The Magical Adventures of
The Worst Witch

The Worst Witch
The Worst Witch Strikes Again
A Bad Spell for the Worst Witch
The Worst Witch at Sea
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A BAD SPELL FOR
THE
WORST
WITCH

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CANDLEWICK PRESS
 CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS the very first day of Mildred Hubble’s second year at Miss Cackle’s Academy for Witches.

The school year at the academy was divided into two long terms, the first of these commencing in September and stretching right to the end of January. This was known as the Winter Term and was followed by a month of welcome holiday. The second session began in March and finished at the end of July, and this was called the Summer Term, though in fact it was still extremely cold and wintry when
term began. Then there was another glorious month of holiday until the beginning of September, and the start of another year.

After her disastrous first year at the academy, it was something of a miracle that Mildred was returning there at all. She was one of those unfortunate people who seem to invite disaster wherever they go. Despite her efforts to be helpful and well behaved, Mildred had an uncanny knack of appearing to be the cause of any trouble which was occurring, and it must be admitted that there were occasions (particularly when her rather wild imagination ran away with her) when she managed to turn some peaceful event into a scene of total chaos.

However, this year Mildred was older and hopefully wiser (at any rate she was more full of good intentions than ever) and she was quite determined to lose
her reputation as the worst witch in the school.

Arriving on her broomstick at the prisonlike school gates, Mildred peered through the railings into the misty playground. For once she was early and there were only a handful of girls in the yard, all stamping their feet and huddling in their cloaks to keep out the bitter cold. It was always chilly at the school because the building was made of stone, rather like a castle, and was perched on the topmost peak of a mountain, surrounded by
pine trees which grew so close together that it was very damp and gloomy. In fact, the girls suffered permanently from colds and flu from all the time they were forced to spend in the freezing playground.

“Healthy fresh air!” Miss Drill, the gym mistress, would bark, herding the sneezing, coughing pupils outside. “It’ll do you all a power of good. Five hundred lines to anyone caught sneaking in before the bell!”

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Mildred flew over the gates and landed expertly on the other side.

“Well, that’s a good start!” she thought, looking around in the hope that someone had witnessed so successful a landing, but of course they hadn’t. People were only ever watching when she did something dreadful, never at a moment of triumph.

Mildred took her suitcase from the back of the broomstick which was hovering politely, waiting for the next command. Then she turned her attention to the tabby cat still spread-eagled on the back of the broom with its eyes screwed tightly shut and its claws gripping on for dear life. The poor little cat had never got over its terror of flying, and Mildred always had to prise it from the broomstick whenever she arrived anywhere.
“Trust me to get a cat like you,” said Mildred fondly, stroking it with one hand and unclasping its claws with the other. “Come on, silly, we’re here. Look! It’s all over, you can jump off now.”

The cat opened one eye cautiously, saw that it was true, and sprang onto Mildred’s shoulder, where it rubbed its head gratefully against her hair. Mildred felt a wave of tenderness towards the scrawny creature.

“Mildred! Millie! It’s me!” shrieked a familiar voice from above. Mildred looked up and saw Maud swooping over the gates, waving her hat in the air. This last action nearly caused her to fall off and she lurched to a rather drunken halt at Mildred’s feet.

“Oh, Maud!” laughed Mildred, full of joy at the sight of her best friend after the long summer holiday. “Gosh, you look a lot thinner, and your hair’s got longer.”

“I know,” said Maud, stroking her hair,
which was in two stubby plaits instead of her usual bunches. “Mother put me on this awful diet. I wasn’t allowed to eat anything except lettuce and celery and dreadful stuff like that. Still, I’m out of her clutches now, so it’s back to good old school dinners. Three cheers for date-pudding and custard, I say!” They both laughed.

“I don’t know why they bother to have gates at this school,” remarked Mildred, as another three pupils soared over the wall on their brooms.

“Perhaps it’s in case we have some
ordinary visitors,” said Maud. “You know, people who don’t have brooms. Miss Cackle couldn’t expect ordinary guests to bring ladders with them, could she? Who else has arrived, by the way? Anyone we know?”

“Oh, look, Maud!” said Mildred, indicating two small girls in brand-new hats and huge cloaks which nearly touched their brand-new shining boots. “They must be first-years; look at them. Don’t they look little?”

“Only Ethel,” replied Mildred. “She pretended not to see me though, not that I care, of course.”

Ethel Hallow was the form sneak and goody-goody, and it was hardly surprising that Mildred felt unfriendly towards her after all the mean tricks Ethel had played during their first two terms, including almost getting Mildred expelled on two occasions.
“To think *we* were like that,” said Maud in a motherly way. “It makes me feel quite old.”

The two first-years were standing close together, looking lost and shy. One of them was glancing nervously around, and the other was trying unsuccessfully to stop crying. They were a sorry-looking pair. Both were thin; the weeping one had a pinched, pale face and wispy mouse-coloured hair; and the other one had brilliant orange frizzy bunches. For some reason, the weeping one reminded Mildred very strongly
of someone else, though she couldn’t think who it was.

“Let’s go and cheer them up, shall we?” suggested Mildred. “They can’t help being new, poor things. Remember how awful we felt?”

Feeling very grown-up and wise, Maud and Mildred sauntered casually over to the two pathetic little girls.

“Hello,” said Mildred. “You must be new.”

“Yes,” chorused the girls.

Mildred patted the snivelling one awkwardly on the shoulder. “Don’t cry,” she said stiffly. “It isn’t *that* bad, you know.” Unfortunately, Mildred’s kindly gesture only served to make matters worse, instead of better, for the girl burst into deafening sobs and flung her arms round Mildred’s waist.

Mildred was appalled. Everyone in the playground was staring at her, and any minute now Miss Hardbroom (Mildred’s
terrifying form mistress from the previous year) was bound to appear and accuse her of upsetting a poor new girl.

Maud detached the girl rather roughly and gave her a shake. “Stop that silly noise at once!” she said crossly. “You’ll get Mildred into trouble before the first bell’s even rung.”

Mildred smoothed her cloak. “What’s your name?” she asked.

“Sybil,” snuffled the girl.

“Mine’s Clarice,” volunteered the other one.

“Are the teachers strict here?” asked Sybil, wiping her eyes with a corner of her voluminous cloak.

“Not really,” replied Maud.

“Well, Miss Hardbroom is,” said Mildred. “In fact she’s the worst of the lot, and she’ll be your form mistress. We’re lucky this year because we’ll get Miss Gimlett, and she’s quite nice. But Miss Hardbroom’s
horrendous. She just appears out of thin air —” At this point Mildred broke off and looked around in case she had done just that, but she hadn’t.

“—And she says dreadful things to you in front of the whole class and makes you feel really stupid,” continued Maud.

“That’s right,” said Mildred, “and I heard tell that she changed one girl into a frog because she was two seconds late for a lesson. I don’t know if it’s true, but there is a frog sometimes seen near the pond in the backyard, and I’ve heard that it’s really a poor first-year who—”

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“I’ve never heard that before!” gasped Maud. “Is it true?”

“I think so,” answered Mildred, though in fact she had made up the tale on the spur of the moment and it had somehow got rather out of hand. To be honest, Mildred’s stories often got rather out of hand, when she would find, to her dismay, that the whole class was listening and believing every word. She just couldn’t say then that she’d made it all up.

Poor Sybil believed every word of Mildred’s story about the frog and she burst into renewed and even noisier sobs, so deafening that Maud and Mildred thought it best to scurry away, leaving Clarice to offer comfort.

“Mildred! Maudie! Yoo-hoo! It’s me!”

Enid Nightshade, the new girl who arrived last term and was now their friend, came zooming over the treetops and screeched to a halt so forcefully that
her cat and suitcase shot off the back, and Maud and Mildred had to leap out of the way to avoid being run over.

At that moment the bell rang and the three witches picked up all their belongings and struggled inside with them.

“Thank goodness we haven’t got H.B. anymore,” whispered Enid. (H.B. was their nickname for Miss Hardbroom.)

“Yes,” agreed Mildred. “This year should be as easy as pie without her breathing down our necks.”
The first announcement made by Miss Cackle at assembly was the ghastly news that Miss Hardbroom had changed places with Miss Gimlett, and would now be accompanying her old form into their second year. An audible groan rippled through the new Form Two, quelled at once by one of Miss Hardbroom’s piercing glances, which always made each pupil feel that they had been noticed personally.

With a sinking heart, Mildred moved miserably through all the chores of the
first day, unpacking robes, arranging the new books in her desk, feeding the cat, and innumerable small tasks till at last it was bedtime.

The pupils were too depressed to bother sneaking into each other’s rooms for a chat as they usually did on the first night back at school. Mildred lay in a glum heap under the blankets with the cat purring like a lawn mower on her pillow, trying to think if there was any possible advantage in another year with Miss Hardbroom at the helm, but there wasn’t.

Next morning, Mildred was jolted awake by the bell ringing in a much more frantic way than usual. It didn’t take long for the cobwebs of sleep to clear and for her to realize that it was the fire bell.

An untidily dressed Maud flung open Mildred’s door as she rushed past. “Quick, Mil!” she shrieked. “It’s fire drill, come on!”

“What a time to choose,” said Mildred,
bundling on her tunic over her pyjamas. “Perhaps it’s a real fire?”

Maud went rushing off down the corridor, but Mildred stopped and looked out of the window to see if there was any evidence of fire. There, in the yard below, was Miss Hardbroom wreathed in thick purple smoke. She appeared to be standing in her customary arms-folded, upright posture, staring into the smoke as if she was in a trance, which seemed decidedly odd, given the circumstances.

“Crumbs!” thought Mildred. “She’s gone into a state of shock. I’ll have to help!”

Mildred rushed to the washroom and seized the bucket which stood under the window there to catch drips from the leak in the ceiling. It was already half full with stagnant rainwater, so Mildred filled it to the brim, then carried it back to the yard windowsill, collecting her broomstick on the way.
She peered out of the window again, hoping that she might perhaps have imagined the scene below, but Miss Hardbroom had not moved and was now almost hidden from view by the smoke.

“Here goes!” said Mildred, her spirits rising as she thought how grateful her
form mistress would be. “Perhaps I’ll get a medal for bravery.”

It is difficult, at the best of times, to balance on a broomstick, but when you are trying to carry a heavy bucket of water at the same time, it is virtually impossible. Mildred did her best to arrange the bucket hanging from the back, but it was obviously going to spill the minute they took off, so she put the bucket back onto the windowsill, climbed onto the broom first, and then settled the bucket in her lap. This
seemed to be reasonably steady, so taking her courage in both hands, Mildred gave the word: “Down, broom! Fast!”

Instantly they plunged into a vertical nosedive so abrupt that the bucket flew from her grasp and dropped like a stone. Mildred swooped desperately after it but, alas, too late. A torrent of foul, icy water
drenched Miss Hardbroom from head to toe, followed a second later by the bucket, which crashed over her head with a doom-laden clang. To give the stern form mistress some credit, it must be recorded that she did not flinch when the metal bucket struck after falling from such a height.
Though her natural inclination was to turn round and zoom straight back again, Mildred could see that there was no escape. The smoke had cleared, revealing at least half the school lined up in rows and Miss Hardbroom still in the same position, with the bucket neatly over her head. For a mad moment, Mildred thought that perhaps, for some unknown reason, it was only a statue of Miss Hardbroom, but this illusion was shattered when the statue spoke.

“There is no need to ask which pupil is responsible for this,” came the familiar voice from inside the bucket. “Mildred Hubble, perhaps you would be kind enough to assist me in my predicament?”

The sight of any other teacher dripping with water and with a bucket over her head would have been an occasion for great mirth among the pupils, but absolutely nothing could diminish Miss Hardbroom’s
power. Not a sound was heard, not a smirk flickered on any face as Mildred stepped forward and stood on tiptoe to remove the bucket.

Miss Hardbroom’s eyes bored into Mildred like a laser beam the moment they came into view.

“Thank you, Mildred,” she said acidly.

“I—I’m s-sorry, M-M-Miss Hardb-bb-room,” gibbered Mildred. “It was—I
thought you were on fire—there was smoke so I, well I thought—it seemed . . .”

“Mildred,” said Miss Hardbroom heavily, “does it seem likely to you that I would be standing here in the middle of a raging inferno, casually rounding up all you girls?”

“There was the smoke, Miss Hardbroom,” explained Mildred in a tiny voice, suddenly feeling aware of the striped pyjama legs under her tunic.

“If you remember your fire drill Mildred,” said Miss Hardbroom, “pupils are expected in the yard through the main door, and not, as some girls seem to imagine, from the upstairs windows. On entering the yard through the correct entrance, they would have been met by me, who would then have informed them that the smoke was merely magic smoke to lend atmosphere to the proceedings and that there
was no cause for total panic as some pupils would seem to be prone to.”

“Yes, Miss Hardbroom,” quavered Mildred. “I’m sorry, Miss Hardbroom.”

“Get into line, Mildred,” ordered Miss Hardbroom. “Let us just say that we expect this to be your only half-witted jape for the entire term. Ethel? Would you please fetch me a towel and my cloak before I turn into an iceberg?”

“Of course, Miss Hardbroom,” said Ethel, smiling demurely at her form mistress, but pulling a horrid face at Mildred as she passed her by.
Mildred lined up next to her two friends, Maud and Enid.

“You are the limit, Mildred,” whispered Maud.

“I know,” said Mildred miserably. “I must have been still asleep or something.”

“Actually,” said Enid, “it was quite funny really.”

At this point all three friends felt an unruly wave of amusement sweeping over them, and the rest of the fire drill was spent desperately avoiding each other’s eyes in case a fit of the giggles should descend, and they were all agreed (especially Mildred) that this would definitely not be the thing to do.