

CHARLIE BUMPERS

vs.
*THE PERFECT
LITTLE
TURKEY*



Bill Harley

Illustrated by Adam Gustavson



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1

Holy Moly

Bumpers passes the ball up the field! The wing passes it back to Bumpers! He takes the ball on the run and puts it between the defender's legs. Unbelievable! The defender loses his shorts!

Bumpers on the left. He sees an open man! A perfect looping pass! This kid is only in fourth grade, but no one can stop him!

It comes back to Bumpers! The goalkeeper comes out! Bumpers lets go! A huge foot!

BAM!





*Goal! Goal! Gooooooooaaaal! The crowd goes wild!
Bumpers pumps his fist. They win the championship! Bumpers
kicks the ball into the crowd!*

BAM!

He rips off his shirt and throws it to the fans!

I'm not supposed to kick the ball against the garage door because once I broke one of those little windows across the top. But that was a year ago, and I'm a lot better at kicking now. Anyway, Mom was out grocery shopping and Dad was in the basement. Charlie Bumpers, ace striker, was safe.

I danced around and pumped my arms in the air, celebrating my victory.

Matt, my older brother, stuck his head out the back door. "Hey, genius!" he called. "You're not supposed to kick the ball against the garage."

"I'm not hurting anything," I said.

"You're going to get caught," he warned, "and I won't defend you."

"Thanks!" I yelled.





“What a turkey,” he said, then went back inside.

“You’re the turkey!” I yelled, just as my little sister Mabel stepped out onto the back porch. My dad calls her “Squirt,” but I call her “the Squid.” It’s funnier.

“I’m not a turkey,” she said. “And your shirt is on the roof.”

I looked up, and there it was, hanging off the edge. I kicked the ball again.

BAM!

“I’m telling!” the Squid yelled.

Just then, Mom pulled in the driveway.

I started dribbling the soccer ball between my feet, like I hadn’t done anything wrong.

“Charlie’s kicking the ball against the door!” the Squid shouted as Mom turned off the motor. “And he’s not wearing his shirt!”

What a traitor!

I grabbed the rake leaning by the garage door and snagged my shirt off the roof.

I put it on just as Mom got out of the car. “Your





dad and I told you not to kick the ball at the garage door,” she said, frowning. “Please come help me with the groceries.”

I gave the Squid a dirty look and kicked the ball against the garage one more time, but not as hard.

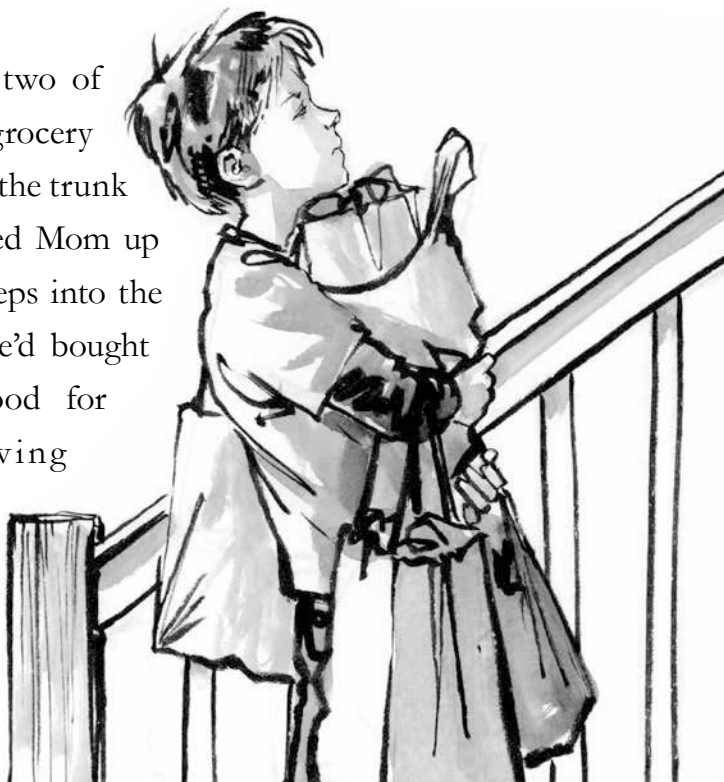
BAM!

“Charlie!” Mom shouted.

“He’s kicking the *b-a-l-l*,” my sister said.

The Squid had just learned to read, and she’d started spelling everything out like she was a human dictionary.

I lifted two of the heavy grocery bags out of the trunk and followed Mom up the back steps into the kitchen. She’d bought tons of food for Thanksgiving dinner.





There are lots of good things about Thanksgiving. Like no school. And my grandparents coming. And the stuffing my mom makes. And the rolls my grandmother always brings, which are the absolute best food on the planet. But this year was going to be even better because on Thanksgiving evening a Buck Meson special was showing on TV.

Buck Meson, Detective from Andromeda, is my absolute favorite superhero. He has his own TV show and he's got this electron stare that paralyzes bad guys in their place so they can't move.

I know he's not real, but he should be. That would mean electron stares are real, and I would have many uses for them. Like paralyzing brothers and sisters.

When Mom and I had finished unloading the groceries from the car, our dog Ginger sniffed at the bags we'd left on the floor, looking for something to eat. Dad came up from the basement. "Wow," he said, looking at all the overflowing bags. "Is there anything left at the supermarket?"





“I asked Mrs. Walcott if she wanted to come for Thanksgiving,” Mom said, ignoring my dad’s joke. “She’s going to be alone, so I thought it would be nice.”

My mom’s a visiting nurse. She goes to people’s homes if they can’t get to the doctor’s office. Mrs. Walcott has been one of her patients a long time, and I’ve even visited her house with my mom.

“Uh-oh,” Dad said.

“What?” Mom asked.

“Well, I thought we were going to invite the Gritzbachs this year.”

Oh no, I thought. *Not the Gritzbachs!* Mr. and Mrs. Gritzbach are our neighbors. Mr. Gritzbach’s kind of grumpy and can’t stand our dog Ginger.

“I know,” Mom said, “but I decided to ask Mrs. Walcott instead. She’ll be completely alone if we don’t have her over here.”

“Hmmm.” Dad looked worried. “I just invited the Gritzbachs.”

“Oh jeez, Jim! Why didn’t you tell me?”





“I’m sorry. I ran into them while I was taking a walk this morning,” Dad said. “Their son is spending the holiday with his wife’s family, so they were going to be by themselves.”

“What are we going to do?” Mom asked.

“Well, I don’t think we can disinvite them,” he said.

“Of course not. But where are we going to put everybody?” Mom grabbed the notepad and pencil we keep by the phone and sat down at the kitchen table.

She started making a list of everyone who was coming. There was our family, which included my mom and dad, me, Matt, and the Squid. Then there were my mom’s parents, Pops and Gams.

“Don’t forget the Gritzbachs,” Dad said.

“And Mrs. Walcott,” I added.

“And Sarah and Brandon and Chip,” Mom said. “And Tilly.”

Brandon and Sarah are my uncle and aunt. My cousin Chip is a year older than the Squid





and two years younger than me, and he can be extremely annoying. Especially to me. Tilly's his new baby sister. Her real name is Matilda.

"Holy moly," Mom said. "That makes fourteen people."

"Wow," Dad said. "I hope you bought a really big turkey."

"Turkey begins with a *t*," the Squid explained to everyone.

Dad's phone rang. He pulled it out of his pocket and looked at the screen. "It's Ron," he said, walking out of the kitchen. "I'd better answer."

Ron's my dad's brother. Uncle Ron is the greatest.

"I wonder if we'll have enough food?" Mom said. "Maybe I should bake an extra pie." She scribbled some notes on the piece of paper while the Squid looked over her shoulder, trying to read the words.

"Mom, you don't write very neatly," the Squid observed.

Dad came back in the kitchen. "Guess what."

"What?" Mom asked.





“Ron broke up with his girlfriend, and he doesn’t have anywhere to go for Thanksgiving.” Dad paused.

“And?” Mom asked.

“I invited him here,” Dad said with a guilty look on his face. “I had to.”

“You think he wants to stay for the entire weekend?” she asked.

“Probably.”

I love Uncle Ron, but I know he kind of drives Mom crazy. Once when he was here for a few days, I heard her tell my dad it was like having another kid in the house.

I didn’t see anything wrong with having another kid in the house. If it was Uncle Ron.

Matt walked in. “What’s going on?”

“We’re having fifteen people for Thanksgiving,” I said.

“No way!” Matt chortled. “That’s a lot.”

The Squid was still peering over Mom’s shoulder, looking at the pad of paper. “I see the number 15,” she said. “But what’s that?” She pointed at something





on the paper. “Those squiggly letters right there. What do they say?”

Mom didn’t answer. Matt looked over Mom’s other shoulder and started to laugh.

“What’s it say? What’s it say?” the Squid squeaked, which she does when she gets excited.

Matt laughed. “It says, ‘*too many!*’”

“You got that right,” Dad agreed.

Personally, I could think of one easy way to shorten the guest list: Have my cousin Chip stay home.

