

The Worst Witch

written and illustrated by Jill Murphy

Almost all the first-year witches were in the yard trying to persuade their puzzled kittens to sit on their broomsticks. Several were already clinging on by their claws, and one kitten, belonging to a rather smug young witch named Ethel, was sitting bolt upright cleaning its paws, as if it had been broomstick riding all its life!

Riding a broomstick was no easy matter, as I have mentioned before. First, you ordered the stick to hover, and it hovered lengthways above the ground. Then you sat on it, gave it a sharp tap, and away you flew. Once in the air you could make the stick do almost anything by saying, 'Right! Left! Stop! Down a bit!' and so on. The difficult part was balancing, for if you leaned a little too far to one side you could easily overbalance, in which case you would either fall off or find yourself hanging upside-down and then you would just have to hold on with your skirt over your head until a friend came to your rescue.

It had taken Mildred several weeks of falling off and crashing before she could ride the broomstick reasonably well, and it looked as though her kitten was going to have the same trouble. When she put it on the end of the stick, it just fell off without even trying to hold on. After many attempts, Mildred picked up her kitten and gave it a shake.



"Listen!" she said severely. "I think I shall have to call you Stupid. You don't even *try* to hold on. Everyone else is all right – look at all your friends."

The kitten gazed at her sadly and licked her nose with its rough tongue.

"Oh, come on," said Mildred, softening her voice. "I'm not really angry with you. Let's try again."

And she put the kitten back on the broomstick, from which it fell with a thud.

Maud was having better luck. Her kitten was hanging on grimly upside down.

"Oh, well," laughed Maud. "It's a start."

"Mine's useless," said Mildred, sitting on the broomstick for a rest.

"Never mind," Maud said. "Think how hard it must be for them to hang on by their claws."

An idea flashed into Mildred's head, and she dived into the school, leaving her kitten chasing a leaf along the ground and the broomstick still patiently hovering. She came out carrying her satchel which she hooked over the end of the broom and then bundled the kitten into it. The kitten's astounded face peeped out of the bag as Mildred flew delightedly round the yard.

"Look, Maud!" she called from ten feet up in the air.

"That's cheating!" said Maud, looking at the satchel.

Mildred flew back and landed on the ground laughing.

