

# The Other Witch



Clara drew fierce, dark wrinkles across her forehead. She blackened two front teeth. She plugged a long, crooked nose over her short, pug one, and stuck a clay wart on the end of her chin. Last of all, she pulled a stiff straw-colored wig over her curly brown hair.

Her costume complete, Clara turned toward the mirror in the room at the end of the hall.

“Eh! Eh! Ehhh! What an ugly witch I am, I am,” she said in a practiced cackle. “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the ugliest kid of

them all? I am! I'm *est*—the ugliest, creepiest, scariest kid in the class. Eh! Eh! Ehhh!” Then she laughed in such a creepy manner that she startled herself.

Clara wiggled her black plastic fingernails at Emily, who stood beside her. “Eh! Eh! Ehhh!” she said. “See how ugly I am, I am.”



Emily continued spraying her hair blue. “Brag, brag, brag!” she said. “You always think you are the best in everything, Clara.”

“Eh! Eh! Ehhh! That’s me. That’s me. I’m *est*,” said Clara. “I’m the wickedest, spookiest, ugliest kid in the class. Eh! Eh! Ehhh!”

“Brag, brag, brag!” said Emily. “That’s all you ever do. Brag, brag, brag!”

Unfortunately, this was true. Clara was a girl who had to be the best at everything she did in school and had to let everyone know about it. Everyone in the class knew her spelling scores were the highest, her book reports the longest, and her handwriting the neatest. When the class made clay pots, Clara’s was the largest. If the class sang, Clara sang the loudest. Multiplication flash cards she did the quickest. In dodge ball she threw the hardest. And during lunch in the cafeteria it was Clara who ate the fastest.

So it came as no surprise to anyone when Clara, dressed as a witch, crept around before the Halloween party saying, “Eh! Eh! Ehhh! *Est!* I’m the scariest, creepiest, ugliest kid in the class! No one is uglier than I am. Eh! Eh! Ehhh!”

Lit by a sole jack-o’-lantern, the room at the end of the hall was a scene of fright. Near the coat closet a monster with seven eyeballs pulled on black boots. By the door a vampire with a sinister grin dribbled blood down his chin, while next to him a mummy wrapped herself in toilet paper.

In the center of the classroom the tall teacher stood by a large tub of water. With his



fake black beard and a tall black hat made from cardboard, it was easy to guess that he was dressed as Abe Lincoln this Halloween.

The teacher waved his arms in x's and y's above his head. "All right, people," he called out. "Time to get our Halloween party under way."

One by one the ghouls and goblins circled around the tub of water. Through all the masks and makeup, it was impossible to tell who was who.

Clara was the last to join the circle. While the tall teacher rattled off instructions and party rules, Clara inspected the ring of costumes. She elbowed a one-armed pirate who stood to her right. "Eh! Eh! Ehhh!" she said into the pirate's gold earring. "Don't you think I'm the ugliest kid in the class?"

The pirate ran his unpatched eye around the group. Pointing across the circle with a hook that served for a hand, he said, "Ahoy! Look over there, Matey. Someone else is dressed as a witch. And whoever is wearing that other witch costume has you beat for ugliness. I mean, that's what I call ugly."

Clara shot a look across the circle. How could she have missed this before? Now, as plain as the crooked nose on her face, she spied a second witch, standing directly across the

circle from her. And there could be no doubt about it—that other witch’s hair was rattier; that other witch’s skin was greener; that other witch’s nails were longer. In short, that other witch was twice as ugly as Clara.

“Ooooooooooooo!” said Clara. “I thought I told everyone that I was going to be a witch this Halloween. So who had the nerve to dress up as the same thing as me?”

Meanwhile, the tall teacher knelt by the tub, dropping apples into it. “OK, people,” he said through his fake whiskers. “Time to start bobbing. Who wants a wet face first?”

A forest of hands shot into the air and swayed back and forth like so many trees in a windstorm. The room filled with the grunts, groans, and other amazing sounds students need to make when they are eager for a teacher to call on them.

The tall teacher pointed to a werewolf, who promptly stepped forward and removed his mask. It was Charlie. Everyone howled as Charlie lowered his face into the tub and chased an apple through the water with his gaping mouth.

Clara, however, had little interest in apple bobbing. Her eyes remained fixed on the witch across the way.

“Frances, I bet,” she muttered under her

breath. “I’m sure that other witch is Frances. Frances is always trying to do things better than I do them.”

But after Charlie rose from the water with an apple between his teeth, the tall teacher chose a skeleton to begin bobbing. Off went the skeleton’s mask—and who should it be but Frances.

Clara was stumped. She turned toward a short ghost to her left. “Say, ghost,” she whispered out the corner of her mouth, “what kid in the class dressed up as that other witch?”

The ghost shrugged its sheet-covered shoulders. “Beats me,” it said through its jagged hole of a mouth. “But that other witch sure gives me the creeps.”

“Ooooooooooooo,” said Clara, feeling more miserable than ever. “Who could that other witch be?”

All this while the witch across the circle appeared to be having a delightful time at the Halloween party. When she caught Clara’s stare, a black smile sliced across her green face. She waved a bony hand merrily at Clara.

“How rude can you get? What a showoff!” Clara huffed. “So rub it in, why don’t you? My costume took me all last night to make. I’ll bet you anything that other witch’s costume is store-bought.”

The apple bobbing continued. As each mask came off Clara examined the face before it dunked into the water after an apple. One by one she checked off names in her head to determine who that other witch was.

When every girl was checked off her mental list, she asked herself, “Could that other witch be a boy? Of course. A boy could dress up as a witch, couldn’t he? Just to spite me. I bet it’s Roger. Only Roger would do something as creepy as copying my witch idea.”

But no sooner had this crossed her mind than the tall teacher called out Roger’s name, and the blue-bearded pirate stepped forward.

“It’s about time,” Roger said, removing his beard and kneeling beside the tub of water. “I mean, what took you so long to call on me?”

“Ooooooooooooo,” said Clara. “Who could that other witch be?”

Clara’s next thought was this: Could there be a party crasher in our classroom—some kid from another class whose own Halloween party wasn’t so hot, so she came to this one?

She counted all the students.

“One two, three, four, five ... twenty-four, twenty-five plus me makes twenty-six,” she ran off. “Say, something is fishy here. There are twenty-five kids in my class. So how come I counted twenty-six? There’s an extra kid at this



party. We have a party crasher and I bet the teacher doesn't even know it." And she eyed the other witch more severely.

At this point the tall teacher announced, "OK, people. Shall we take our seats? Time to eat our Halloween treats."

This was the moment Clara had been waiting for. As soon as the class broke from the circle, she marched up to the other witch. Crooked nose to crooked nose the two witches stood.

"You're in big trouble, you!" Clara snapped. "You don't belong in this room, do you? Who are you? I was meant to be the ugliest kid in the class, and I was until you came. So go back to your own classroom, why don't you?"



The other witch's narrow black lips spread wide. Clara took a step backward. My, how toothless this other witch's mouth really appeared. Her snarled hair looked genuine as well. And her wrinkles—how did she ever get them on her face like that? Her five warts looked nothing like clay.

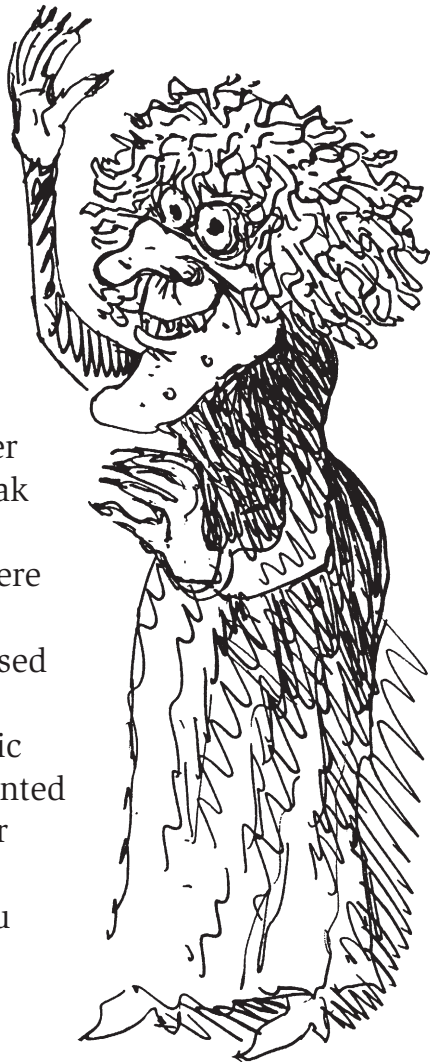
“Frightening party, isn't it, Missy,” the other witch cackled in a voice that sent ripples through Clara's skin.

“Say, just who are you?” Clara said, in a near whisper.

“What's that, Missy?” asked the other witch. “Speak up. Speak up.”

“Who are you? Where did you come from?”

The other witch raised a crooked finger that looked like an authentic crooked finger and pointed straight up. “From four thousand feet altitude, Missy. Is that what you



mean?” she answered. “Good flying height tonight, for your information—dark and stormy.”

Clara folded her arms across the front of her black dress. “OK. Knock it off,” she said. “Why are you really here?”

“Why, I spotted some of my friends down here having a party,” replied the other witch. “So I thought I would drop down and join in the fun. Great crowd.”

“You’re just here to show me up, aren’t you,” said Clara. “I was the ugliest kid in the class before you came.”

“Well, Missy, I’ve learned something in my two thousand years of flying,” said the other witch. “That often when you think you are better than everyone else, someone will come along and prove you wrong. But now I must be off to work, Missy. Busy night for us witches, isn’t it?”

And with that, the other witch turned on her high heels and stepped out the classroom door.

Clara bolted for the window. Outside on the playground a stiff wind churned up dust devils. The lone oak tree shook off its last leaves and sent them swirling around the jungle gym.

The other witch appeared on the baseball field with a broom in her hand. A black cat brushed

against her leg. Near the pitcher's mound, she straddled the broom handle; her cat sat behind her. Then, with Clara watching intently, the broom rose into the air and rocketed away.



Clara spun around. She pointed out the window and shrieked to her class, "Witch! Witch! Look, everyone! A witch! A witch!"

Only a couple of her classmates looked toward the window. Most continued to munch their Halloween cupcakes.

"Sure, Clara," Howard called out. "We know how ugly you think you are."

"You were uglier without the costume," said Roger.

"Yeah," said Frances. "You always think you're the best at everything."

"Brag, brag, brag!" said Emily.

The tall teacher, for his part, eyed Clara meaningfully and pointed to her desk in the second row.

"Well, how do you like that?" said Clara, fixing her crooked nose more firmly on her face.

And even though she was now truly the ugliest kid in the class, she said nothing more about her costume. She stepped to her desk and grabbed the cupcake off her desktop.

She wolfed it down in one bite.