



## CHAPTER 1

“Should we go in, too?” Frankie asked. “Maybe Louise got lost.”

“Nah,” said Charlie, glancing toward the haunted house. “She’ll be out soon.”

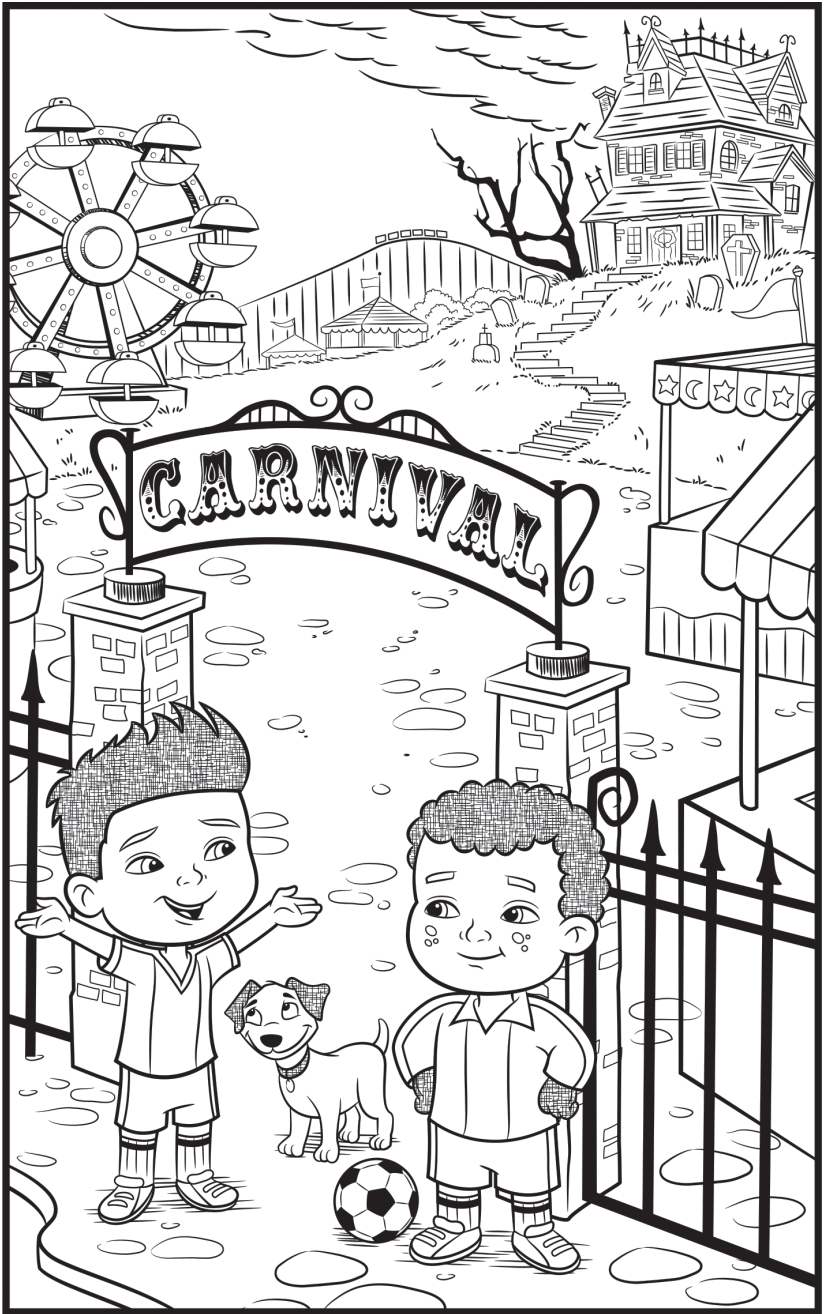
Frankie and Charlie were standing by the exit, waiting for their friend

Louise. The sun was dropping behind the Ferris wheel, and soon the carnival would be shutting down for the year and leaving town.

“Not scared, are you?” said Frankie.

Charlie blushed, and all his freckles stood out. “Of course not.”

Frankie grinned. He remembered that Charlie hadn't wanted to go in last year, either. It *was* pretty scary. There were walking skeletons, dangling spiders, and wailing ghosts. He would have gone in again today with Louise, but it cost a dollar and he only had fifty cents left.



Frankie's dog, Max, was sniffing around the ground looking for scraps of food.

"Here you go, boy," Frankie said. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a dog biscuit. Max opened his mouth and Frankie dropped it in, then tickled the dog under his furry white muzzle.

The doors opened and a few screams drifted over. Then a balding man with pale skin and wide eyes stumbled out. It was their gym teacher, Mr. Donald.

"Looks like Donald's spooked," said Frankie.

Mr. Donald saw them and walked

over, smoothing down the few hairs on his head.

“Is that a spider on your shoulder, sir?” asked Charlie.

Mr. Donald jumped about a foot in the air, craning his neck.

“Only joking, sir,” said Charlie.

Mr. Donald stared at them with a frown. “I hope to see you both at soccer practice tomorrow.”

“Of course, sir,” said Frankie. “We wouldn’t miss practice for anything!”

Mr. Donald walked off, still checking his shoulder.

The doors of the haunted house creaked open again and Louise

emerged. She was playing a handheld video game.

“We thought a skeleton might have gotten you,” said Frankie.

Louise rolled her eyes. “*Sooo* not scary — I almost fell asleep.”

Frankie checked his watch and saw it was nearly a quarter to five. “We should go home — my mom wants me back by five thirty.”

“Mine, too,” said Louise.

They made their way past the bumper cars and the ring toss. Their friend Kobe from school was standing behind a rope, trying to knock the tin cans off their stands with baseballs.