

CHARLIE BUMPERS

VS.
THE END
OF THE
YEAR



Bill Harley
Illustrated by
Adam Gustavson

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Fourth Grade Forever!

Before I knew it, the school year was almost over! It was May and there were only a couple more weeks left. Everyone in my fourth-grade class was talking about what they were going to do that summer and who their teachers might be next year.

I must be crazy. I was going to miss fourth grade.

Don't get me wrong. I, Charlie Bumpers, am ALWAYS happy to get out of school. But looking ahead, I realized I was happy where I was.

I would never admit it to my parents or my brother Matt—or even to my teacher, Mrs. Burke—but I was going to miss my class. At the beginning of the year,

I didn't like Mrs. Burke, but now I really did. And I liked our class.

Except for Samantha Grunsky, who has driven me crazy all year long.

I especially liked Hector. His family moved here last fall from Santiago, Chile, and he ended up in my class, sitting right beside me. Since he was new, and English wasn't his best language, he was kind of shy and didn't have many friends. But I found out pretty quickly that he was a really nice guy, and also very good at soccer. Right away we became friends. As the year went on, he got to know a lot of the kids in the school and everyone seemed to like him. Mostly he hung out with me and my other best friend, Tommy Kasten. We were even all on the same soccer team, and we would be next year, too.

But the reason I hated to see fourth grade end was I didn't know what would happen in fifth grade.

Things could change.

What if I got Mrs. Blumgarden, the teacher I

knocked over—by accident—in the hallway? And what if Hector wasn't in my class? Or Tommy?

Just Samantha Grunsky!

Disastrophe! (That's a disaster and a catastrophe together.)

And Matt told me that fifth grade is a lot harder than fourth grade. He said there's more homework and the teachers are tougher because they're getting you ready for middle school.

“They'll eat you alive in middle school!” Matt told me.

“Stop terrorizing your younger brother,” Dad said.

That's what Dad always says.

But maybe Matt was right. Maybe fifth grade *would* be hard.

I liked things the way they were. Except for maybe getting to have Tommy in my class, I didn't want anything to change.

As far as I was concerned, I could stay in fourth grade forever.

I was thinking all those things when I sat down for dinner with my family. I wanted to talk about it when it was my turn to share, which we do every night. But before I could say anything, my little sister opened her mouth.

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Just Say NO!

“I have news today,” the Squid announced. “It’s very important.”

My little sister Mabel—I call her the Squid—is a first grader. Even though the school year was almost over, she still thought everything was important and new.

It wasn’t new for me. So I’m in fourth grade, I’ve known all about first grade forever. Or at least since first grade, which makes three years.

My whole family was at our dining table—Mom, Dad, my older brother Matt, and the Squid. Dad had made a huge casserole with tons of cheese on top, which was very promising. I was starved.

“Can we eat a little first and then hear all about it?” Dad asked.

“You can eat while I talk,” the Squid said. “But you have to listen while you eat.”

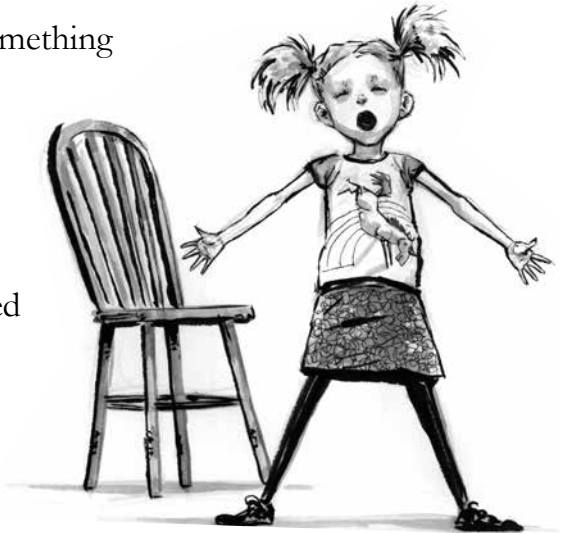
She took a big helping of the casserole and stuffed a bite in her mouth. She chewed as fast as she could, swallowed, and took a gulp of milk.

“Today”—she started talking before anyone else had taken a bite—“we had the second day of our unit on bullying. First we sang our song. It goes like this.”

“Oh no!” I moaned. “Not again!” I put my hands over my ears.

“Aaaah!” Matt groaned. He covered his face and muttered something we couldn’t hear.

The Squid pushed out her chair, planted her feet on the floor, and launched into the song.



“When someone’s being bullied,” she sang out in a voice that sounded like a dying seagull, “you STAND UP! And just say NO!” She jumped up from her chair and shook her head from side to side. Then she took a deep breath, sat back down, and kept going.

“When someone’s being bullied, you STAND UP! and just say NO!”

We had all heard the song before. Last night at dinner, the Squid explained about the first-grade unit on bullying, and then she sang the dumb song for us—*three times*.

It was horrible last night and it was worse tonight. But the Squid didn’t care. She just kept singing.

Dad had a cockeyed grin on his face, like he was enjoying the nightmare of her wailing.

“When someone’s being bullied, you STAND UP! And just say NO!” the Squid screeched, jumping to her feet every time she sang STAND UP! and stomping the floor when she sang NO!

“Just say NO!” she went on. “Until you make the bully go!”

“Mabel,” Mom said gently. “The song is nice, but what else did you do?”

“We learned a new verse.” My sister paused to catch her breath, but I could tell she was getting ready to sing again.

“Can you just *tell* us about it?” Mom asked.

The Squid sat down. “Okay, but it’s more fun to sing.”

“Fun for *you*,” Matt said. “Torture for us.”

“Matt!” Dad gave my older brother a warning look. “Mabel, just tell us about it.”

“Today we learned about how you can tell if someone’s being bullied.”

“Give us a break, Mabel,” Matt muttered. “We know this already.”

“First, if someone is being bullied,” the Squid lectured in her six-year-old-know-it-all way, “they might start acting different. Like they don’t want to talk about something. Or you might know someone’s

being bullied if they don't have their lunch money because maybe someone's taking it from them, or you might tell someone's being bullied if they pretend to be sick so they can stay home, or..."

The Squid kept blabbing, but I was still thinking about what she'd said about someone suddenly acting different.

I nearly choked on my casserole.

My stomach twisted up in an enormous knot.

It felt like I was in a dark, winding tunnel, far away from everybody at the table. I knew the Squid was still talking but I couldn't hear her anymore.

I was thinking about Hector.