

CHAPTER FOUR



It was the morning of the potion test, and the girls were filing into the potion lab, each hoping she had learned the right spell, except for Ethel who

knew everything and never worried about such matters.

‘Come along, girls! Two to a cauldron!’ barked Miss Hardbroom. ‘Today we shall make a laughter potion. No textbooks to be used – put that book away this *instant*, Mildred! Work quietly, and when you have finished you may take a small sip of the mixture to make sure it is correctly made. You may begin.’

Maud and Mildred were sharing a cauldron, of course, but unfortunately neither of them had learned that particular spell.

‘I think I can remember it vaguely,’ whispered Maud. ‘Bits of it, anyway.’ She began to sort through the ingredients which had been laid out on each workbench.

When everything was stirred together in the cauldron, the bubbling liquid was bright pink. Mildred stared at it doubtfully.

‘I’m sure it should be green,’ she said. ‘In fact I’m sure we should have put in a handful of pondweed-gathered-at-midnight.’

‘Are you *sure*?’ asked Maud.

‘Yes ...’ replied Mildred, not very definitely.

‘*Absolutely* sure?’ Maud asked again. ‘You know what happened last time.’

‘I’m *quite* sure,’ insisted Mildred. ‘Anyway, there’s a handful of pondweed laid out on each bench. I’m positive we’re supposed to put it in.’

‘Oh, all right,’ said Maud. ‘Go on, then. It can’t do any harm.’

Mildred grabbed the pondweed and dropped it into the mixture. They took turns at stirring it for a few minutes until it began to turn dark green.

‘What a horrid colour,’ said Maud.

‘Are you ready, girls?’ asked Miss Hardbroom, rapping on her desk. ‘You should have been ready minutes ago. A laughter potion should be made quickly for use in an emergency.’

Ethel was still working on the bench in front of Mildred, who stood on tiptoe to sneak a look at the colour of Ethel’s potion. To her horror, it was bright pink.

‘Oh, no,’ Mildred thought, with a sinking feeling.

‘I wonder what potion we’ve made?’

Miss Hardbroom banged on the desk again.

‘We shall now test the potion,’ she commanded. ‘Not too much, please. We don’t want anyone hysterical.’

Each pupil took a test-tubeful of liquid and drank a little. At once shrieks of laughter rang through the room, especially from Ethel’s bench where they had made the best potion of all and were laughing so much that tears rolled down their cheeks. The only two girls who weren’t laughing were Mildred and Maud.



‘Oh, dear,’ said Maud. ‘I feel most peculiar. Why aren’t we laughing, Mil?’

‘I hate to tell you,’ confessed Mildred, ‘I think –’

But before she had time to say any more, the two girls had disappeared!

‘Cauldron number two!’ snapped Miss Hardbroom. ‘You seem to have made the wrong spell.’

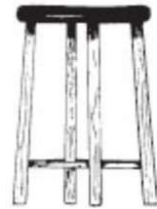
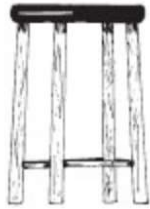
‘It was my fault,’ said Mildred’s voice from behind the cauldron.

‘That I do not doubt,’ Miss Hardbroom said sourly. ‘You had both better sit down until you reappear, and then, Mildred, perhaps a trip to Miss Cackle’s office would do you some good. You can explain why I sent you.’

Everyone had left the room by the time the two young witches finally began to reappear. This was a very slow process, with first the head and then the rest of the body becoming gradually visible.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Mildred’s head and shoulders.

‘That’s all right,’ said Maud’s head. ‘I just wish you’d *think* a bit more. We had the right potion to start with.’



‘Sorry,’ mumbled Mildred again, then she began to laugh. ‘Hey, Maud, you do look funny with just your head showing!’

At once they both began to laugh, and soon they were best friends again.

‘I suppose I’d better go and see Old Cackle now,’ said Mildred, when she had completely reappeared.

‘I’ll come with you to the door,’ offered Maud.

Miss Cackle was small and very fat, with short grey hair and green horn-rimmed glasses which she usually wore pushed up on top of her head. She was

the exact opposite of Miss Hardbroom, being absent-minded in appearance and rather gentle by nature. The girls were not in the least bit afraid of her, whereas Miss Hardbroom could reduce any of them to a miserable heap with just one word. Miss Cackle used a different technique. By always being friendly and pleased to see a pupil in her office, she made them feel embarrassed if they had something unpleasant to tell her, as Mildred nearly always had.

Mildred knocked at Miss Cackle’s door, hoping she would be out. She wasn’t.

‘Come in!’ called the familiar voice from inside.

Mildred opened the door and went in. Miss Cackle, glasses on her nose for once, was busily writing in a huge register. She looked up and peered over her spectacles.

‘Ah, Mildred,’ she said pleasantly. ‘Come and sit down while I finish filling in this register.’

Mildred closed the door and sat by Miss Cackle’s desk.

‘I wish she wasn’t so pleased to see me,’ she thought.

Miss Cackle slammed the register shut and pushed her glasses on to the top of her head.

‘Now, Mildred, what can I do for you?’

Mildred twisted her fingers together.

‘Well, actually, Miss Cackle,’ she began slowly, ‘Miss Hardbroom sent me to see you because I made the wrong potion again.’

The smile faded from the headmistress’s face and she sighed, as if with deep disappointment. Mildred felt about an inch high.

‘*Really*, Mildred,’ Miss Cackle said in a tired voice, ‘I have run out of things to say to you. Week after week you come here, sent by every member of staff in the school, and my words just seem to go straight in one ear and out of the other. You will never get the Witches’ Higher Certificate if this appalling conduct continues. You must be the worst witch in the entire school. Whenever there’s any trouble you are nearly always to be found at the bottom of it, and it’s just not good enough, my dear. Now, what have you to say for yourself *this* time?’



‘I don’t really know, Miss Cackle,’ Mildred said humbly. ‘Everything I do just seems to go wrong,

that's all. I don't *mean* to do it.'

'Well, that's no excuse, is it?' said Miss Cackle. 'Everyone else manages to live without causing an uproar wherever they go. You must pull yourself together, Mildred. I don't want to hear *any* more bad reports about you, do you understand?'

'Yes, Miss Cackle,' said Mildred, in as sorry a voice as she could manage.

'Run along, then,' said the headmistress, 'and remember what I have said to you.'

Maud was waiting in the corridor, eager to know what had been said, when her friend came out of the office.

'She's nice really,' Mildred said. 'Just told me all the usual things. She hates telling people off. I'll have to try to be better from now on. Come on, let's go and give the kittens another broomstick lesson.'



Task – please answer the following questions.

1. Why does it say "Maud and Mildred were sharing a cauldron, of course."? (page 1)
2. Have Mildred and Maud prepared well for their potion test? Give a reason for your answer.
3. On page 2, why were they worried that Ethel's had turned pink?
4. What spell were they supposed to be creating? What did their spell do instead?
5. Do you think it's fair that Miss Hardbroom sent Mildred to see Miss Cackle? Give a reason for your answer.