

## CHAPTER SIX



allowe'en was celebrated each year in the ruins of an old castle quite near the school. The special fires were lit at sunset, and by dark all the witches and wizards had assembled.

As the sun set, the members of Miss Cackle's Academy were preparing to leave the school. Mildred smoothed her robes, said good-bye to her kitten, put on her hat, grabbed Ethel's broomstick and ran down to the yard. She took a quick look out of her window before leaving the room and saw the fires being lit in the distance. It was very exciting.

The rest of the school had already assembled as Mildred rushed out of the door and took her place. Miss Hardbroom looked splendid in her full witch's robes and hat.

'Everyone is present now,' Miss Hardbroom announced to Miss Cackle.

'Then we shall set off,' said the headmistress. 'To the celebrations! Class Five first, Class Four second, and so on until Class One!'

They made a wonderful sight flying over the trees towards the castle, cloaks soaring in the wind, and the older girls with their cats perched on the ends of their broomsticks. Miss Hardbroom looked particularly impressive, sitting bolt-upright with her long black hair streaming behind her. The girls

had never seen her hair loose before and were amazed how much of it she could possibly scrag into that tight knot every day. It came down to her waist.



‘H.B. looks quite nice with her hair like that,’ whispered Maud to Mildred, who was riding next to her.

‘Yes,’ agreed Mildred, ‘she doesn’t seem half as frightening.’

Miss Hardbroom turned round and shot a piercing look at the two girls.

‘No talking!’ she snapped.

A huge crowd was already there at the castle when they arrived. The pupils of the Academy lined up in neat rows while Miss Cackle and all the other

teachers shook hands with the chief wizard. He was very old, with a long white beard and a purple gown embroidered with moons and stars.

‘And what have you prepared for us this year?’ he asked.

‘We have prepared a broomstick formation team, Your Honour,’ Miss Cackle replied. ‘Shall we begin, Miss Hardbroom?’

Miss Hardbroom clapped her hands and the girls lined up, with Ethel at the front.

‘You may begin,’ said Miss Hardbroom.

Ethel rose perfectly into the air, followed by the rest of the class. First, they made a line, sinking and rising, which received great applause. Then they nose-dived the yard. (Miss Cackle closed her eyes during this part, but nothing went wrong.) Then the girls made a V in the air, which looked quite beautiful.

‘Your girls get better every year,’ remarked a young witch to Miss Hardbroom, who smiled.

Last of all came the circle, which was quite the easiest part.



‘All over soon,’ whispered Maud, arranging her broomstick in front of Mildred.

As soon as they had formed the circle, Mildred knew that something was the matter with her broomstick. It started to rock about, and seemed to be trying to throw her off balance.

‘Maud!’ she cried to her friend. ‘There’s something –’ but before Mildred could say any more, the broomstick gave a violent kick like a bucking bronco and she fell off, grabbing at Maud as she fell.

There was chaos in the air. All the girls were screaming and clutching at each other, and soon there was a tangled mass of broomsticks and witches on the ground. The only girl who flew serenely back to earth was Ethel. A few of the younger witches laughed, but most of them looked grim.



‘We are so sorry, Your Honour,’ apologized Miss Cackle, as Miss Hardbroom untangled the heap of

girls and jerked them to their feet. 'I'm sure there must be some simple explanation.'

'Miss Cackle,' said the chief magician, sternly, 'your pupils are the witches of the future. I shudder to think what that future will be like.'

He paused, and there was complete silence. Miss Hardbroom glared at Mildred.

'However,' continued the chief magician, 'we shall forget this incident for the rest of the evening. Let us now begin the chanting.'



**Task – please answer the following questions.**

1. Why did Mildred and Maud think Miss Hardbroom looked particularly impressive (page 1)?
2. How do you think the class felt as they were flying out to do their formation?
3. Have you ever had to perform in front of lots of people? How did you feel?
4. When did the broomstick formation go wrong?
5. What did the chief magician think about the disastrous display? Give a reason for your answer.