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Charlie & The Cat Flap

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Extract

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One

Four days before the Big Sleep

Charlie and Henry were both seven years old, and they were best friends. They were best friends, and they quarrelled all the time. They argued at school. They squabbled at birthday parties. They nearly always had to be separated on school trips. Their friends said, "Charlie and Henry have been like that *for ever*!"

and took no notice; but their teachers called them ***The Terrible Two***. "***Double Trouble***!" agreed Charlie and Henry's fathers.

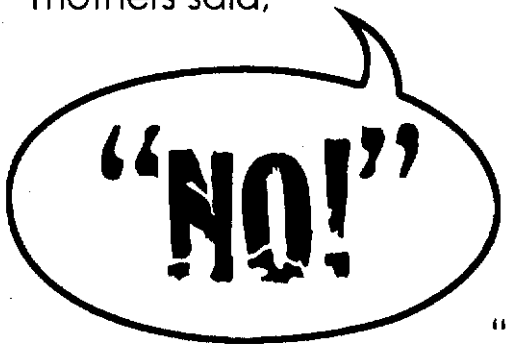
Their mothers said,



One Monday morning Charlie's big brother Max asked if he could stay with a friend for the night on Friday and his mother said he could. This would mean there would be an empty bed in Charlie's bedroom. That Monday afternoon Charlie and Henry ran out of school to where their mothers were both standing moaning about them and

Charlie asked, "On Friday night, can Henry come for a sleepover?"

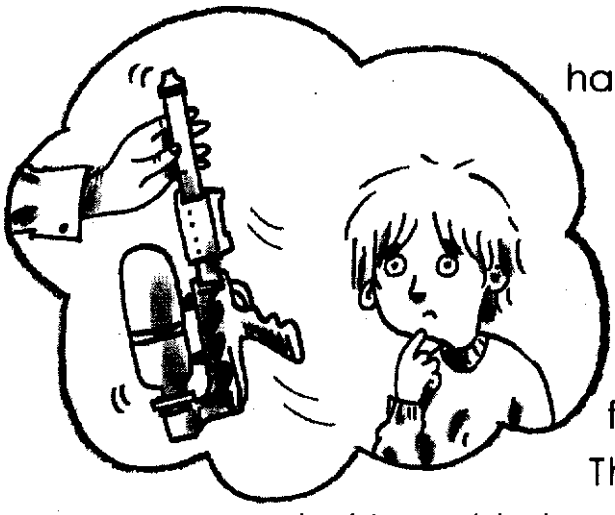
Straight away Charlie and Henry's mothers said,



"No," they said. "We haven't forgotten the last time!"

The last time Henry's father had had to get dressed at two o'clock in the morning and take Charlie home because Charlie said he could not bear listening to the way Henry breathed for one moment longer.

"He is copying *my* breathing!" Charlie had complained furiously. "Every time I breathe, he breathes! He has been doing it ever since you took away his Super Soaker Water Squirter! And what has



happened to my Itching Powder and my two dead flies? That's what I want to know!"





So Charlie had been taken home, and Henry's Super Soaker was banned for a week. But the Itching Powder and the two dead flies turned up safe and sound in Henry's bed, where Charlie had put them and Charlie and Henry soon forgot all about their quarrel. They were astonished when their mothers reminded them. They looked at each other and they put on their Sad Little Boy faces and then they tried again.



Charlie said to his mother: "You let Max have sleepovers but you won't let me!"

"You like Max better than me!"

"He's your favourite!"

"It's not fair!"

And Henry said to his mother: "At least Charlie has Max! I have no brothers or sisters and I am fed up with living in a house just with grown-ups."

Their mothers made moaning sounds but Charlie and Henry did not stop.

They said: "We never quarrel!"

"Charlie likes it when I hit him."

"Henry likes it when I push him over."

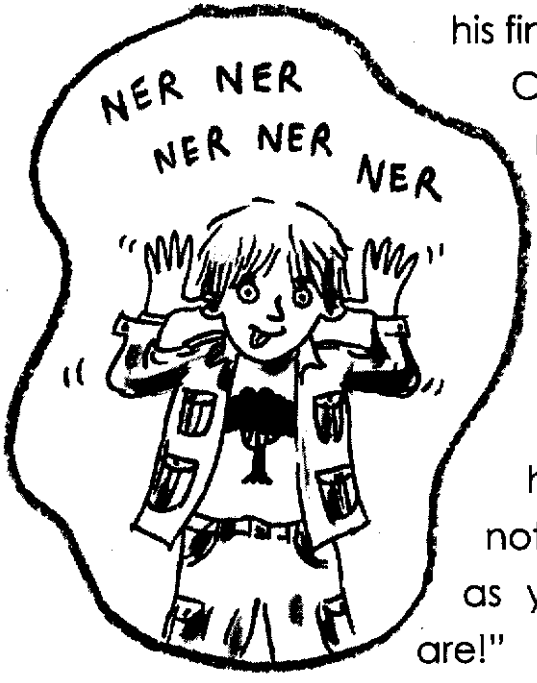
"We only argue a bit."

"*I* don't argue," said Charlie.

"How can you say that?" asked Henry. "You argue all the time!"

"Just because I don't agree with every single word you say!" said Charlie.

"Argue argue argue," said Henry, sticking his thumbs in his ears and waving



his fingers rudely at Charlie. "Moan moan moan moan!"

"You think you are so clever!" said Charlie, grabbing at him. "You are not half as clever as you think you are!"

"You are not a quarter as clever as you think you are," replied Henry, dodging behind his mother.

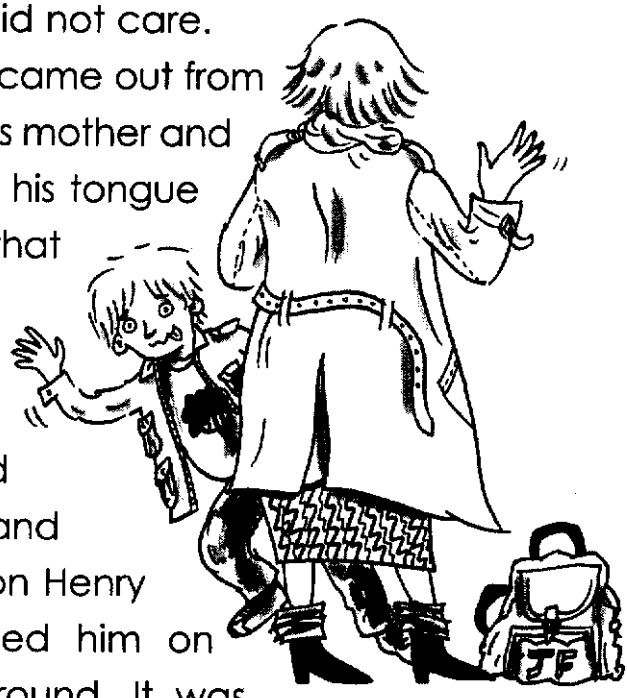
"You are not a millionth!" shouted Charlie.

"You are not a quarter of a millionth!" said Henry.

Charlie was not very good at maths and he could not think of any amount smaller than a quarter of a millionth to

say Henry was not as clever as, so he did not say anything. He stared up at the sky as if he did not care.

Henry came out from behind his mother and stuck out his tongue to show that he had won.



"Ha!" shouted Charlie, and jumped on Henry and tipped him on to the ground. It was always very easy for anyone to tip Henry over. He did not seem to be properly balanced.

Charlie sat down on top of Henry and Henry flung his arms about and bashed Charlie on the nose. It started to bleed at once. Charlie's nose always bled at the

smallest bump. It did not seem to be very well made.



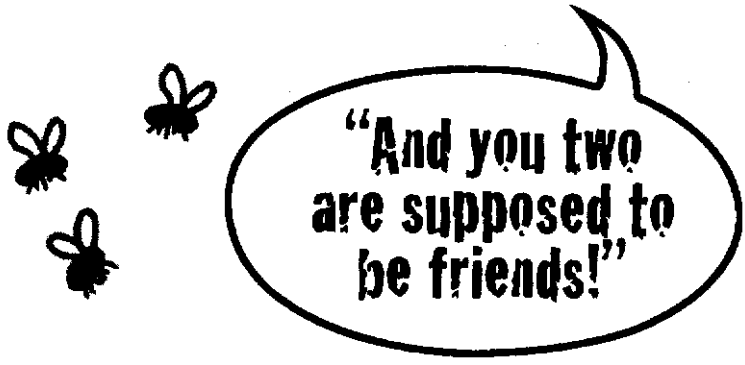
All this arguing and wrestling and nose bashing had taken less than two minutes. And Charlie and Henry were still best friends at the end of it, but their mothers did not understand that. Henry's mother jerked Henry to his feet and said, "Now say you are sorry! Look what you've done to poor Charlie!"

Charlie's mother pushed a handful of tissues on to Charlie's nose and snapped,



"It is you who should say sorry! Bumping down on poor Henry like that!"

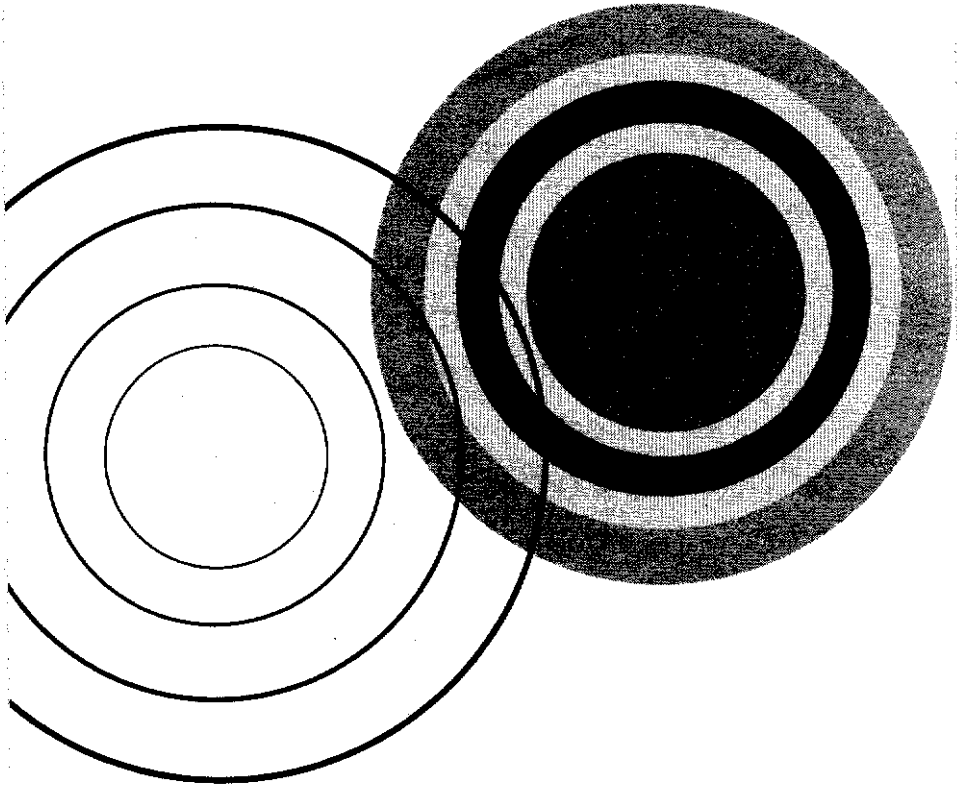
Then both mothers exclaimed together,

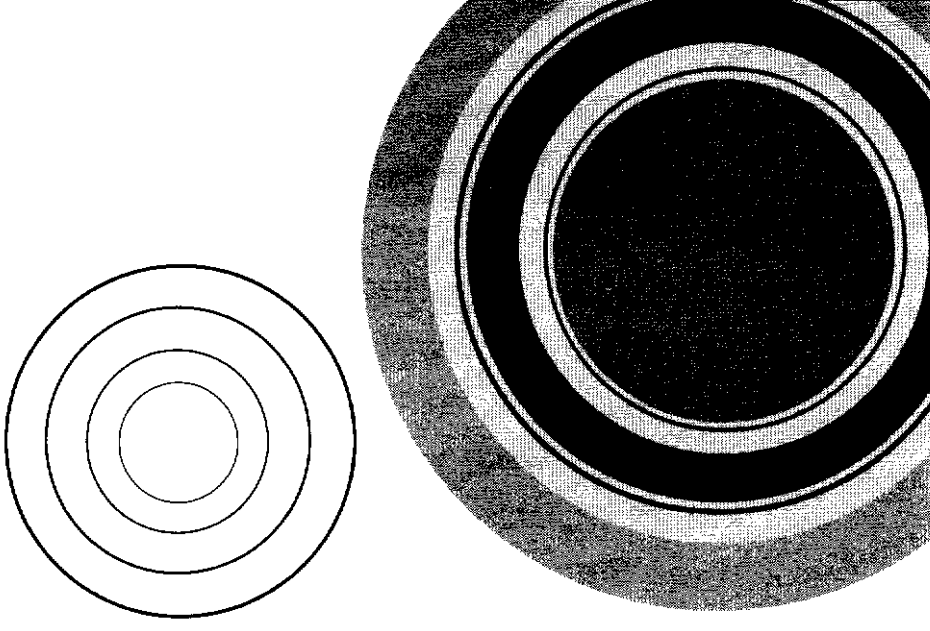


Charlie and Henry stopped asking if they could have a sleepover for the rest of that afternoon. But they agreed to start again the next morning (which was Tuesday). Patiently, maybe a hundred times, they asked the same question: "Why can't we have a sleepover?" Also Charlie said how his mother liked Max more than she liked him, and that it was not fair. And Henry said how tired he was of living with just grown-ups, and that it was not fair.

It was very hard work for Charlie and

Henry, but in the end it worked. On Wednesday afternoon their mothers gave in and said, "Oh all right! Anything for peace and quiet! But this will be your Last Chance Ever!"





Two

Two days before the Big Sleep

Charlie and Henry planned the best sleepover ever. They made an agreement:

No Itching Powder, No Dead Flies and No Super Soakers to be squirted at the ceiling in order to make surprise indoor rain.

"We'll look for ghosts," said Charlie.

"That's a good idea," said Henry. "And we'll have a midnight feast."

"Brilliant!" said Charlie.

It felt very strange saying "Good idea!" and "Brilliant!" to each other, but it was all part of Charlie and Henry's plan. They knew their sleepover would be cancelled if they began quarrelling, so for the next two days they were very polite. They did not fight at all, at least not where anyone could see them.

"It won't last," said Charlie's mother. She was in a very gloomy mood because the sleepover was happening at her house, but Henry's mother (who was planning a trip to the cinema with her phone switched off) was much more cheerful. She said, "Perhaps Charlie and Henry are beginning to grow up. At last."

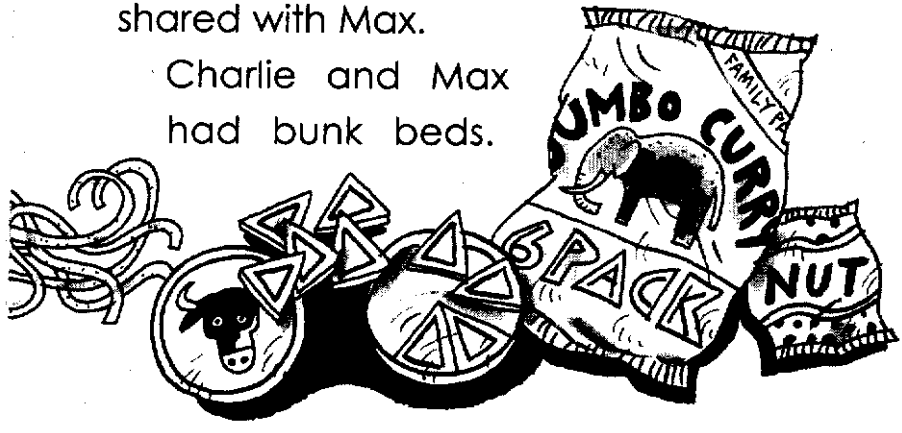
Then they both said, "Wouldn't it be lovely!"



It sometimes seemed to Charlie and Henry's mothers that Charlie and Henry were taking an awfully long time to grow up.

Charlie and Henry spent all their pocket money collecting food for the midnight feast. They bought salted peanuts, strawberry bootlaces, cheese triangles, Coca-Cola, chocolate M&Ms and curry-flavoured crisps. They hid all these things in the bottom of Henry's sleeping bag. Henry had carried his sleeping bag round to Charlie's house as soon as their mothers gave in and said the sleepover was allowed. Since then it had been kept in Charlie's bedroom in the bottom of the wardrobe that he shared with Max.

Charlie and Max had bunk beds.



Max had the top bunk and Charlie had the bottom. Max would never let Charlie have a turn in the top bunk because sometimes Charlie had accidents at night.

"And what if it dripped through?" Max said. "And I was underneath! Horrible!"



Max did not like the idea of Charlie's sleepover. He said,

