

Halloween

AT LUNCH THE next day, Summer asked me what I was going to be for Halloween. Of course, I'd been thinking about it since last Halloween, so I knew right away.

"Boba Fett."

"You know you can wear a costume to school on Halloween, right?"

"No way, really?"

"So long as it's politically correct."

"What, like no guns and stuff?"

"Exactly."

"What about blasters?"

"I think a blaster's like a gun, Auggie."

"Oh man ...," I said, shaking my head. Boba Fett has a blaster.

"At least, we don't have to come like a character in a book anymore. In the lower school that's what you had to do. Last year I was the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*."

"But that's a movie, not a book."

"Hello?" Summer answered. "It was a book first! One of my favorite books in the world, actually. My dad used to read it to me every night in the first grade."

When Summer talks, especially when she's excited about something, her eyes squint like she's looking right at the sun.

I hardly ever see Summer during the day, since the only class we have together is English. But ever since that first lunch at school, we've sat at the summer table together every day, just the two of us.

"So, what are you going to be?" I asked her.

"I don't know yet. I know what I'd really want to go as, but I think it might be too dorky. You know, Savanna's group isn't even wearing costumes this year. They think we're too old for Halloween."

"What? That's just dumb."

"I know, right?"

"I thought you didn't care what those girls think."

She shrugged and took a long drink of her milk.

"So, what dorky thing do you want to dress up as?" I asked her, smiling.

"Promise not to laugh?" She raised her eyebrows and her shoulders, embarrassed. "A unicorn."

I smiled and looked down at my sandwich.

"Hey, you promised not to laugh!" she laughed.

“Okay, okay,” I said. “But you’re right: that is too dorky.”

“I know!” she said. “But I have it all planned out: I’d make the head out of papier-mâché, and paint the horn gold and make the mane gold, too. ... It would be so awesome.”

“Okay.” I shrugged. “Then you should do it. Who cares what other people think, right?”

“Maybe what I’ll do is just wear it for the Halloween Parade,” she said, snapping her fingers. “And I’ll just be, like, a Goth girl for school. Yeah, that’s it, that’s what I’ll do.”

“Sounds like a plan.” I nodded.

“Thanks, Auggie,” she giggled. “You know, that’s what I like best about you. I feel like I can tell you anything.”

“Yeah?” I answered, nodding. I gave her a thumbs-up sign. “Cool beans.”

School Pictures

I DON’T THINK anyone will be shocked to learn I don’t want to have my school picture taken on October 22. No way. No thank you. I stopped letting anyone take pictures of me a while ago. I guess you could call it a phobia. No, actually, it’s not a phobia. It’s an “aversion,” which is a word I just learned in Mr. Browne’s class. I have an aversion to having my picture taken. There, I used it in a sentence.

I thought Mom would try to get me to drop my aversion to having my picture taken for school, but she didn’t. Unfortunately, while I managed to avoid having the portrait taken, I couldn’t get out of being part of the class picture. Ugh. The photographer looked like he’d just sucked on a lemon when he saw me. I’m sure he thought I ruined the picture. I was one of the ones in the front, sitting down. I didn’t smile, not that anyone could tell if I had.

The Cheese Touch

I NOTICED NOT too long ago that even though people were getting used to me, no one would actually touch me. I didn't realize this at first because it's not like kids go around touching each other that much in middle school anyway. But last Thursday in dance class, which is, like, my least favorite class, Mrs. Atanabi, the teacher, tried to make Ximena Chin be my dance partner. Now, I've never actually seen someone have a "panic attack" before, but I have heard about it, and I'm pretty sure Ximena had a panic attack at that second. She got really nervous and turned pale and literally broke into a sweat within a minute, and then she came up with some lame excuse about really having to go to the bathroom. Anyway, Mrs. Atanabi let her off the hook, because she ended up not making anyone dance together.

Then yesterday in my science elective, we were doing this cool mystery-powder investigation where we had to classify a substance as an acid or a base. Everyone had to heat their mystery powders on a heating plate and make observations, so we were all huddled around the powders with our notebooks. Now,

there are eight kids in the elective, and seven of them were squished together on one side of the plate while one of them—me—had loads of room on the other side. So of course I noticed this, but I was hoping Ms. Rubin wouldn't notice this, because I didn't want her to say something. But of course she did notice this, and of course she said something.

"Guys, there's plenty of room on that side. Tristan, Nino, go over there," she said, so Tristan and Nino scooted over to my side. Tristan and Nino have always been okay-nice to me. I want to go on record as saying that. Not super-nice, like they go out of their way to hang out with me, but okay-nice, like they say hello to me and talk to me like normal. And they didn't even make a face when Ms. Rubin told them to come on my side, which a lot of kids do when they think I'm not looking. Anyway, everything was going fine until Tristan's mystery powder started melting. He moved his foil off the plate just as my powder began to melt, too, which is why I went to move mine off the plate, and then my hand accidentally bumped his hand for a fraction of a second. Tristan jerked his hand away so fast he dropped his foil on the floor while also knocking everyone else's foil off the heating plate.

"Tristan!" yelled Ms. Rubin, but Tristan didn't even care about the spilled powder on the floor or that he ruined the experiment. What he was most concerned about was getting to

the lab sink to wash his hands as fast as possible. That's when I knew for sure that there was this thing about touching me at Beecher Prep.

I think it's like the Cheese Touch in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. The kids in that story were afraid they'd catch the cooties if they touched the old moldy cheese on the basketball court. At Beecher Prep, I'm the old moldy cheese.

Costumes

FOR ME, HALLOWEEN is the best holiday in the world. It even beats Christmas. I get to dress up in a costume. I get to wear a mask. I get to go around like every other kid with a mask and nobody thinks I look weird. Nobody takes a second look. Nobody notices me. Nobody knows me.

I wish every day could be Halloween. We could all wear masks all the time. Then we could walk around and get to know each other before we got to see what we looked like under the masks.

When I was little, I used to wear an astronaut helmet everywhere I went. To the playground. To the supermarket. To pick Via up from school. Even in the middle of summer, though it was so hot my face would sweat. I think I wore it for a couple of years, but I had to stop wearing it when I had my eye surgery. I was about seven, I think. And then we couldn't find the helmet after that. Mom looked everywhere for it. She figured that it had probably ended up in Grans's attic, and she kept meaning to look for it, but by then I had gotten used to not wearing it.

I have pictures of me in all my Halloween costumes. My first Halloween I was a pumpkin. My second I was Tigger. My third I was Peter Pan (my dad dressed up as Captain Hook). My fourth I was Captain Hook (my dad dressed up as Peter Pan). My fifth I was an astronaut. My sixth I was Obi-Wan Kenobi. My seventh I was a clone trooper. My eighth I was Darth Vader. My ninth I was the Bleeding Scream, the one that has fake blood oozing out over the skull mask.

This year I'm going to be Boba Fett: not Boba Fett the kid in *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, but Boba Fett the man from *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*. Mom searched everywhere for the costume but couldn't find one in my size, so she bought me a Jango Fett costume—since Jango was Boba's dad and wore the same armor—and then painted the armor green. She did some other stuff to it to make it look worn, too. Anyway, it looks totally real. Mom's good at costumes.

In homeroom we all talked about what we were going to be for Halloween. Charlotte was going as Hermione from Harry Potter. Jack was going as a wolfman. I heard that Julian was going as Jango Fett, which was a weird coincidence. I don't think he liked hearing that I was going as Boba Fett.

On the morning of Halloween, Via had this big crying meltdown about something. Via's always been so calm and cool, but this year she's had a couple of these kinds of fits. Dad was late

for work and was like, "Via, let's go! Let's go!" Usually Dad is super patient about things, but not when it comes to his being late for work, and his yelling just stressed out Via even more, and she started crying louder, so Mom told Dad to take me to school and that she'd deal with Via. Then Mom kissed me goodbye quickly, before I even put on my costume, and disappeared into Via's room.

"Auggie, let's go now!" said Dad. "I have a meeting I can't be late for!"

"I haven't put my costume on yet!"

"So put it on, already. Five minutes. I'll meet you outside."

I rushed to my room and started to put on the Boba Fett costume, but all of a sudden I didn't feel like wearing it. I'm not sure why—maybe because it had all these belts that needed to be tightened and I needed someone's help to put it on. Or maybe it was because it still smelled a little like paint. All I knew was that it was a lot of work to put the costume on, and Dad was waiting and would get super impatient if I made him late. So, at the last minute, I threw on the Bleeding Scream costume from last year. It was such an easy costume: just a long black robe and a big white mask. I yelled goodbye from the door on my way out, but Mom didn't even hear me.

"I thought you were going as Jango Fett," said Dad when I got outside.

“Boba Fett!”

“Whatever,” said Dad. “This is a better costume anyway.”

“Yeah, it’s cool,” I answered.

The Bleeding Screen

WALKING THROUGH THE halls that morning on my way to the lockers was, I have to say, absolutely awesome. Everything was different now. I was different. Where I usually walked with my head down, trying to avoid being seen, today I walked with my head up, looking around. I wanted to be seen. One kid wearing the same exact costume as mine, long white skull face oozing fake red blood, high-fived me as we passed each other on the stairs. I have no idea who he was, and he had no idea who I was, and I wondered for a second if he would have ever done that if he’d known it was me under the mask.

I was starting to think this was going to go down as one of the most awesome days in the history of my life, but then I got to homeroom. The first costume I saw as I walked inside the door was Darth Sidious. It had one of the rubber masks that are so realistic, with a big black hood over the head and a long black robe. I knew right away it was Julian, of course. He must have changed his costume at the last minute because he thought I was coming as Jango Fett. He was talking to two mummies who

must have been Miles and Henry, and they were all kind of looking at the door like they were waiting for someone to come through it. I knew it wasn't a Bleeding Scream they were looking for. It was a Boba Fett.

I was going to go and sit at my usual desk, but for some reason, I don't know why, I found myself walking over to a desk near them, and I could hear them talking.

One of the mummies was saying: "It really does look like him."

"Like this part especially ...," answered Julian's voice. He put his fingers on the cheeks and eyes of his Darth Sidious mask.

"Actually," said the mummy, "what he really looks like is one of those shrunken heads. Have you ever seen those? He looks exactly like that."

"I think he looks like an orc."

"Oh yeah!"

"If I looked like that," said the Julian voice, kind of laughing, "I swear to God, I'd put a hood over my face every day."

"I've thought about this a lot," said the second mummy, sounding serious, "and I really think ... if I looked like him, seriously, I think that I'd kill myself."

"You would not," answered Darth Sidious.

"Yeah, for real," insisted the same mummy. "I can't imagine looking in the mirror every day and seeing myself like that. It

would be too awful. And getting stared at all the time."

"Then why do you hang out with him so much?" asked Darth Sidious.

"I don't know," answered the mummy. "Tushman asked me to hang out with him at the beginning of the year, and he must have told all the teachers to put us next to each other in all our classes, or something." The mummy shrugged. I knew the shrug, of course. I knew the voice. I knew I wanted to run out of the class right then and there. But I stood where I was and listened to Jack Will finish what he was saying. "I mean, the thing is: he always follows me around. What am I supposed to do?"

"Just ditch him," said Julian.

I don't know what Jack answered because I walked out of the class without anyone knowing I had been there. My face felt like it was on fire while I walked back down the stairs. I was sweating under my costume. And I started crying. I couldn't keep it from happening. The tears were so thick in my eyes I could barely see, but I couldn't wipe them through the mask as I walked. I was looking for a little tiny spot to disappear into. I wanted a hole I could fall inside of: a little black hole that would eat me up.



Names

RAT BOY. FREAK. MONSTER. Freddy Krueger. E.T. Gross-out. Lizard face. Mutant. I know the names they call me. I've been in enough playgrounds to know kids can be mean. I know, I know, I know.

I ended up in the second-floor bathroom. No one was there because first period had started and everyone was in class. I locked the door to my stall and took off my mask and just cried for I don't know how long. Then I went to the nurse's office and told her I had a stomach ache, which was true, because I felt like I'd been kicked in the gut. Nurse Molly called Mom and had me lie down on the sofa next to her desk. Fifteen minutes later, Mom was at the door.

"Sweetness," she said, coming over to hug me.

"Hi," I mumbled. I didn't want her to ask anything until afterward.

"You have a stomach ache?" she asked, automatically putting her hand on my forehead to check for my temperature.

"He said he feels like throwing up," said Nurse Molly, looking at me with very nice eyes.

"And I have a headache," I whispered.

"I wonder if it's something you ate," said Mom, looking worried.

"There's a stomach bug going around," said Nurse Molly.

"Oh geez," said Mom, her eyebrows going up as she shook her head. She helped me to my feet. "Should I call a taxi or are you okay walking home?"

"I can walk."

"What a brave kid!" said Nurse Molly, patting me on the back as she walked us toward the door. "If he starts throwing up or runs a temperature, you should call the doctor."

"Absolutely," said Mom, shaking Nurse Molly's hand. "Thank you so much for taking care of him."

"My pleasure," answered Nurse Molly, putting her hand under my chin and tilting my face up. "You take care of yourself, okay?"

I nodded and mumbled "Thank you." Mom and I hug-walked the whole way home. I didn't tell her anything about what had happened, and later when she asked me if I felt well enough to go trick-or-treating after school, I said no. This worried her, since she knew how much I usually loved trick-or-treating.

I heard her say to Dad on the phone: "... He doesn't even have the energy to go trick-or-treating. ... No, no fever at all ... Well, I will if he doesn't feel better by tomorrow. ... I know, poor thing ... Imagine his missing Halloween."

I got out of going to school the next day, too, which was Friday. So I had the whole weekend to think about everything. I was pretty sure I would never go back to school again.

Part Two



Far above the world

Planet Earth is blue

And there's nothing I can do

—David Bowie, "Space Oddity"

