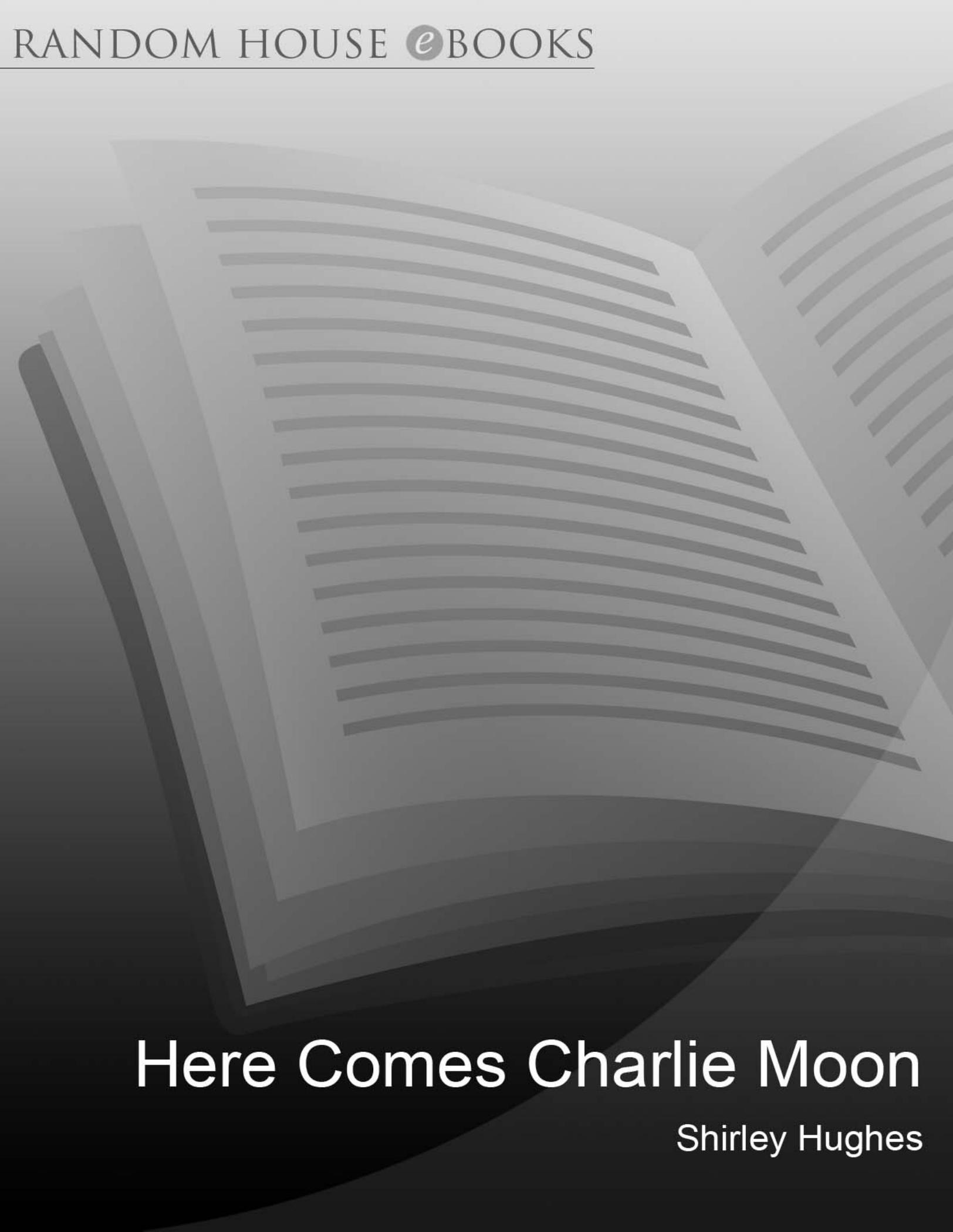


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Here Comes Charlie Moon

Shirley Hughes

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Charlie Moon and the Big Bonanza Bust-Up

**HERE COMES
CHARLIE MOON**

written and illustrated by

Shirley Hughes



For John

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Charlie Moon's Auntie runs a joke shop at the seaside. It sells things like comic hats, masks, rubber spiders, fake flowers that squirt water at you unexpectedly, and cushions that squeak when you sit down on them. The narrow shop front faces the sea. "JOKES AND CARNIVAL NOVELTIES" it says, and underneath, "Jean Llanechan Jones", which is Charlie's Auntie's name. It's easier to say the middle bit properly if you are Welsh, as she is. You have to spit it out rather than say it.

Charlie himself lives in a big city with his Mum, who is in the hairdressing business. There are no jokes in her shop, only a row of lady customers sitting wired up to domed space-helmet drying machines, cooking slowly to lobster red as they flick through their magazines. Charlie tends to trip over their feet whilst skateboarding through the shop from the back room to the street. They don't like it. It puts them off coming. By the end of the first week of the summer holidays Mum's patience has snapped, and Charlie is off to his Auntie Jean's at Penwyn Bay. He can't take his skateboard because it weighs down the suitcase too much. It's too full already, as Charlie is a smart dresser. He wants to pack four changes of trousers, his T-shirt with Superman on the front, and his red-and-white cap with the big peak. Also his snorkel and mask in case he wants to do some underwater swimming.

"What do you want to pack all that for?" asks Mum, forcing down the suitcase lid by sitting down on it with all her weight. "You can't see anything under water at Penwyn Bay—it's too muddy."

"I might. There might be a big fish or a seal. One of those got washed up on the beach once. I saw a picture of it in the *Penwyn Bay News*."

“You don’t need a mask and a snorkel to look at seals,” Mum tells him, but they get packed all the same. “You’re to help Auntie Jean with the washing-up, and in the shop if she asks you to,” Mum goes on. “And don’t forget to make your bed properly instead of just dragging the covers up as you do here. Ariadne’s going to be there,” she adds.

This is not good news for Charlie. Ariadne is his cousin. She is only two years older than he is but it seems more like five because she is so clever. Not stuck up exactly, but her Dad is a very important man who writes things in the newspapers and she reads a lot of books. Charlie likes a good book too, of course, but his mind often seems somehow to slide off the page and he finds himself doing something else. He once read a book about a cave-man which was great. He’ll read that again all right when he’s got time. Ariadne being at Auntie Jean’s means that she will be sleeping in the best room at the top of the house which looks out to sea, and will be sitting about reading all the time, or saying things that make people feel uncomfortable. She has two favourite words, one is “pathetic” and the other “typical”. (Pretty pathetic and typical to go round with a name like Ariadne, come to that, thinks Charlie privately.)

Still, it isn’t bad at Auntie Jean’s.

The jokes and carnival novelties are all over the place as usual. Rows of rubbery masks are hanging up behind the counter—not the underwater kind, but funny ones of red-nosed clowns, Frankensteins, gorillas and suchlike. In the passage behind the shop are piles and piles of boxes full of crackers, indoor fireworks, magic sets and squeakers that you blow out at people to make them feel jolly. Not even Auntie Jean knows what is inside some of these boxes. In fact, she has a lot of trouble finding things. She often runs out of things to eat, too. This happens on the first afternoon of Charlie’s visit.

“I’ll just be popping out for a loaf and some fish fingers for tea,” she sings out, climbing into her red coat. “And I might just be dropping in at Mrs Goronwy Lewis’s on the way back, just for ten minutes, see. Look after the shop, won’t you? Everything’s priced, and all you’ve got to remember is to give the right change out of the till and to be ever so polite to the customers.”

“I don’t suppose there’ll be any,” says Ariadne, after Auntie’s footsteps have tittupped away up the prom. “There hardly ever are. This shop’s going bankrupt, if you ask me.”

She stretches out on the old sofa in the back room, with a book and Einstein, the old ginger torn cat, on her stomach. From here, with her head propped up, she can see through the open door along the passage to the shop. Charlie has disappeared. All is very still. The afternoon sun lies quietly on the dusty shop floor, and outside the sea washes gently on the stones. Suddenly a strange moaning is heard. It rises to a louder moan, then to a throaty roar. A shuffling creature on all fours advances down the passage, and a monstrous face covered in green hair appears round the arm of the sofa.

Einstein merely twitches one ear.

“You are *pathetic*,” says Ariadne, calmly turning over a page.

Charlie takes off the monster mask which he has borrowed from the shop, and gets up off his hands and knees. He hadn’t really hoped that Ariadne would think he was a proper monster, but at least she could have pretended for a bit. It would be more fun than just lying about with a book and not talking to people. He’s just about to tell her so, too, when the shop door opens with a loud clang, and in come two boys. They are sandy-haired, piggy-eyed and look as though they might be brothers. Both of them are wearing striped jerseys, hooped like barrels around their wide middles.