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Opening extract from

Dirty Bertie Bk.18: Scream!

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For Helen ~ D R

For Lorin, with best wishes ~ A M



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CHAPTER 2

At six o'clock Bertie slouched in the hall as his parents got ready to go out.

"Right," said Mum. "I've left some jelly eyeballs for any trick-or-treaters. I'm leaving you in charge, Bertie."

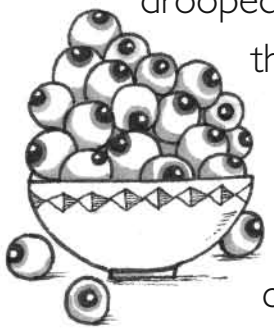
"And that doesn't mean you can eat them," warned Dad.

"Not even one?" said Bertie.

"No! They're for people who come to the door," said Mum. "Gran will be keeping an eye on you, won't you, Gran?"

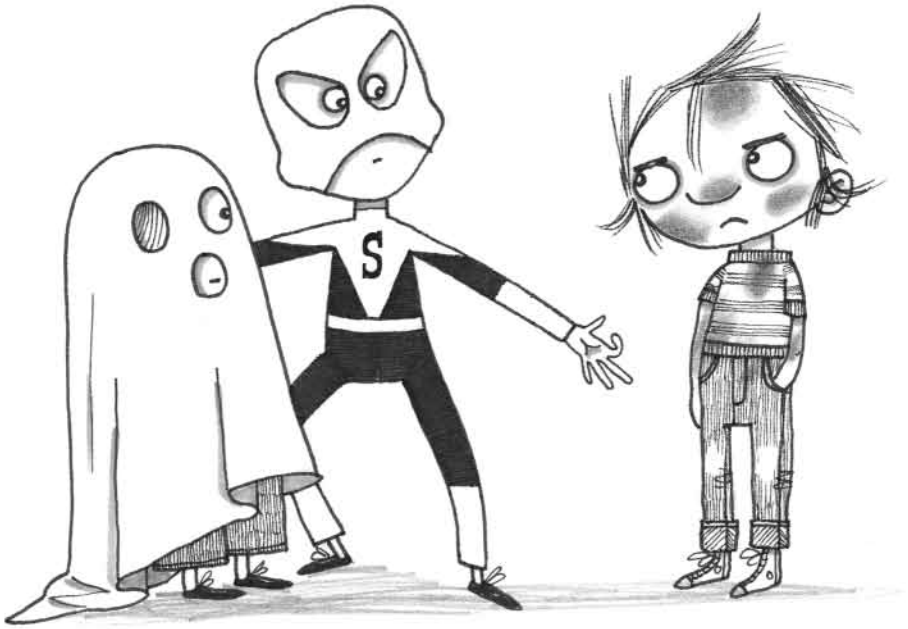
"Mmm?" said Gran, who was glued to *Animal Olympics* on the TV. "Yes, off you go. We'll be fine, won't we, Bertie?"

The front door slammed. Bertie drooped into the kitchen and stared at the jelly eyeballs in the bowl. It was torture leaving sweets out that he wasn't allowed to eat. He bet he was the only one in his class whose parents starved them of sweets on Halloween. It would serve them right if he died of hunger!



DING DONG!

Bertie hurried to the door. It was his friends. Eugene was dressed as a ghost, while Darren had come as Splat-man.



"TRICK OR TREAT?" they yelled.

Bertie's shoulders drooped. "I can't come out."

"WHAT? Why not?" cried Darren.

Bertie shrugged. "Mum won't let me."

"But you've got to, we're going trick-or-treating!" said Eugene, from under his sheet.

"I know!" sighed Bertie. "It's not my fault. Mum says we can stay here. Gran's babysitting."

Darren and Eugene looked at each other. It was hardly what they had in mind.

"Got any sweets?" asked Darren.

"Jelly eyeballs," nodded Bertie. "But I'm not allowed to touch them. They're for people who come to the door."

Darren shrugged. "We've come to the door."

"That's true," agreed Bertie. "And if you think about it, I've come to the door to let you in."

"Exactly," said Darren.



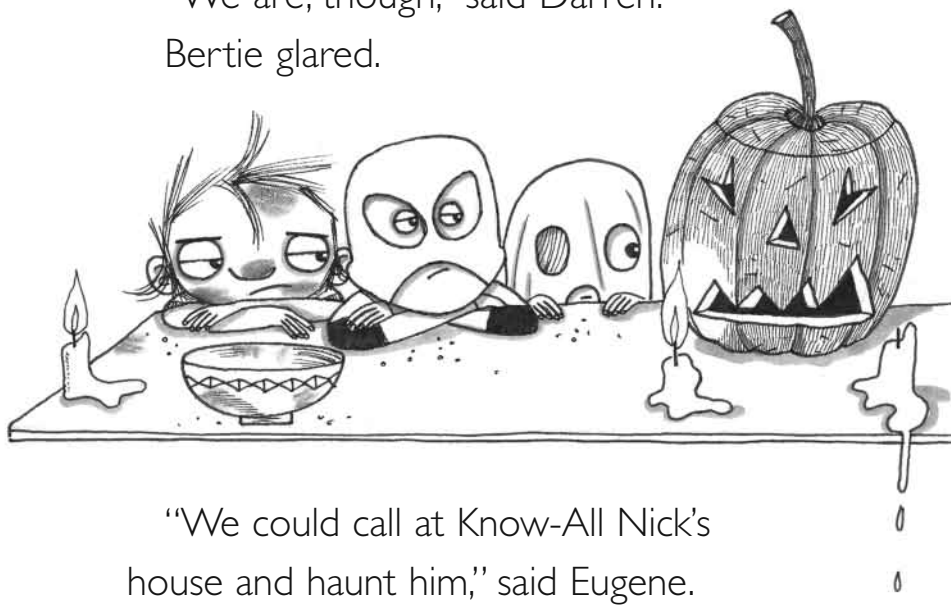
Ten minutes later the sweets had all gone. They sat round the kitchen table, staring at the pumpkin lantern Bertie had made. Darren let out a long sigh.

"This is boring! We should go trick-or-treating."

Bertie rolled his eyes. "How many times? I'm not allowed."

"We are, though," said Darren.

Bertie glared.



"We could call at Know-All Nick's house and haunt him," said Eugene.

Bertie suddenly sat up. He'd just had a brilliant idea. This way they could get their hands on tons of sweets without even leaving the house.

"I've got it!" he cried. "A haunted house!"

"Eh?" said Eugene. "Where?"

"Here!" said Bertie. "We'll make one like the one at the fair."

"You mean with spooky music and evil laughter," said Darren. "MUH HA HA HA!"

"Yes! And cobwebs and cupboards with skeletons in!" said Bertie.

Eugene looked doubtful. "But who's going to see it?" he asked.

"Anyone who comes trick-or-treating!" cried Bertie. "And here's the best bit – they have to pay us in sweets to come in."

He could see it now – a haunted house with creaking stairs and rattling doors. Witches in the attic, ghosts in the bedrooms and zombies in the toilet.

It would be scarier than Miss Boot on a Monday morning. Once word got round, people would be queuing down the road to get in. They'd be rolling in sweets.

"Hang on, though," said Darren. "What about the ghosts?"

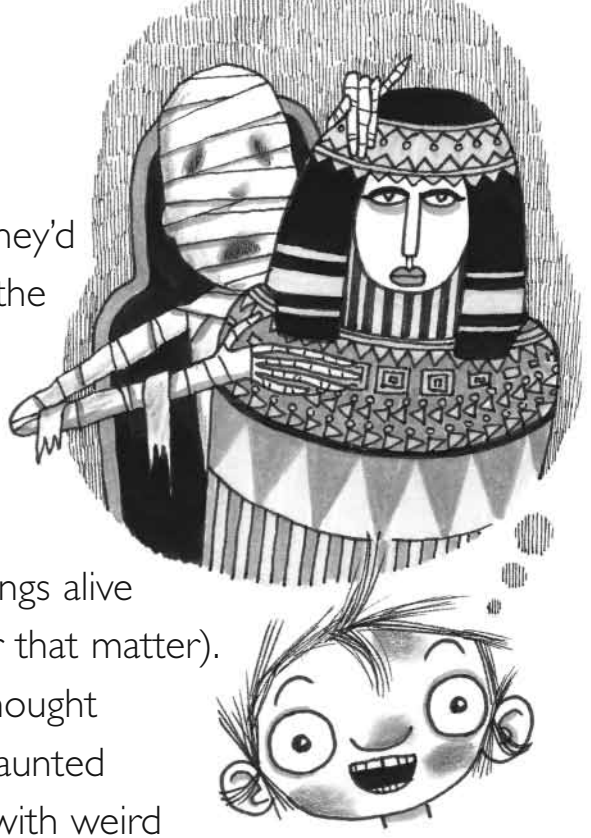
"I can be a ghost," cried Eugene, ducking under his sheet. "WOOOO! WOOOOOO!"

Bertie sighed. Eugene's ghost impression wouldn't frighten a two-year-old. No, they would have to think of something really spooky, something to totally scare the pants off people.

"What if one of us was dressed as a vampire?" suggested Darren.

"Or a skeleton," said Eugene.

"I know!" said Bertie. "What about … a MUMMY?"



Brilliant! They'd been doing the Egyptians at school and mummies were the creepiest things alive (or dead, for that matter). Imagine it, thought Bertie – a haunted tomb filled with weird paintings and statues … then a coffin lid slides back and something terrible rises out of the dark. An ancient mummy, a million years old…

"It could work," said Darren. "But who's going to be the mummy?"

"Not me," said Eugene quickly. "I'm not lying in a coffin. My mum wouldn't like it."

"Well, I can't," said Bertie. "I've got to answer the door. It has to be Darren."

"Me?" said Darren. "I'd rather be Splat-man."



Upstairs in Bertie's bedroom, they stood back to admire their work. Darren was wrapped from head to toe in toilet paper. Only his mouth was visible, and a tuft of hair sticking up like a carrot top. Bertie thought he looked dead creepy – he certainly wouldn't want to meet him in a deep dark tomb.

"Fantastic!" he said. "Say something."

"URRRGHHHHHH!" moaned Darren, who didn't know a lot of Egyptian.

"Not bad. Try walking around," said Eugene.

Darren raised his arms and shuffled forward mummy-style, trailing bits of tissue.



"URRGH … URGHHHH … OWWW!" he cried, walking into the bed. It was hard to see where you were going, wrapped in toilet paper.

"It's okay," said Bertie, steering him in the right direction. "You don't need to see. Just lie still and act dead."