

CHARLIE BUMPERS vs.

THE SQUEAKING SKULL



Bill Harley

Illustrated by Adam Gustavson

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Summary: As Halloween nears, Charlie and Tommy hope to get out of taking their little sisters trick-or-treating and go by themselves to Alex's upscale neighborhood instead, then attend a sleepover at Alex's house, but when Charlie learns that partygoers will be watching a very scary horror movie he panics.

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To my dad, Max Harley

Thanks to Jane Murphy, for her continued
careful reading and acute insight



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Tons of Candy

“What are you wearing for Halloween?” Tommy yelled over the noise in the gym.

“I don’t know,” I said. There were only twelve days to Halloween, and I hadn’t decided what I wanted to be.

Tommy Kasten’s my best friend. We were leaning against the gym wall during recess, since it was raining too hard to go outside. There were two different kickball games going, a basketball game, and some kids skipping rope. With everyone yelling and screaming, Tommy and I could barely hear ourselves think. For a few minutes we watched everyone else run around.



Mr. Shuler, our gym teacher, was watching, too. I could tell by the look on his face that he didn't like all these kids crowded into his gym.

"Maybe I'll go as Mr. Shuler," I said. "That would be scary."

"Ha!" Tommy snorted. "I'm going as a werewolf. I've got some fangs to put in my mouth, and I'm going to glue hair all over my hands and face."

"Your mom's going to let you glue hair on yourself?" I asked.

"I hope so," Tommy said.

"That'll be great. I can't think of anything good to be this year."

"Well, you'd better figure something out pretty soon," he said. "Don't forget about the costume contest. The winner gets ten free movie tickets."

"I know." There was going to be a costume contest at school, and I wanted to win. Then Tommy and I could go to the movies five times together. Or maybe I would take someone else, too. Like Hector, who sits next to me in Mrs. Burke's fourth-grade class.

“Want to come to my house for trick-or-treating?” I asked.

“If I do, I’ll have to bring Carla,” Tommy said.

Carla is Tommy’s little sister. She’s in first grade, just like my sister Mabel, and they’re best friends, too. My dad calls Mabel “Squirt,” but I call her “the Squid” because it’s funnier.

“I know,” I said. “I always have to take the Squid around. We could do it together.”

“I guess,” Tommy said. “The only problem is Carla slows me down. I can never get to as many houses as I want. And when Mom or Dad comes with us, they stop and talk to the grown-ups handing out the candy. It’s worse than going to the supermarket with them. It takes forever.”

“Exactly!” I agreed.

“It’s too bad we can’t go by ourselves,” Tommy said.

“And it’s too bad we can’t go to a neighborhood where the houses are really big and everyone hands out huge candy bars.”

“Right!” said Tommy, getting more excited. “The bigger the houses, the bigger the candy bars! Then maybe we’d have to carry extra bags for when the first ones got filled up. That would be stupendous.”

“Terrific!” I said.

“Stupific!” Tommy said.

“Stupific!” I repeated. “That’s hilarious.”

“Stupific!” we both crowed at the same time.

“Wait!” Tommy said. “Maybe your brother Matt could take Carla and Mabel around, and we could go to a different neighborhood by ourselves!”

“Maybe,” I said. But I wondered if Matt would really take two first graders out trick-or-treating. Anyway, the Squid usually wanted to do things with me.

“Hey!” Alex MacLeod ran up, bouncing a ball a million miles an hour. He’s a nice guy, but hyper—very, very hyper.

“What are you guys doing for Halloween?” Alex asked, still bouncing.

“Trick-or-treating,” Tommy said. “Duh.”

Alex lost the ball and ran to retrieve it. When he bounced it back our way, I caught it and held on to it. He didn't seem to notice.

"You wanna come to my house?" he asked. "I'm going to have a sleepover. We'll go out trick-or-treating in my neighborhood, then watch movies. It'll be great."

Tommy and I looked at each other. A dream come true. We knew where Alex lived—his house was really big, and his neighborhood was full of other big houses. Every one of them was probably loaded with giant candy bars.

Carla and Mabel the Squid wouldn't be there. Tons of candy! Heaven on earth on Halloween!

Tommy and I smiled at each other.

"Sure," I said.

"How many bags should we bring?" Tommy asked.

"As many as you want," Alex said. "It's going to be awesome. And I'm going to get some horror movies."



“I love scary movies,”
Tommy said.

“I hope we can get *The Shrieking Skull*,” Alex said.
“It’s the scariest horror
movie ever!”

“Fantastic!” Tommy said.

“Ask your parents if you
can come,” Alex said. “We’ll
eat candy and pizza until we
throw up, and then watch
scary movies and scream
like crazy.”

“Stupific!” Tommy said.

“Super stupific,” I said.

Halloween with friends. Lots of candy. All of it
was really stupific.

Except for one thing.

I HATE horror movies.