

The House on Humbleberry Lane

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His dad called him “my buddy Little Hal.” But the kids in the neighborhood settled on Horrible Harry.

And Little Hal/Horrible Harry liked it that way.

Five-eight and chunky – big for a sixth grader – he finished strapping on his green feet, then admired himself in the mirror. Did a good job with the green face paint, he thought. And the green chest muscles and the tattered clothes, and his hair bunched and shoved around just so, he really did look like The Hulk, his hero.

He stepped out into the hallway where his father surprised him, snapped a photo with his cellphone. “Grammy’s not gonna believe this,” the dad said as he elbowed his wife. “This is a hoot. I’ll text her and send the picture.”

Little Hal’s mother gazed lovingly at her boy. She held out a plastic pumpkin, a trick-or-treat bucket.

The Hulk held up a pillowcase.

“Oh, aren’t you the clever one,” she said. “You want Daddy to go with you this year?”

The Hulk shook his green head and crammed on by and out the door. He melted into the parade of goblins and princesses and miniature Darth Vadars flowing by, the littlest with a mom or a dad or an older brother or sister walking with them.

The Hulk pushed a Papa Smurf behind a clump of Rose of Sharon, held his pillowcase open to him. “All your candy in here, kid, or I’ll pound you in the dirt.”

Quaking, the smurf did as he was told, and The Hulk shambled back out into the passing crowd. A half block on, where the light from the street corner barely reached, he tripped Spiderman.

“You all right, Spidey?” he asked as he helped the child up. “You dropped your trick-or-treat bucket. Let’s me get that for you.”

He did. Dumped it in his sack, flung the bucket away, and galloped off across the street – cackling – toward the Wade house, famous in the neighborhood for the generosity of the treat offerings there. Mister Wade answered the doorbell in his Cat-in-the-Hat striped stovepipe hat. He held a tray piled high with Snickers bars and Sour Balls.

Mister Wade studied The Hulk, measured him against the kids crowding behind him. “Aren’t you a little old for this?” he asked.

The Hulk whined. “I’m only twelve.”

“I think you’d better move on.”

“Not fair. Trick-or-treat, mister.” He held his pillowcase open.

“I don’t think so,” the man in the Cat-in-the-Hat hat said.

The Hulk stomped on his foot.

Mister Wade howled. He dropped his tray, and most of the candy fell into The Hulk’s bag.

The Hulk, laughing like The Joker, ran. He slammed Hannah Montana and a gaggle of her entourage out of his way and raced around the block, past the corner of Raven Street and Humbleberry Lane, toward a house he couldn’t remember having seen before – a ramshackle mansion with a weedy yard and a broken fence. A troupe of costumed children danced out the front door waving their goody bags and shouting thank you. They hurried down the front walk

and away into the evening mist.

The Hulk studied the house.

Well, why not?

So he hustled up the walk to the porch. And the porch's boards squawled under his weight as he crossed to the front door.

Hmm, no button for the doorbell.

Obvious solution. The Hulk banged on the door. He called out in his best imitation of the voice from that car commercial he'd seen, "I'm Mister Opportunity and I'm knockin'!"

The door creaked open.

In the weak light stood a witch next to a bubbling cauldron. "Yes?" she asked.

He held out his sack well over half full. "Trick-or-treat."

She brought out something from beneath her cloak, held it out to him. "How about a nice poisoned apple, sonny?"

"Candy. I want candy."

"Well, my dear, for that you must come inside."

The witch stepped out of the way, and The Hulk entered. He stopped when a demonic laugh echoed up from what surely must have been the basement.

The witch planted a boney hand on The Hulk's shoulder. "Not to worry. That's just my cousin, Boris, experimenting with a potion to shrink children like you into dolls. Now you wanted candy? Right this way."

She gave him a sharp push that sent him stumbling into a man with an oversized head and a bolt through his neck. He clamped onto the boy's arm.

The Hulk croaked out, "Neat costume, mister. Where'd you get it?"

The man grinned, a front tooth missing. "This is not a costume," he said in the bassiest of bass voices.

He pulled the boy forward, into a circle of people gathered around a coffin in the living room, the coffin open, two candles flickering on stands at the head.

The Hulk peered around the circle. His dad had told him about the old television show, The Addams Family. He'd even seen an episode on TV Land. This must be them.

"To get your treat," the man said, "reach inside." And he gestured at the casket.

The Hulk went up on his toes, for a better look. There was candy there, half covering a body.

Well, if he must –

He reached out, flexed his fingers to make the biggest scoop he could.

A hand came up out of the coffin. It grabbed his. And the body sat up, its eyes a blazing red.

"Gotcha, kid!"

The Hulk screamed. He dropped his pillowcase of candy and ran for the front door, ran outside, ran as if a swarm of hornets was after him. Behind him came the witch, the man with the bolt in his neck, and the Addams Family. They stopped in the weak light from the fire under the cauldron, the witch calling out, "Did you like our trick, dearie? We have more."