

CHAPTER FIVE



he following morning, Miss Hardbroom strode into the classroom looking thoughtful. She was wearing a new grey-and-black striped dress, with a brooch at the shoulder.

‘Good morning, girls,’ she greeted them, not as sharply as usual.

‘Good morning, Miss Hardbroom,’ chorused the girls.

Their form-mistress arranged the books on her desk and surveyed the class.

‘I have something to tell you, girls,’ she began, ‘that gives me great pleasure on one hand, yet causes me some worry on the other.’ Here she shot a glance at Mildred. ‘As you know, the Hallowe’en celebrations take place in two weeks’ time and it is customary for a display to be presented by this school. This year, our class has been chosen to present the display.’

There were gasps of delight from the girls.

‘Of course,’ Miss Hardbroom went on, ‘it is a great honour, but also a responsibility, as Miss Cackle’s Academy has a very high reputation which we don’t want to spoil, *do we?* Last year, Form Three produced a play which was highly praised, and I thought that this year we might present a broomstick formation team. You will need a lot of

practice, as some of you are not too steady on your broomsticks yet, but I am quite certain that we could give an interesting and successful performance. Is there anyone who would prefer something different?’

She looked round piercingly at the girls, who all shrank into their seats and would not have dared to disagree, even if they had wanted to.

‘Good,’ said Miss Hardbroom. ‘Then it is settled. We shall present a broomstick formation team. Let us go down to the yard and begin to practise at once. Fetch your broomsticks and be outside in two minutes.’ With which words she vanished.

The girls excitedly clattered from the room and rushed along the corridors to fetch their broomsticks, which were kept in their own rooms. The spiral staircase rang with the sound of hob-nailed boots as the girls rushed down to the yard, where they found Miss Hardbroom waiting for them.

‘First of all, you’d better take a practice flight,’ she said. ‘Form an orderly crocodile and go round the

school and back.’

Off they all flew in an orderly, but rather wobbly, procession round the school.

‘Quite good, girls,’ said Miss Hardbroom, as they lined up in front of her. ‘You were swaying about rather badly, Mildred, but apart from that, you all did quite well. Now, I have made out a list of the things you will be doing. First, a single line, with each pupil sinking and rising alternately. This should be comparatively easy. Secondly, a flying “V” similar to wild geese in flight. Then, nose-diving the yard, and swooping up just before you reach the ground. That will be the most difficult part of all.’ Mildred and Maud exchanged horrified glances. ‘And finally you will form a circle in the air, each broomstick touching the next. Any questions? No? Very well, then, we shall begin the first item immediately. What *was* the first item, Mildred?’

‘... er, nose-diving the yard, Miss Hardbroom.’

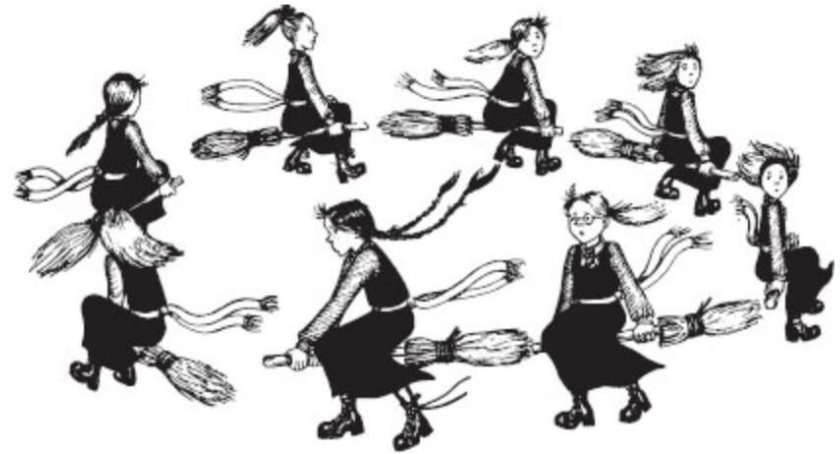
‘Wrong. Ethel, do you remember?’

‘We are to form a line, each pupil sinking and rising alternately,’ replied Ethel, word-perfect as

always.

‘Correct,’ said Miss Hardbroom, with a frosty glare at Mildred. ‘We shall practise all this morning and every morning until the celebrations, and perhaps this afternoon, if I can persuade Miss Bat to allow you to miss your chanting lesson.’

They worked very hard for the next two weeks. Every spare minute was spent practising and, by the time Hallowe’en arrived, the display was quite a joy to watch. Maud’s hat was squashed like a concertina from the time when she had not pulled up from a nose-dive during practice, but apart from that there had been hardly any trouble at all, even from Mildred, who was making a special effort to be good and thoughtful.



The day before Hallowe’en, Miss Hardbroom lined up her class in the yard to give them a few final words of advice.

‘I am very pleased with you, girls,’ she said, almost pleasantly. ‘Now, you will be wearing your best robes tomorrow, so I hope they will be clean and pressed.’

As she said this she caught sight of Mildred’s broomstick.

‘Mildred, why is there a bundle of sticky-tape in the middle of your broomstick?’

‘I’m afraid I broke it in half during the first week of term,’ admitted Mildred.

Ethel giggled.

‘I see,’ said Miss Hardbroom. ‘Well, you certainly can’t use that one in the display. Ethel, I seem to remember you have a spare one. Perhaps you could lend it to Mildred?’

‘Oh, Miss Hardbroom!’ cried Ethel. ‘It was given to me as a birthday present. I shouldn’t want anything to happen to it.’

Miss Hardbroom fixed Ethel with one of her nastiest looks.

‘If that is how you feel, Ethel,’ she said in icy tones, ‘then –’

‘Oh, I didn’t mean I *won’t* lend it, Miss Hardbroom,’ Ethel said, meekly. ‘I’ll go and fetch it now.’ And she ran into the school.

Ethel had never forgotten the time Mildred had turned her into a pig, and as she made her way up the spiral staircase she suddenly thought of a marvellous way of taking her revenge. (Ethel really wasn’t a nice person at all.)

‘I’ll fix you, Mildred Hubble,’ she cackled to herself, as she took the broomstick out of her

cupboard. ‘Now, listen to me, Broom, this is very important ...’ ★

The class had dismissed when Ethel returned carrying the broomstick. Mildred was practising nose-diving the yard.

‘Here’s the broom, Mildred,’ called Ethel. ‘I’ll leave it propped against the wall.’

‘Thanks very much,’ replied Mildred, delighted that Ethel was being so nice, for the two hadn’t spoken since the pig episode. ‘It’s very kind of you.’

‘Not at all,’ said Ethel, smiling wickedly to herself as she went back into the school.



Task – please answer the following questions.

1. What is Miss Hardbroom announcing to the girls on page 1?
2. Why is she feeling both excited and worried at the same time?
3. Why does Miss Hardbroom suggest that Ethel gets her spare broomstick for Mildred?
4. What do you think Ethel said to the broom? ★
5. What do you think is going to happen?