer uniform which was even more dreary than the winter one. It consisted of a black-and-

grey-checked short-sleeved dress, brightened a little by the sash around the waist, and grey ankle socks with black lace-up shoes. Everyone's knees were startlingly white after spending the winter swathed in itchy black wool stockings.

Despite this picture of gloom, the room buzzed with laughing voices and the pupils all sounded very excited to be back – except for Mildred. Worried would be a better word to describe how Mildred felt as she sat on her desk listening to Maud's tales of what had happened during the holidays.

In fact, she wasn't really listening to Maud at all because she was busy imagining all the dreadful things that were just bound to happen during the coming term. Why, it hadn't even *started* yet. There were weeks and weeks to get through! After the appalling report she'd had at the end of last term, she had promised everyone at home that she *really would try* this term.



Even though Miss Cackle had kindly mentioned the day when she had saved the school from disaster, it hardly made up for all the days when everything she touched fell to bits or broke or, worse, when she couldn't resist doing something wicked to liven things up a bit. It was the worst report she'd ever taken home.

'Mildred!' Maud broke into her thoughts. 'You haven't been listening to a word, have you?'

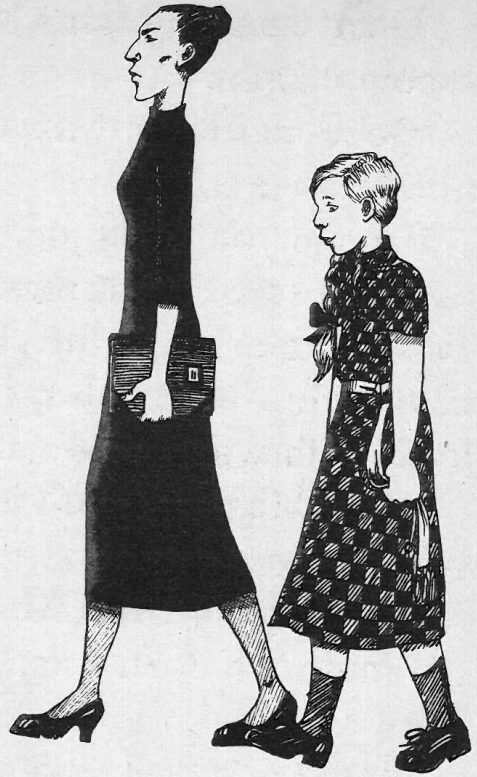
'Yes, I have,' said Mildred.

'Well, what did I say then?' asked Maud.

'Er – you got a pet bat for your birthday?' replied Mildred, hopefully.

'I told you you weren't listening!' cried Maud triumphantly. 'That was about ten minutes ago.'

The door crashed open and Miss Hardbroom, their terrifying form-mistress, swept in like an icy blast, bringing with her a girl whom no one had ever seen



before. As usual, everyone nearly jumped out of their skins, and there was a mad scramble as desk-lids slammed and people crashed into each other in their hurry to be standing by their desks in an orderly manner.



'Good morning, girls,' said Miss Hardbroom crisply.

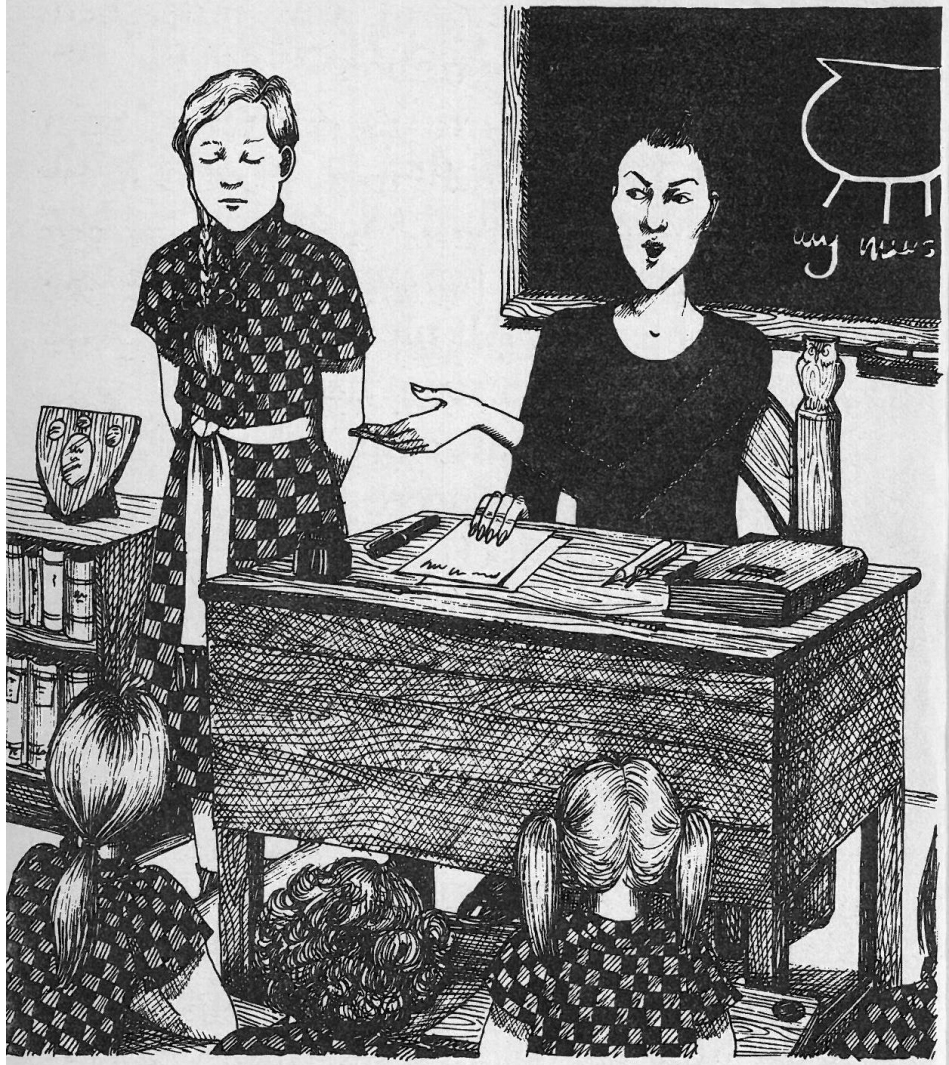
'Good morning, Miss Hardbroom,' replied the girls.

'I hope you're all glad to be back with us,' said Miss Hardbroom, narrowing her eyes and glaring at the unfortunate pupils in the front row. 'All nice and rested and looking forward to some hard work?'

'Yes, Miss Hardbroom,' chorused the girls in their most sincere voices.

'Good!' said Miss Hardbroom, clapping her hands together in a business-like way. 'Now then. This is Enid Nightshade.' She extended a bony hand towards the newcomer, who stood with hunched shoulders, looking fixedly at the floor.

Enid was a tall girl, even taller than Mildred, but much more ungainly, with big hands and feet. There seemed to be an awful lot of her, though she wasn't exactly fat. Her hair was the colour of milky tea and was restrained into a long, thick plait,



but you could tell that it would be very wild and wavy once it was unleashed from the black hair ribbon.

'Enid is newly with us this term,' said Miss Hardbroom. 'Mildred, Enid is to be entrusted to your care. I must point out that this is not my idea, but some strange notion of Miss Cackle's that if you are awarded such a responsibility it may actually turn you into a responsible member of the community. Personally, I feel it a great loss to send young Enid off down the path of ill-fame with you, when we could all breathe easily if someone like Ethel were to show her the ropes.'

Ethel, the form sneak and goody-goody, smiled demurely at this point and everyone felt like hitting her.

'However,' continued Miss Hardbroom, 'perhaps I shall be proved wrong. I certainly hope so. Please make sure that Enid knows where everything is, Mildred, and keep her company for the next few days.

Thank you. Now, Enid, take the desk next to Mildred and let us begin the lesson. The first school assembly will be tomorrow morning in the Great Hall.'

'Crumbs,' thought Mildred, sneaking a look at Enid, who had crammed her huge frame into the neighbouring desk. 'We won't get much fun out of *her*.'

But Mildred couldn't have been more wrong.



# CHAPTER TWO




EARLY next morning before the rising-bell had rung, Maud crept along the stone corridor to Mildred's room and knocked on the door.

There was no reply, but this was hardly surprising as Mildred was renowned for her ability to sleep through any amount of noise; in fact Maud often had to go and

shriek in her friend's ear to waken her when the rising-bell failed to do so.

Maud tiptoed into the room, closing the heavy door quietly behind her. Mildred's three bats skimmed over her head returning from their night out and settled upside-down on the picture rail.

A soft 'Miaaow' at her feet reminded Maud of Mildred's little tabby cat which was threading itself round her ankles. She bent down and picked up the little creature, which immediately draped itself around her neck like a fur stole and began to purr. Maud was quite glad of the warmth as she felt a bit chilly in her summer nightdress of grey cotton.

'Mildred,' she whispered to the bundle of bedclothes. 'Wake up, Mildred. It's Maud.'

'Whassat?' mumbled Mildred's voice from deep under the covers, followed by a series of rhythmic snores.

'*Mildred*!' whispered Maud, giving the





lump under the covers a vigorous shake. 'Wake up!'

The top of Mildred's head appeared on the pillow.

'Oh, hello, Maud!' she said. 'Is it time to get up yet? Did I miss the bell?'

'No,' said Maud curling up on the end of the bed. 'It's still early. The bats have only just come in. I came to have a chat before the others get up.'

Mildred hauled herself into a sitting position.

'Wrap yourself up, you must be freezing,' she said, offering Maud her black cloak. Maud took the cloak from the bedpost and put it around her shoulders.

'Thanks,' she said. 'What shall we do at break?'

'Well,' said Mildred, 'I've got to show Enid round the school. You know, the potion lab and gym, that sort of thing.'

'Can't you hand her over to someone else?' asked Maud, sounding a little touchy. 'She looks very dull, and anyway you and *I* always go about together.'

'It's a bit difficult to get rid of her,' said Mildred. 'Miss Hardbroom asked me and she'd go berserk if I tried to get out of it. Anyway the poor girl is new, I feel a bit sorry for her.'

'Oh, all right,' agreed Maud reluctantly. 'I'll come and call for you later and we can at least go to Assembly together.'



'Er – well, I'll have to take Enid to Assembly,' said Mildred awkwardly. 'But you can come too, though.'

'Oh, *thanks*!' stormed Maud. 'I'd rather go on my own.' She flung off the cloak and uncurled the cat. 'Perhaps you could fit me in later in the week!'

'Oh, Maud!' said Mildred. 'Don't be so silly, I didn't mean –'

But Maud had already swept out of the door, letting it bang behind her.

