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Opening extract from

Monstrous Maud: Spooky Sports Day

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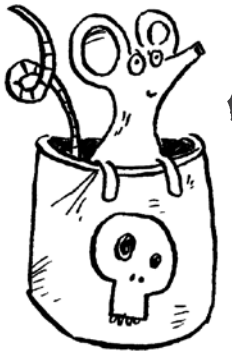
Spooky Sports Day



A. B. Saddlewick

BUSTER





Chapter One

Maud's pet rat Quentin peeked up out of the top pocket of her polo shirt. When he saw Penelope, he squeaked with fear and dived back down again.

Maud heard sniggering behind her, and turned to see her least favourite classmate. Poisonous Penelope was a witch with a ragged black dress, a pointy hat and long purple hair, and she never missed an opportunity to bully Paprika and Maud.

"Come on, Paprika! It's sports day soon," shouted Maud. "You can do it. I know you can!"

Paprika took a run up and flung the metal

helmet towards the net. It bounced once, then twice …

… and went a full broomstick wide of the goalposts, landing in the long grass beyond the playing field.

"Bad show!" shouted the detached head of their PE teacher, Mr Galahad, from inside the helmet. At the side of the playing field, his armour-clad body was standing with its arms folded.

Maud sighed and went over to find Mr Galahad's head in the grass.

"Over here, child," he called, his bushy moustache twitching.

"Found you, Sir," said Maud. She picked the head up and tossed it back to Paprika, but it slipped through his fingers and flew all the way to the other side of the playing field.

"Ouch!" roared the teacher's head, as it rolled away. "Pay attention, boy! This helmet isn't padded, you know!"

"Sorry," mumbled Paprika, looking round at his classmates and wincing.

Class 3B had been playing Monsterball against Class 2C for half an hour, and Paprika hadn't managed to score a single goal. No matter how close he stood to the net, actually throwing the head into it seemed to be beyond him.

Maud felt sorry for Paprika. Because he was a vampire, everyone expected him to be strong and fast, and they couldn't understand why he was terrible at PE. But Maud had recently discovered that Paprika was actually half-vampire and half-human. And it certainly wasn't the vampire side he took after when it came to playing sports.

Paprika fixed his gaze on the net, frowning hard, and threw the head again. This time it only got halfway there before it hit something and fell to the ground. Paprika looked away from his teammates, blushing with shame.

"Ow," shouted a voice from where the helmet

had fallen. It was Isabel, Maud's invisible classmate. "Stop throwing things at me! It's bad enough that no one ever passes the helmet to me without having it lobbed at my head."

"He didn't mean it," said Maud. Paprika was her best friend at Rotwood School, and she didn't like it when the other pupils were rude to him.

"Stop making excuses for him," said Penelope. "He's about as much use as a chocolate cauldron. It's only four days until sports day and, thanks to him, our class is going to come last."

"He might not be great at Monsterball," said Maud, remembering something that had happened the week before, "but at least he isn't a scaredy-cat who jumps out of his skin at the sight of a tiny doll."

"Any real monster would have been scared of that hideous thing," said Penelope, narrowing her eyes. "If you ask me, it's pretty funny that you weren't."



Maud shifted around uncomfortably. The truth was that she was the only pupil at Rotwood who wasn't a real monster. Penelope was a witch, Paprika was a half-vampire and Invisible Isabel was … well, invisible. But Maud was just an ordinary human girl. She'd been transferred to Rotwood the week before and she'd pretended to be a 'Tutu' monster so she could stay. Rotwood was so much better than her old school, Primrose Towers.

"Let's get on with the game," shouted Mr Galahad. His head had landed near an ants' nest and his eyes were darting around nervously as a trail of the insects marched towards his nostrils.

While Maud's werewolf friend Wilf returned the head to the middle of the playing field, Maud reached into the top pocket of her polo

shirt and stroked Quentin. Her pet rat was trembling from all the running about she had been doing. Poor Quentin was always nervous about something.

"It's all right," she said. "There's nothing to worry about."

"Play on!" boomed the voice from Mr Galahad's helmet.

Maud rushed forward and picked up the helmet. She made a solid run up the field, dodging a mummy and a demon on the way, and she was about to try for goal when Bartholomew Bones the skeleton boy lunged at her. Maud threw Mr Galahad's head to the only teammate who was nearby.

Unfortunately, that teammate was Paprika.

Paprika dashed towards the helmet with his hands out. Maud held her breath. This time, it looked as though he might actually catch it. But just as the tips of his fingers were about to make contact with the spinning head, he tripped over

his feet and went crashing down to the ground.

"Enjoy your trip," shouted Penelope.

Mr Galahad's head went rolling back into a muddy puddle.

"Someone tied my laces together!" shouted Paprika.

"Stop making excuses and get me out of this filthy soup," gurgled Mr Galahad.

Maud could see Penelope sniggering to herself at the side of the playing field. She knew what must have happened – Penelope had cast a spell to knot Paprika's laces together. What a bully! It was bad enough when Penelope teased her friend, but casting a spell on him was the last straw. Time to give Penelope a taste of her own medicine.

There wasn't much a monster feared. Spiders, graveyards and rats were useless, but Maud had recently found out that monsters were terrified of pink, cute stuff like dolls or teddy bears. She knew one thing that was sure to scare Penelope.

As the witch went running to pick up their teacher's head, Maud shouted out, "Behind you! Bunny rabbit!"

Penelope's eyes went wide, and she turned to look, crashing into Oscar, the headless boy, so that they both fell flat on the ground. When she glanced up at Maud, her face was almost as purple as her hair. Without even getting up, she stretched out her arm and muttered under her breath again.

Maud ducked, but she was too late. It felt like a huge hand had smacked into her stomach and she hit the ground so hard it knocked the wind out of her.

Maud scrambled to her feet and charged at Penelope. All the pupils from 3B and 2C were crowding round, chanting, "Duel! Duel! Duel!"

Just as Maud was getting close to the witch, a large bulk moved in between them. She skidded to a halt. It was the body of Mr Galahad. One hand was on his hip, while the other held out his soggy head, his moustache dripping with puddle water.

"That's quite enough, young ladies. This silly nonsense is the last thing we need," shouted Mr Galahad. "Both of you go and see the Head right now!"

Penelope's face went very pale indeed.

