

Chapter 1

My dad always says, “Charlie Bumpers, your closet looks like a tornado came through and decided to live there.”

Ha ha ha. My dad is a riot. But he’s right. My closet is usually a mess. And the top drawer of my dresser. And my backpack.

I mean to keep things neat. But then something else happens.

I had a couple of hours to do the impossible. My mom told me that I had put it off long enough. I had to clean out my closet before she got back... or else.

I didn’t ask what she meant when she said “or else.” And I didn’t want to find out.

I’d already pulled out a bunch of clothes (like

the sweatshirt with the Martian on it I'd thought was lost), a can of tennis balls, a Nerf football, seven socks (none of them matched), the Christmas card from Uncle Ron from when I was five (with the money taken out), two pairs of smelly old sneakers, and the dorky dress shoes I'd told Mom I couldn't find so I wouldn't have to wear them.

Then I found my old soccer ball. The little one I got when I was five. Playing soccer's my favorite thing to do. It's a lot more fun than cleaning closets.

I decided to give the old soccer ball to my little sister. She'd like it. When she likes something she squeals, and it's pretty funny.



But I still wasn't done with my closet. I held my breath and went back in. I was down to the second layer.

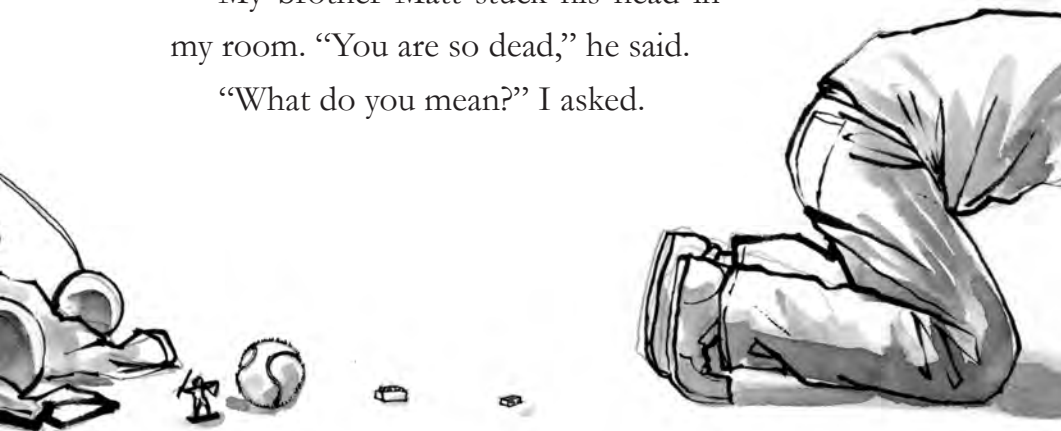
I dragged out my second-grade project on the solar system (now missing the planets Mercury and Neptune), the ancient tennis racket my dad said I could have, a Wiffle ball bat with a crack in the handle, my Dracula costume from last Halloween, a tyrannosaurus (stuffed) and a triceratops (plastic), a bunch of busted handheld games, three trophies from teams I'd been on, a broken kite, and...

Never mind. You get the picture.

I took the Wiffle ball bat and scraped everything else out of the floor of the closet. I had to get this job done before Mom got home.

My brother Matt stuck his head in my room. "You are so dead," he said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.



“Your closet looks better, but now your room is a huge mess. Mom’ll freak out!”

I looked around. Everything that had been in my closet was now scattered all over the floor. “Where am I going to put all this stuff?” I moaned.

“That’s *your* problem,” Matt said. “And it’s a big one.” Then he pulled his head out of the doorway and disappeared down the hall.

“Thanks a lot!” I yelled. “Couldn’t you help me?”

“You’re way beyond help,” he called back. “Good luck, Disaster Boy.”

Matt is two years older than me. “Two years older, two years smarter,” he says.

Matthew will always be older than I am, but I have hopes that someday I’ll be bigger than he is and pay him back by giving him the giant noogie he truly deserves.

I had almost finished hanging up my pants and shirts when I heard Ginger’s special bark that meant a car had just pulled into our driveway.

Mom! Pretty soon she’d be coming up to inspect

my closet. I panicked and started shoving stuff under my bed.

“It’s me, Mabel!” my little sister yelled up the stairs, as if I wouldn’t recognize her earsplitting voice. “We’re home!” she squealed.

“Hey, Squid!” I yelled back. “You want my old soccer ball?”

“Charlie!” my mom called up the stairs. “Guess what? I found out who your teacher is going to be!” She sounded excited.

“What?” I stopped stuffing sweatshirts behind my beanbag chair. I didn’t care if things were a mess anymore. “You know who my teacher is?”

“You have Mrs. Burke!” she shouted. “Isn’t that great? Last year she was Teacher of the Year!”

My heart stopped beating for a minute, then started up again really fast, like it was trying to jump out of my chest.



It couldn't be true. There was no way I could have Mrs. Burke.

Matthew was right. I was so dead.