

Halloween Ride

By Nancy Lois Kelton

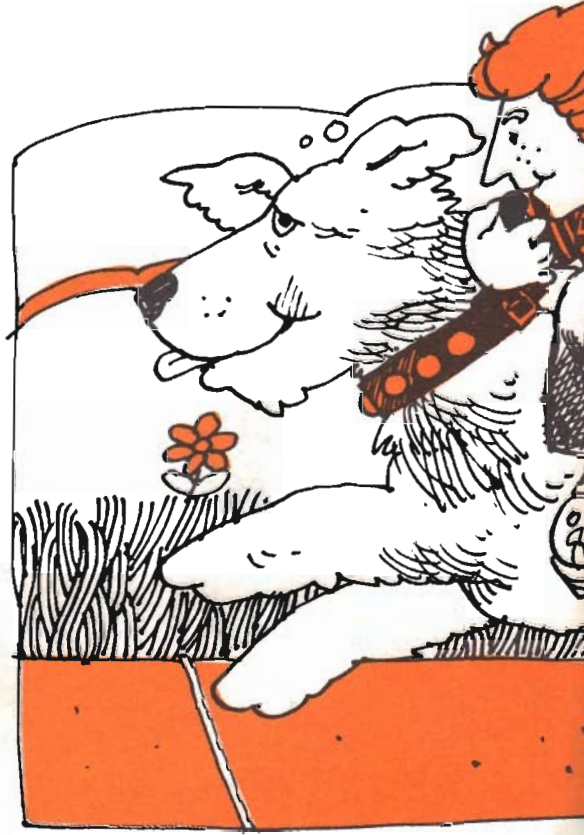
Illustrated by Nick Brocker

It was Halloween afternoon, and Bentley had no one to play with. His friends were busy getting their costumes ready for the big night. Not one of them had invited Bentley to go trick or treating, just because he was a dog.

He sat down in his comfortable chair where he did his deepest thinking. Everyone will be out tonight, even the cats. I don't see why dogs can't celebrate Halloween, too, thought Bentley to himself.

Bentley decided that he was going to join in the trick or treating fun. But first, he had to get a costume.

He walked briskly down the street until he saw two friends, Danny and Barbara, who were carrying an enormous pumpkin.



"Hi, Bentley," said Barbara. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to buy myself a Halloween costume," said Bentley.

Barbara and Danny looked at each other and giggled. "You're silly," said Danny. "No one's going to sell a Halloween costume to a dog."

Bentley didn't answer. He couldn't let them see how sad he was as he walked away. Soon something made the drooping corners of his mouth turn up in a smile.



The entire window of a five and ten cent store was filled with costumes.

The store was crowded. No one noticed Bentley as he walked in. People pushed and shoved from all sides. From down where he stood, it was hard to tell where anything was. But all at once he heard many excited voices:

"Hey, do I look like a monster?"

"You look silly in that mask."

"Do I look scary?"

Bentley walked around a

counter and found dozens of children trying on costumes.

He stood up, with his front paws on the counter, and tried on a monster mask. When he first looked into the mirror, he couldn't find himself among the masked faces, but as soon as he did, he was not at all pleased.

"It's just not me," he said. "I'm not the scary type."

The king's mask made him feel too pompous. The dog's mask made him feel too normal, not like being dressed up.

Bentley spotted something unusual on the counter. It was a little yellow bonnet with big white daisies on the brim. He put it on and looked in the mirror. "How cute!" he chuckled. "I'll dress up as a baby."

As he went around the counter to find the rest of the baby costume, a voice from behind started shouting, "Would you mind taking off my baby's bonnet, sonny? I just put it there when she got warm."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," said Bentley, as he turned around to see a cross looking woman

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holding a baby. I thought it was part of a costume."

"Some nerve," she said. "And you shouldn't be trying on more than one costume at a time, anyway. Where's your mother?"

"I'm not wearing a costume," said Bentley, "I'm a dog, and my mother hasn't been with me since I was a puppy."

The woman shrieked. Just as she was about to call the manager, a little boy in a cat's costume crept up behind her and shouted, "Boo." She jumped up screeching and the baby began to cry.

"See what you did, Peter," yelled his mother.

Meanwhile, Bentley sneaked around to look at costumes on the other side. A little girl pointed her finger at him.

"Mommy," she said. "I want a costume like that. Ask the little boy where he got it."

"On which counter did you find that costume?" the woman asked Bentley.

"This isn't a costume. I'm a dog."

The little girl giggled, but her mother got angry. "Don't be such a wise guy. You can

wait until later to play your trick or treat games."

The little girl pulled his tail to see if it would come off.

"Ouch," cried Bentley. "You're hurting me. Let go."

A sales woman standing nearby overheard this and turned to Bentley. "You'd better scram," she said, "before I call the store manager."

She was about to chase him with the broom from a witch's costume. Just then a woman asked her where picture frames were, and a man wanted her to help him locate the shoe polish.

Bentley spotted an empty baby buggy in the aisle and he jumped inside to hide. Suddenly, he heard a familiar voice.

"That looks just fine, Peter. Now take it off so we can go."

It was the mother of Peter and the baby with the yellow bonnet.

As she went to put the baby inside the buggy, she saw Bentley there. "Help!" she screamed. "It's that dog, again! Get him out of here!"

Mr. Paloni, the store manager, was getting ready

to close up for the night. He came over, grabbed Bentley by the collar, and took him out of the store. Mr. Paloni pointed to the sign on the door that read, NO DOGS ALLOWED.

I guess I should learn to expect things like that to happen, thought Bentley as he plodded along. People aren't always so nice, especially to dogs.

His head was hanging low. When he turned the corner, he almost knocked over a little boy who was carrying a big box under his arm.

"I hope I didn't hurt you," said Bentley. "Let me help you carry that."

"Don't bother me," said the boy. "I'm late as it is."

Bentley tagged along behind. "I'm sorry, and I'd like to make it up to you," said Bentley. "What are you late for, anyway?"

"I've got to return this horse's costume to the store," said the boy. "I should have done it a long time ago, but I was playing with my friend."

"Why are you returning it?"

"My mother got it without me and it doesn't fit, so I want to get something else,"

answered the boy. "Will you stop asking me so many questions?"

When they got to the store, it was locked for the night. The little boy started to cry.

"Don't worry," Bentley said, "You'll look fine in that costume."

"It's not just that," said the boy. "It's late and my mother will be angry that I didn't do this sooner."

Bentley had an idea. "Maybe if I ride you home, your mother will hardly know the difference."

"Can you go fast?" asked the boy.

"Sure," said Bentley.

The boy hopped on Bentley's back. "Take a left at the corner and go straight for two blocks."

"What's your name? Mine's Bentley."

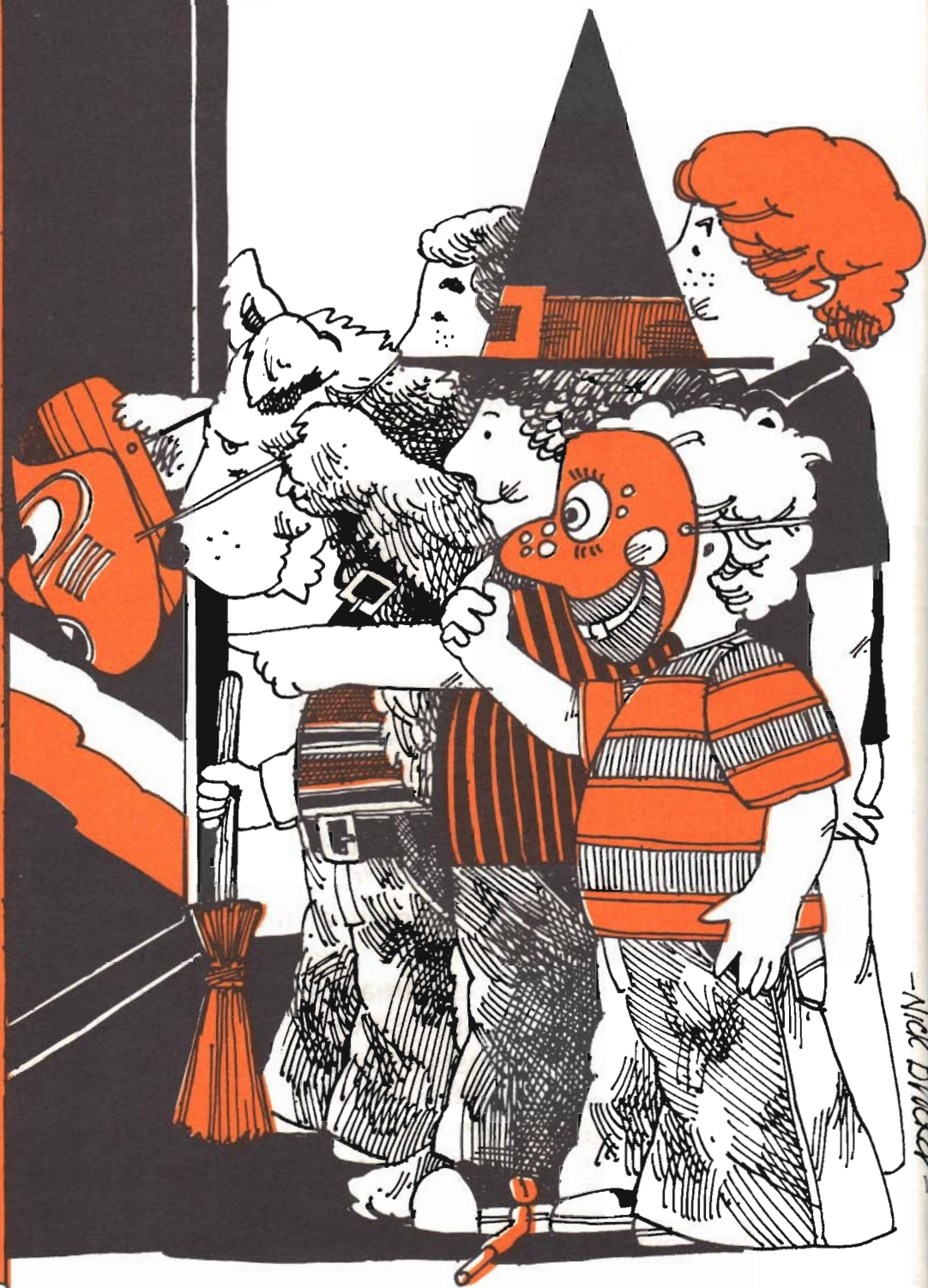
"Charley Richards. You turn right at the next light."

"Are you going trick or treating with your friends?"

"Of course," said Charley. "How else do you go trick or treating?"

"I really wouldn't know," said Bentley. "I've never gone in my whole life. I've never even worn a costume."

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"Never?" exclaimed Charley.

"No, never," said Bentley, who was still running as fast as his legs could go.

For a few minutes, Charley didn't say a word. Then he ordered, "You take a left at this corner and it's that big gray house."

"Well," said Bentley as he let Charley off, "I'm glad I could help you and I enjoyed being with you."

"Where do you live?" asked Charley.

"On Rugby Lane, 191," called Bentley. "Happy Halloween."

"Same to you, Bentley."

Suddenly, Bentley felt very lonely as he moped along to his house. He made supper, but when he sat down to eat, he wasn't hungry. He took a warm bath with his favorite bubbles, but it wasn't any fun.

Bentley was ready for bed when the doorbell rang.

Thinking that it was probably some trick or treaters, he grabbed his piggybank and took out a few pennies.

Standing outside in a cowboy costume was Charley Richards.

"What a surprise!" said

Bentley. "You look great in that costume. What happened to the one from the—"

"I found this in the attic. It used to be my brother's. I thought it would look super if I rode on a horse," said Charley. He pulled out the big five and ten box from behind his back. He handed it to Bentley. "I can't think of a better horse."

Bentley, too excited to even talk, put the costume on. He stared at himself in the mirror. All he could see behind a beautifully fitting horse's costume was a pair of sparkling eyes.

"Are you ready?" said Charley. He put the handle of a large black and orange trick or treat bag into Bentley's mouth.

"Hop on partner," said Bentley.

It was the most wonderful night of Bentley's life. Everyone stopped to admire them, even the owls and black cats who don't go in for that sort of thing. None of the children recognized Bentley. At least not until he jumped up and licked their faces to wish them all a Happy Halloween.

