

Zombie Dog

by Clare Hutton



SCHOLASTIC INC.

For James, Fiona, and Matt, with whom I would
face zombies any day.

If you purchased this book without a cover, you
should be aware that this book is stolen property.
It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher,
and neither the author nor the publisher has received any
payment for this “stripped book.”

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored
in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or
by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording, or otherwise, without written permission
of the publisher. For information regarding permission,
write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions
Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

ISBN 978-0-545-39824-4

Copyright © 2012 by Clare Hutton
All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc.
SCHOLASTIC, ROTTEN APPLE, and associated
logos are trademarks and/or registered
trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

12 13 14 15 16 17/0

Printed in the U.S.A. 40
First printing, August 2012

Chapter One

“I’m coming to get you!” Becky Nolan called. Her two-year-old Labrador retriever, Bear, whuffed excitedly behind his mouthful of purple octopus toy and barreled down the porch steps.

Becky leaped down the steps after Bear and grabbed hold of two of the stuffed octopus’s legs, pulling the toy toward her as her dog set his legs and growled playfully.

They yanked the octopus back and forth for a few seconds, until Bear suddenly dropped his head and whined softly.

Becky automatically let go of the stuffed toy and reached for Bear. “What’s the matter, sweetie?” she asked softly, patting his glossy black side. “What’s up, boy?”



Bear danced backward out of reach, the octopus clutched triumphantly in his mouth. His eyes were shining and he was grinning a big doggy grin: Becky was sure that he was laughing at her.

“That dog is so the boss of you,” Becky’s best friend, Charlotte, said from the porch. She was laughing at Becky, too. “Look at how he outwitted you.”

“Naughty boy,” Becky said. She lunged playfully toward him, but Bear quickly dodged away from her. A minivan pulled up in front of the house. From inside, Charlotte’s mom waved to them.

“Gotta go,” Charlotte said, pulling her backpack onto her shoulders and tightening her ponytail. “See you at school tomorrow.”

Becky stared at the minivan with dismay. “You just got here!” she complained.

Charlotte laughed. “We did homework together and made brownies and you showed me your new clothes and we talked and played with Bear,” she reminded Becky. “I’ve been here for ages.”

“I know,” Becky agreed. “I just miss hanging out with you all the time.”

The year before, when Becky’s family first moved to this town, her family had rented an apartment on

the street where Charlotte lived. Charlotte had come over almost every afternoon. But over the summer, Becky's family had moved to this new house on Tulip Street, which her parents called their dream house, and now it felt like she hardly saw Charlotte outside of school. "Maybe you can spend the night this weekend?" Becky asked.

Charlotte's mom beeped her horn impatiently.

"Maybe," Charlotte said, moving off toward the minivan. "That house next door to you is pretty creepy looking, though. I might be too scared to sleep here." She made a joking grimace as she pulled open the passenger door.

"Wait, what?" Becky said. Charlotte waved and climbed into the minivan, slamming the door as her mother pulled out.

Becky blinked in confusion at the back of the van and then climbed slowly back up her porch stairs. She looked over at the empty house on the other side of the fence. Creepy? It was just an empty house. Her parents called it the "old McNally house," but she didn't know who the McNallys were, or had been.

Becky sat on the porch swing to think. The McNally house had clearly once been a pretty house

like the others on the street. But now it was obviously neglected — its paint was peeling and the windows were boarded over.

Becky could see why Charlotte thought it was creepy. The house was pretty dilapidated, and the yard was overgrown. Thick dark evergreens grew close around the walls of the house. Altogether, it looked as if something had been shut up inside it, something that might try to get out, and the trees and boards were there to hold it back.

The chains on Becky's porch swing creaked as she swayed, and she almost thought she heard an answering *creak* from the other house.

She stilled the swing and listened. Nothing.

Another *creak* came from somewhere in the old house on the other side of the fence. The late afternoon light dimmed as a cloud passed over the sun, and, suddenly chilled, Becky shivered.

She automatically began to reach out for the comforting warmth of Bear's thick fur, but didn't find it. Where *was* Bear?

"Oh *no*," she muttered. "Dad's going to *kill* me."

Ever since the Nolan family had moved to their new house, Bear had made a habit of cheerfully trotting off to visit the neighbors whenever he could — and

sometimes he came back with a souvenir. Mrs. Baxter down the street had been so mad when Bear stole the cushions from her lawn furniture and dragged them through a bush, and when she'd complained to Becky's parents, they'd made Becky replace them with her own money.

Becky had begged for a dog for years before they'd gotten Bear. She'd promised that she would take care of everything her dog needed. But her parents had been really reluctant, especially her dad. He thought a dog would be too much work and inconvenience for everyone.

When her parents had finally broken down and given her Bear for her eleventh birthday, he had been a soft, round, little bear cub of a puppy who had squirmed in her arms and eagerly strained to reach and lick her chin and face, giving happy puppy yips the whole time. She and Bear had been crazy about each other from first sight. But her dad still sighed and rolled his eyes whenever Bear got into trouble. And now that they lived in a house with a big yard for Bear to run around in, he expected Bear to behave better than he had in the apartment.

"Bear!" Becky called, standing up to scan the neighborhood. "Where are you, boy? Come on home!"

She was peering off toward the far end of the street when she heard Bear's license tags jingling. Turning, she saw him trotting up the driveway. He was clearly proud of himself; his ears looked perky and his tail was straight up in the air. Becky breathed a sigh of relief. At least she wasn't going to have to spend the evening looking all over the neighborhood for him. "You'd never go too far when it's almost dinnertime, huh, boy?" she said affectionately, and Bear, understanding the word *dinner*, sped up.

There was something in his mouth, though — a ball. Becky held out her hand and he dropped it into her palm, not fighting her this time, and then barked eagerly, as if expecting her to throw it for him.

Ugh. The ball was about the size of a tennis ball, and it might have been blue once, with a pattern of stars or dots, but it was filthy and ripped now. There was a patch of greenish mold growing on it, and Becky almost gagged at the nasty, rotting smell it gave off. He'd probably dug it up somewhere. "Yuck, Bear," Becky said, holding it gingerly between two fingers. "That better not make you sick."

At least no one will be mad that he took this, she thought. Holding the ball away from her body,

she dropped it in one of the trash cans at the end of the driveway.

Thunder rumbled overhead, and Becky looked up in surprise. It had been such a beautiful, sunny afternoon a few minutes ago, but now the sky was filled with ominous black clouds. Another *crack* of thunder came, and Bear pressed against Becky's legs, trembling a little. He hated thunderstorms.

"It's okay, sweetie," Becky said uneasily. She usually liked thunderstorms, but it was strange how this one had sprung up from nowhere.

A flash of lightning lit up the sky. Becky grabbed hold of Bear's collar, and they ran together toward the house. Thunder cracked once more as she threw open the front door, and Bear whined.

Letting go of his collar and closing the front door, Becky breathed a sigh of relief. They'd gotten into the house before it started raining, luckily: Wet dogs stunk. "It's okay, Bear," she said comfortingly again, and petted his head. Bear whimpered loudly.

"What's the matter with Bear?" her mom called from the living room.

"He's scared of the thunderstorm," Becky called back. She pulled out an old towel from a basket near

the door and wiped the dirt from the yard off Bear's feet, then took off her own shoes. Bear followed her, his tail wagging lazily and his fears apparently forgotten, into the living room.

"Thunderstorm?" her mom asked, frowning at her quizzically over the book she was reading on the couch. "What are you talking about?"

Behind her, sunshine streamed through the windows.

Becky blinked in surprise. "It was thundering a minute ago," she said. "And it looked like it was really going to pour."

"How strange," her mom said. "I didn't hear anything. Did you and Charlotte get your homework done?"

"Uh-huh," Becky said. She flopped down in a chair and stared out the window. Bear rested his head on her leg, and she petted him absently. Outside the window, the sky was bright and blue and peaceful.

Weird.