

CHAPTER ONE



Squalling rain and a biting wind buffeted the pupils of Miss Cackle's Academy as they struggled to reach the school in time for the first day of the Winter Term. The girls' cloaks kept blowing inside out, then flapping round their faces like wet flannels, and most of the older pupils (who were expected to keep the cats sitting on their brooms at all times) had given up and crammed the cats into their baskets for safety.

Mildred Hubble, who was *not* one of the best fliers in the school, was valiantly trying her best to keep Tabby (her nervous striped cat) perched on the broom just in case anyone was watching when she arrived. She had wedged Tabby between her back and a laundry-bag stuffed with books, and she could feel his claws through her gymslip as the unruly cloak flapped and whirled above her shoulders.

‘Ouch!’ she yelled. ‘It’s all right, Tab, we’re nearly there . . . hang on just a teeny bit longer – OW! I didn’t mean *literally* hang on! OW! OUCH!’

