



A Halloween Happening

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"You need a drink, Jim?" Marlon, the somewhat shaggy and slightly inebriated host, asked cheerfully.

"No. I'm fine. And my name's John."

"C'mon, Jim. Halloween only comes once a year! Let's party!" Marlon said with a level of enthusiasm that no sober person could attain.

"It's a great party, but I think I'll stick with the snacks." John said, then realized that Marlon had already wandered away to speak to another of his guests.

John had been surprised when Marlon stopped him in the hallway at school and invited him to the Halloween party at his house. If it had been anyone else, John might have been suspicious, worried that he was being set up for some kind of cruel prank.

Even though he didn't know Marlon personally, by everything he had heard around school, Marlon was a genuinely nice guy. Marlon wasn't a big brain and he certainly wasn't a jock. But just about everyone knew who he was. And everyone who knew him, liked him.

John had just turned fifteen, so everyone else at the party was a year or so older than he was. It was sort of an honor to be invited, but John felt a little bit out of his league.

Looking around, he realized that the music was good and for the most part, the other guests were friendly. So, although he felt a little bit out of place, he found that he really was having a good time.

"Here you go Jim, Marlon said that you needed a drink." Kara, Marlon's girlfriend, said as she offered him a plastic cup of something fizzy and orange.

"I'm not used to drinking." John admitted shyly.

"Well, you don't have to get hammered or anything like that. But sometimes a drink can loosen you up a little and make a good time even better." She said cheerily.

John considered her words as he accepted the drink, then cautiously asked, "What is it?"

"I'm not sure. Orange pop and... tequila? Or whiskey. Maybe both. Does it matter?" She asked with a perky flip of her hair, before bouncing away.

John sniffed the drink, then walked to the table of snacks and discretely sat it beside an unopened bucket of fried chicken.

He paused for a moment. Finally, his curiosity got the better of him and he popped open the paper top of the bucket and was delighted to see an entire bucket of hot wings.

After reaching across the table to grab a paper plate, John carefully picked up three of the hot wings and a few paper napkins.

He took his first bite and reveled in the sensation. The vinegary bite of the hot sauce was absolutely perfect. His taste buds danced with joy.

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"I KNOW when I've had too much to drink!" Nathan McClure exclaimed from beside John, his slur giving lie to his words.

"I'm just saying that maybe you should slow down for a little bit, so you can enjoy the whole party." Marlon said reasonably.

"Hey! Look! Another orange whiskquila!" Nathan said joyously as he reached for John's abandoned drink.

John noticed, and turned away, to avoid being drawn into their conversation. Putting it out of his mind, John devoted his full attention to the next hot wing.

"Think, Nathan. You don't want to pass out before we even start having fun, do you?" Marlon pleaded as he reached for the drink.

"Hey man! Not cool!" Nathan screamed as he jerked his drink away from Marlon's grasp.

His drunken reflexes weren't up to the task and he went off balance, plowing right into the person just behind him.

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John wasn't prepared for the impact, and very nearly went sprawling on the floor as Nathan's full weight collided with him.

All the air was knocked out of him in a whoosh and it took a moment for him to realize that something was wrong, seriously wrong.

One moment in time seemed to stretch into eternity as John realized his situation.

"You okay, Jim?" Marlon asked with concern.

John started pointing at his throat while at the same time he tried with all his might to dislodge the chicken bone that he had apparently tried to inhale.

"Hey man, that isn't funny." Marlon said slowly.

John could feel himself getting lightheaded as his knees started to give way.

"Stop fucking around, man, that isn't cool." Nathan said as he finally managed to more or less find his balance.

Darkness started to intrude on the periphery of John's vision and the sounds of voices around him became muffled.

"*Take my hand.*" A voice whispered, then John saw the hand, reaching out to him.

As he took the offered hand and used it to pull himself to standing, he suddenly felt a wave of relief wash through him.

He wasn't choking anymore, and his vision became clear.

"Thanks, that was kind of scary for a minute." John said with relief, then looked closely at the figure before him. "Great grim reaper costume, where's your scythe?"

"*We use combine thrashers now. It's much more efficient.*" The hooded figure said in a dry tone.

"I bet." John said with a grin, then turned at the sounds behind him.

"Come on, Jim. You're scaring the shit out of me here." Marlon said in a voice that conveyed his escalating panic.

John was about to answer him, but froze when he saw Marlon slapping the face of the still figure on the floor.

"Hey! That's..." John trailed off as Marlon moved and allowed John to see the wide vacant eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling.

"*Yes. It's you.*" The hooded figure said in his whispery voice.

John looked at his companion, then down at the floor again.

Finally John whispered, "I'm dead?"

"*Probably.*" The hooded figure said carefully.

John looked at him, hoping he would continue the thought.

"If one of these people has the presence of mind to clear your airway and administer CPR, then it's possible that you could revive." The hooded figure said quietly.

John looked around at everyone staring dumbly at what was happening on the kitchen floor.

"I wouldn't get my hopes up." The hooded figure added reluctantly.

"Someone needs to call for an ambulance!" Kara said in a trembling voice.

"Ya think?" John said indignantly as he noticed the pronounced blue color tinting the skin of his body on the floor.

"No. The cops will come. We need to ditch the body!" Nathan said urgently.

"Hey! What did I ever do to you?" John asked plaintively.

"We're calling for an ambulance. Everyone, take off before the cops get here." Marlon said decisively, then turned to his girlfriend and said, "Kara, baby, would you hand me the phone?"

"Seriously Marlon, my dad has a wood chipper, no one would ever know." Nathan said imploringly.

"Thanks Nate. Go on, before the cops come and you get in trouble." Marlon said as he dialed the phone. "Kara, would you see that Nate gets home safe? He's not good to drive."

"Are you sure you don't want me to stay?" She asked quietly.

"There's no reason for you to get in trouble too. Go on, and be safe." Marlon said with a weak smile, then turned his attention to the phone. "I need an ambulance right away."

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"How are you feeling?"

"Well, even though I should probably be freaking out, I'm actually feeling fine." John said thoughtfully.

"Without adrenaline or any of the other physiological fear responses, you're able to think clearly. I just want to be sure that you're not depressed about what's happened."

"Well, I'm not exactly happy about being dead, but... I think I'm okay." John said honestly.

"Good. I'll do whatever I can to help you through this."

"What's going to happen now?" John asked as he turned his full attention to his companion.

"You have some decisions to make."

"Like what?" John asked cautiously.

"You just need to figure out what's going to make you happy, and we'll do our best to get that for you... and then you'll have it forever."

"Forever?" John asked in a whisper.

"You'll have plenty of time to worry about that later. But now I think we should go to your house."

"It's kind of far away. I was planning to call for a ride home." John said uncertainly.

"Just close your eyes and think about your home and we'll be there." John's companion said as he placed a hand on his shoulder.

As John was about to close his eyes, he saw Marlon sitting beside his still body on the kitchen floor.

Marlon reached out a hand and gently closed John's dead, sightless eyes as he whispered, "I'm sorry, Jim."

John reluctantly smiled and nodded, then closed his eyes and concentrated on his home.

"It may be a while before your parents are notified. So we should have time to talk about a few things."

"I wonder where they are?" John said as he glanced around.

"From what I'm hearing upstairs, it sounds like they may be a few minutes."

"Oh." John said as he looked at the stairway, then added, "Ewww."

"When a spirit passes, he has some decisions to make."

"Like?" John asked, then gestured toward the sofa in the living room, offering his companion a seat.

"If there is someone in the world of the living that you're worried about, you can choose to stay with them and watch over them. You know, like a guardian angel."

"So all that stuff they say about 'your grandma is watching over you' is really true?" John asked with surprise.

"Sometimes. Quite often, the recently deceased feel that they left things unfinished and want to remain, for a time, to see them through."

"I don't think I have anything like that." John said slowly.

"Well, one of the reasons I wanted to bring you here is in case you would want to watch over your parents."

"Do a lot of people choose to do that?" John asked curiously.

"Some do. I wouldn't say a lot."

"Okay, but let's just say for the sake of argument that I don't have anyone alive that I want to watch over. What would I do then?" John asked seriously.

"Well, that depends on if there's someone waiting to take you to the other side."

"Isn't that what you're here to do?" John asked curiously.

"Oh no. I'm just here to get you past the initial fear and then answer your questions. What you need is a loved one who has passed on to take you over. When they do, you'll be with them forever."

"What if, again, for the sake of argument, I don't have a loved one waiting for me?" John asked cautiously.

"Well, in that case, you'd stay here, in limbo."

"Limbo? You mean between life and death?" John asked cautiously.

*"Not exactly. You *are* dead. Limbo is the plane of existence between the living world and the afterlife."*

"So... what? Am I waiting to be judged? Or do I need to do a good deed or something to earn my way in?" John asked slowly.

"Oh no. Nothing like that. In the afterlife, I suppose you could call it heaven, no one is alone. You're with your loved ones forever. But if you don't have a loved one, or they haven't passed on yet, then you stay here."

"Well, if I end up being stuck here, what would I do?" John asked as his mind raced over the people he had known in his life.

"Whatever you like. If you have a favorite place, you could go there and enjoy it. You can follow your friends or family around, or you might even find a complete stranger that you would want to watch over."

"Forever." John said darkly.

"Of course, if you're interested, you could become a guide like me. It's hard work and it can be heartbreaking at times but, I don't know, you're there when people are hurting and needing answers, and you can really help them."

"Put a robe on! John could be home any time."

John and his companion turned to see John's mother walking slowly down the stairs.

"That's my mom, her name is Janelle." John said with a grand gesture toward the stairway.

"He's out at a party. I bet he's dead drunk by now."

"Well, he's half right." John said dryly, then added, "That's my step-dad. Howard."

"And I bet you never even thought about doing **anything** naughty at his age." Janelle said with a grin at her husband.

"Do you want to see how naughty I can be?" Howard asked with a leer.

"If they start making out in here, I'm gonna puke." John said with a cringe at the scene unfolding before him.

"*You're dead. You can't puke.*" His companion said quietly.

"If they get naked, trust me, I'll find a way." John said with a queasy look.

The phone ringing drew everyone's attention.

"That's probably John wanting a ride home." Janelle said as she rushed past her husband toward the phone.

"Or the police, telling us to come and get him from the drunk tank." Howard said frankly.

"Hello."

John watched carefully for his mother's reaction.

"Yes, that's my son. Johnathan David Cutter." She said in a trembling voice.

"What happened? How is he?" She asked in panic.

"Yes. Yes. I've got that. We'll be right there." She said as she forced herself to calm.

"What's wrong, Janey?" Howard asked with concern.

"That was the police, John's on his way to the hospital." She said in a shaky voice.

"Which one?" Howard asked seriously.

"Um, General."

"I'm sure he'll be fine. He probably just had too much to drink. Let's get dressed and get going." Howard said as he started walking toward the stairs.

"What is it with him and thinking that I'm drunk? I've NEVER said or done ANYTHING to deserve that." John said indignantly.

"He's probably just thinking about how it was when he was your age and assumes that you're doing what he did."

"As if!" John huffed, then thought to ask, "So are we going with them, or what?"

"We can go directly to the hospital if you like. I know the way."

"Oh, yeah. Sounds good. It'll beat having to listen to Howard telling my mom about how much of a drunk I am." John said with a roll of his eyes.

The hooded figure held out a hand.

When John accepted it, the world faded out around them.

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Just as suddenly as the world had faded, it reformed to be the waiting area of the emergency room.

"Your body probably isn't here yet."

"What's taking so long?" John asked curiously.

"They were probably trying to resuscitate you at the scene for a while before giving up and bringing you here."

"Are you sure they didn't succeed in reviving me?" John asked cautiously.

"No. You're here. That means your body is dead. And after this long, there's no chance of going back."

"I have a question." John said thoughtfully.

"Go ahead and ask. That's what I'm here for."

"I always heard that if you were good, you'd go to heaven and if you were bad, you'd go to hell." John said slowly.

"That's about right." His companion said seriously.

"Tell me about it. I mean, am I going to be taken in front of a great huge throne and judged for everything I did in my life?" John asked cautiously.

"I don't know all the details, but from what I understand, the moment you died, you were judged. If you were destined for... the bad place, you'd be there right now."

"So there is a hell?" John asked cautiously.

"I don't know from personal experience, but from what I've heard, yes. And it's a never-ending horror beyond imagining. Those who are hopelessly corrupt go straight to the pit. But since you're here, you've obviously avoided that fate."

"But what about heaven?" John asked cautiously.

"Again, I don't know from personal experience, but the afterlife that waits for us beyond limbo is said to be the ultimate fulfillment; absolute peace. And if you had a guardian spirit waiting for you, then you would have crossed over with them by now."

"But you can't go there alone." John said slowly.

"No. I think that, if you were alone, it wouldn't be heaven."

"My mom's on her third husband, which one would she go to heaven with?" John asked curiously.

"Well, assuming she makes it, I'd guess none of them, but I suppose it's just as likely that it could be all of them. The bond of marriage ends at death... you know, 'till death do us part', but if they're still friends and lovers in their hearts, they could continue on for eternity together."

"Wow. I guess I can see why they call it heaven." John said in wonder.

"Is that the Cutter kid?" a nurse asked as she rushed to the men wheeling a gurney into the emergency room.

"Yeah. But there's no rush. We just need to get a doctor to call it." One of the paramedics said sadly.

"Overdose?" The nurse asked cautiously.

"Yeah. An overdose of hot wings." The Paramedic said with weak humor, then motioned for his partner to help him shift the covered body to a waiting bed.

At the nurse's curious look, he continued. "The kid had a chicken bone stuck in his throat. It was wedged in there solid."

"What a waste." She said as she looked at the shrouded figure.

"Yeah, he was only fifteen." The paramedic said sadly, then in a more serious voice, continued, "Will you get the doc to make it official? We need to get back out there, it's Halloween and I have a feeling that things will be jumping tonight."

"Yeah. It's already started picking up here." She said sadly.

"Shouldn't my mom be here by now?" John asked as he walked over to the body covered by a sheet.

"Be patient. You have all the time in the universe."

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"I'm Janelle Sutherland, I'm here for my son, John Cutter." Janelle said as she rushed into the emergency room.

"Oh. My. God!" John said as he looked at his parents.

"*What's wrong?*" His companion asked curiously.

"Howard's carrying a McDonald's cup of coffee. They stopped for coffee on the way to the hospital!" John said in amazement.

There was a shriek from John's mother, then she ran to her husband, crying hysterically.

"Tell me again, why are we here?" John asked curiously.

"*There are certain things that you need to witness to make it easier to accept your new situation.*"

"Okay. Well, if I've seen what I need to, can we go?" John asked uncomfortably.

"*There's just one other thing. It's good to hear their first words after they've calmed down. Sometimes it helps you find peace.*"

"Okay." John said reluctantly, then moved beside his mother and her husband so that he could hear.

"How could he do this to me?" Janelle whimpered into her husband's chest.

"You can stay and watch if you want. But I'm done." John said as he turned to walk away.

His companion put a hand on his shoulder and said, "*I understand. Do just like before, but this time take us to your father.*"

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"This is my father's office. He's always working, so he's probably here." John said as he glanced around the darkened reception area.

"Just put the candy bowl out so they can get it themselves! I need you to help me get our stories straight before the board sees the quarterly figures tomorrow."

"That would be my dad, John Cutter Senior." John said as he gestured toward the only doorway with light spilling out.

"What do you think his reaction will be?"

"Who knows? I doubt that he'll laugh or dance a jig or anything like that, but I can't imagine him being all that upset about it. He's seen me a total of about thirty minutes in the past five years." John said frankly.

"You can't automatically assume that he doesn't care just because he isn't around."

"I guess we'll see in a few minutes. I don't think mom would miss an opportunity to send some bad news my dad's way." John said bitterly.

"If you'd rather not do this, we could go."

"No. We're here, we may as well stay and watch. I doubt that there'll be much to it." John said in a resigned voice.

"Hold on Scott, I've got another call, I'll be right back." John Sr. said before putting the line on hold, then clicking another, "John Cutter."

"Hold on Janelle, John did what?"

"Dead? You mean... dead?"

"No. No. You don't need to worry about anything. You know that I'm responsible for all his medical and insurance costs, so it'll be best if I handle this. I'll take care of all the arrangements and get back with you about the details."

"Just take care of yourself and leave the rest to me."

"Goodbye."

"Well, that didn't sound so bad." The hooded figure said in his whispery voice.

John Sr. then clicked the blinking button on his phone and said, "Scott? Oh, no. It was nothing. Now, line item forty seven..."

"I have a half brother who absolutely hates me, are we off to see him next?" John asked bitterly as he walked out of the office.

"I'm sorry, John." The hooded figure said as he hurried to follow.

John stopped at the feeling of a hand on his shoulder.

Before he knew what had happened, a pair of arms were drawing him into a hug.

"I'm really sorry. Seeing your loved ones receiving the news and accepting it usually helps you to let go of your former life. I just wanted to make your passing as painless as possible."

John enjoyed the hug for a moment, then said, "You are making it easier. But I think it's safe to say that I'm not planning to devote my afterlife to watching out for either one of those two."

"Yes. I think that's a wise decision." his companion said as he released John from the hug.

"How long do we have? I mean, am I taking up your time when you're supposed to be helping someone else?" John asked curiously.

"No. I'm here just for you. We can take as long as we want. Once you're settled into your afterlife and I know that you're happy, I'll go back and get another assignment."

"Good. Because if we've got time, there's someone that I'd like to check on." John said seriously.

"Just imagine their home and we'll be there."

"You see, that's the thing. He's dead." John said reluctantly.

"Well, that can be a little more challenging, but I should still be able to help you."

"Okay, how do we do it?" John asked hopefully.

"Just tell me about him so maybe I'll get a sense of where to start looking."

"Well, there was this guy at school. He was a grade behind me, so I never really got to talk to him that much. But he really seemed nice. I always kind of thought that someday we'd get a chance to talk and get to know each other." John said distantly. "But last summer he drowned. So I was wondering if you could help me find him so I can find out what happened to him."

John paused for a moment to see if his companion had any questions. When it was apparent that he didn't, John continued, "I guess I'd just like to know if he went up... or down. And maybe, if he's here in between like I am, we'd finally get to know each other. Even though I never got to know him that well, I always had the feeling that, if we got the chance, we'd be really good friends."

"What was his name?" The hooded figure asked slowly.

"Billy. Billy Hobson." John said hopefully.

John watched his companion and waited for him to say or do something.

Without being able to see his face, there were none of the usual visual cues that he was accustomed to reading.

Finally his companion brought his hands up to the sides of his hood, then slowly pulled it back.

John froze at the sight before him and finally asked, "Billy? Is that really you?"

"Yeah. And I always thought we could be friends too. That's why, when I saw that you were going to have a close call with death, today, I volunteered to help you." Billy said quietly. "Sometimes, if

we can see the danger coming, we can intervene and give you another chance at life."

"Um, thanks. I guess it didn't work out that way, this time. Huh?" John asked weakly.

"No. I'm sorry. I had all my attention on that drink. I thought for sure that it was going to be the instrument of your death. I never even imagined that you'd choke to death on a chicken wing." Billy said with a pained smile.

John looked at Billy curiously, then finally realized what seemed off about him. "You're bigger than you were."

"Yeah. Your body here is formed by your self-image. I always wanted to be taller, so now I am." Billy said timidly.

"It looks good." John said with a sincere smile, then shyly asked, "So. What do you say? We're both here now. Do you think that we'll have time to get to know each other?"

"Is forever enough time?"

"Maybe. I'd like to find out." John said with a smile, then asked, "So what do I do now? Should I become a grim reaper so we can spend time together?"

"Well, we could do that if you wanted to." Billy said shyly, then quietly added, "Or maybe we could cross over."

"But I thought you said I couldn't cross over unless I had someone... you'd go with me?"

"My life didn't hold much more for me than yours did for you. When I arrived here, I thought that I'd be here forever, watching people, one after another, moving on to something that I could never have."

"How do we do it?" John asked cautiously.

"Are you sure you want to try?" Billy asked slowly.

"Yeah. I think I am. There's nothing for me here, so I'm ready to go." John said with a level of certainty that surprised even him.

Billy looked at John appraisingly for a moment, then offered his hand.

"But I thought you said that you have to go with a loved one." John whispered, with doubt beginning to infiltrate his expression.

Billy nodded, still holding his hand out.

John looked at the hand for a moment longer, then grinned as he realized what Billy was really saying.

The last of his misgivings fled as he said, "Yeah. I think, me too."

Billy shyly smiled as he felt John's fingers entwine with his.

"What now?" John asked curiously.

"I don't know. Let's find out." Billy said as a brilliant tunnel of light formed before them.

The pair wore matching expressions of awe and excitement as they walked hand in hand into the infinite light.

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"What's got you so down?" Kara asked as she sat beside her boyfriend.

"I was just thinking about that kid, Jim." Marlon said as he stared at the floor.

"You didn't do anything wrong. Even the cops said so. It was just an accident." Kara soothed.

"I know, I just feel like... because of me, he's dead. If I hadn't invited him to the party, he'd still be alive." Marlon said despondently.

"You can't know that for sure. Maybe some things are meant to happen. I think you should try to accept that. Because things like this are still going to happen whether you accept it or not." Kara said seriously.

Marlon thought about it for a moment, then smiled as he said, "You're pretty smart. Don't let anyone ever tell you different."

Kara snuggled against Marlon, feeling completely at peace with the man she knew was her soul mate.

The End



Trick/Treat

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"Where are we?"

"My old neighborhood."

"Oh? I've never seen where you used to live. Which one is your house?"

"Actually, it's a few blocks from here. That's not why I brought you."

"Why are we here, then?"

"Why else? It's Halloween!"

"Yeah. So?"

"Maybe if you see what I brought with us, it'll make more sense."

"What is that? Fangs? Wait, are you saying that you want me to dress up like a vampire for Halloween?"

"No. Actually, the vampire costume is for me. You get to be a stylish and disturbingly hunky zombie."

"But you hate zombie movies."

"True. But do you think I haven't noticed how much you enjoy them? Go ahead and start getting ready. It'll be dark soon."

"Will you help me? There's no mirror here. I can't see what I'm doing."

"I'm always here for you. However you need me."

* * * * *

"So, what do we do now?"

"It's pretty simple. Ring the doorbell, wait for them to answer, then say 'Trick or treat'."

"Are you sure you really want to? I mean, aren't we too old for this?"

"Maybe. But if people think so, they can just not give us any candy."

"Then do we have to trick them?"

"Let's take that on a case by case basis."

"Did you bring any bags or anything for candy?"

"Only the best."

"Pumpkins? Wow. You really did go all out. How long have you been planning this?"

"It feels like forever. I can't believe it's finally here."

"Well, it is. So let's do it."

* * * * *

"S'Cuse me, Mister? Can me and my brother walk with you? He's scared 'cause it's getting dark."

"Sure. I think that two wolfmen would fit right in with me and my zombie friend."

"I'm a wookie, and Sammy's an Ewok."

"Oh! Of course. Have you been to this house yet?"

"No. We were just about to start, but Sammy was too scared to walk up to the door."

"That works out because we were just about to start, too. Do you want for one of us to ring the doorbell for you, Mr. Wookiee?"

"Sammy should do it. That way he'll figure out that he doesn't need to be scared of it. Besides, I'm only doing this for him."

"Are you too old for Halloween?"

"It's stupid."

"I don't think it's stupid. Halloween is the one night of the entire year when the spirits of the dead are free to walk the earth and be seen by mortal men."

"Really?"

"Yes. But the most wonderful thing is that instead of regular people being afraid and keeping their doors locked, they made it a celebration. Because everyone is dressed up, no one knows who anyone really is, so everyone treats each other the same."

"Are there really ghosts out here?"

"Maybe. But if there are, you don't have to worry about it because they just want to be your friends. They don't want to scare you or hurt you."

"I don't know. It sounds kinda made up to me."

"Let's not worry about it. Someone needs to ring the doorbell."

"Come here, Sammy. We're all here with you. We'll keep you safe."

* * * * *

"Trick or treat!"

"Oh my! Werewolves and zombies and vampires. I suppose we'd better give you some candy to ward off an evil attack."

"I'm a wookiee!"

"Here you go. A nice handful for each of you."

"Thank you, Mrs. McMahon."

"Happy Halloween. You boys be safe."

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"Trick or treat!"

"I would never celebrate this satanic holiday. Here, I have some pamphlets that I want you to read that tell all about God and his wonderful gift to the world, his son Jesus."

"Yeah. I already heard about all that. It sounds made up to me. You gonna give us candy or not."

"I would never promote a satanic holiday like this."

"Yeah? Well, I don't believe in Satan, either. I'm just in this for the candy."

"I'll pray for you."

"Knock yourself out."

* * * * *

"That was great, Mr. Wookie. Way to stand up for yourself!"

"So you're not mad at me for not believing in God?"

"Of course not. If you think all that religious stuff is made up, then you should be free to say that. I'd only be mad at someone if they tried to force me to believe something that I don't."

"Yeah. That sounds right."

"Come on, Mr. Wookie, let's get some more candy."

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"Happy Halloween. Please come in to my haunted house and discover what terrors await you."

"It's okay, Sammy. It's just pretend."

"No. It's scary. I don't want to."

"How about Mr. Wookie and I go see the haunted house and Mr. Ewok can stay out here with the zombie, where it's safe?"

"Is that okay with you?"

"Yeah. Go on. You shouldn't have to miss doing fun stuff because of me."

"Is that okay with you, John?"

"Sure. Mr. Ewok and I will be just fine out here. In fact, we may even sample a little bit of candy while you two are gone."

"Come on, Mr. Wookie. This looks like it's gonna be fun."

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"Don't worry. Your brother will be right back."

"I know. Thanks for not saying anything bad about our costumes. I know they look crappy, but Jody got them at the Goodwill and used the money he makes from mowing the old lady next door's lawn to get them."

"Your costumes look great to me. I was just thinking about monsters when I first saw you, or I would have guessed Wookie and Ewok first thing."

"Thanks."

"Are you having fun tonight?"

"Yeah. I didn't think we was gonna be able to go trick or treating, but Jody fixed it so we could."

"He seems like a really good brother."

"He's the best brother, ever!"

* * * * *

"How was the haunted house?"

"Mr. Vampire screamed like a little girl."

"Whoever came up with that was sick in the head."

"Come here, Billy. I'll keep you safe."

"Were you scared, Jody?"

"I jumped a couple times, but I didn't scream and cry."

"Hey! I didn't cry. I just screamed a little."

* * * * *

"Which way do you want to go next, Mr. Wookiee?"

"We don't know anyone off of this block."

"Where is your house, then? We'll walk you home."

"I'm old enough to do it myself. I'm almost nine!"

"Of course. But I thought Mr. Ewok might feel safer walking at night with a few more people tagging along."

"Yeah. Sammy's only six. That'd be good. Our house is right there."

"Why is it all dark? Isn't anyone home?"

"Our dad's home, but he works graveyard shift, so he's gotta sleep."

"What about your mom?"

"She's on afternoon shift right now. She won't be back until later."

"Are you guys going to be alright?"

"Yeah. We've just gotta be quiet so we don't wake up Dad. But he's there if we need something important."

"Alright, then. I guess this is goodbye. I was thinking, I don't really need all this candy. If you want it, you could have mine."

"Mine, too."

"Really? That'd be great! We hardly ever get to have candy. With yours, too, we can probably have enough to make it to Christmas."

"Go ahead, Mr. Wookie. Just be sure to share with Mr. Ewok."

"I will. I promise."

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"It's still early. What do you want to do now?"

"Watch out to see that the boys are going to be alright."

"You heard Mr. Wookie. Their dad's home. They'll be fine."

"Will they?"

"Oh. You're doing that thing where you think about more than the next five minutes, aren't you?"

"Their parents couldn't even give the boys a simple Halloween."

"Yeah. Mr. Ewok was telling me that Mr. Wookie used his own money to get them costumes at Goodwill."

"I'm sorry. I know this isn't any of our business. I just can't help but think that we should do something."

"Don't be sorry. That's one of the things I love about you. And, as far as doing something... well, you said you wanted us to see that the boys are going to be alright."

"Everything I've seen tells me that their family is barely living on the edge of abject poverty. One thing, even a minor thing, could devastate them. I can't stand to think of what Ewok and Wookiee would have to go through if that happened."

"I know. Now that you've made me stop and think about it, I'm one hundred percent in agreement with you. Let's help them."

"Are you sure? I mean, what I want to do..."

"I know exactly what you're talking about. And yes, I'm sure. When this night ends, Ewok and Wookiee won't be able to see or hear us anymore. But we'll still be able to help them. Every day we'll be there to watch over them and guide them to make the right decisions and we'll intervene when they need our help."

"And someday, hopefully many many years from now, when their days on this earth come to an end, we can be there with them to welcome them to what comes next and go with them when they cross over."

"Wow, you've got it all planned out, don't you? Are you really ready to commit to doing this for a human lifetime?"

"A human lifetime isn't even the blink of an eye compared to eternity."

"Good point. Let's go back home and let our friends know what we'll be doing, so they won't worry about us not being around."

"Yeah. We need to be sure to be back here before morning so we can start our jobs as guardian spirits."

"Thank you. I love you."

"I love you, too. Let's go."

The End



Halloween Happenings 3:

BLACK CATS

"I'll be back in a few minutes. Hang in there."

"You don't have to leave already do you?"

"I just have to go hunt down the doctor and ask him a question. I'll be right back."

"Okay. Maybe I'll take a little nap while you're gone."

"Do that. I'll be back before you know it."

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"He's so weak. Isn't there something we can do for him?"

"No. There's no way for us to intervene this time."

"But it doesn't have to be a miracle or anything. Isn't there some medical treatment that could help him? Give him a little more time?"

"I don't know. There might be. If Sammy was some rich guy's kid he might have a chance. But he isn't and he doesn't."

"Don't sugar coat it, Billy. Just say what you feel."

"Sammy's going to die."

* * * * *

Silence filled the room as the teenager slept with his guardian spirits watching over him.

"Who's there?"

Both spirits looked on in surprise as the boy in the bed sat up and looked directly at them.

"Don't worry. We're friends."

"You look familiar. I'm pretty sure I've seen you before but I don't remember where I met you."

"We've actually met a few times, but the most memorable time was when we went trick or treating with you and your brother."

"You're the vampire and the zombie?"

"That's us."

"What are you doing here, in my hospital room?"

"That's kind of difficult to explain." One began to say when the other interrupted, "While that would normally be true, this once, I think we can actually explain exactly who and what we are."

"Are you sure?" His companion asked worriedly.

"Yes." He responded, then turned to the boy in the bed and said, "My name is Billy and this is John. Back when you met us the first time, when I was a vampire and John was a zombie, we were ghosts walking the earthly plane on All Hallow's'si;½ Eve, taking the rare opportunity to visit the world we had left behind."

"So, you're saying that you're ghosts?" Sammy quietly asked.

"Yes. That's right. In fact, we tried to explain to you how things worked so you wouldn't be too afraid if you found out."

"You said that on Halloween, the ghosts can physically walk in the world of the living... but that they aren't mean. They don't want to hurt anyone."

"Yes. That's exactly right."

"It's Halloween, isn't it?"

"That's right, Sammy. What with everything else going on right now, I didn't think that you remembered." Billy said frankly.

"You know my name?"

"Of course. That night that we met, John and I decided to become your guardian spirits. We've remained on the earthly plane, hidden from sight, ever since." Billy carefully explained.

"So all those weird things that happened? That was you?" Sammy asked slowly.

"Every now and then, when we saw something dangerous in your path, we either diverted you or did something to stop it." John quietly admitted.

"So when Jody started saying that I had a guardian angel watching over me... he was right?" Sammy asked with a smile.

"More or less." Billy said warmly.

"Why are you here now? Why are you telling me this?" Sammy asked anxiously.

"I think you already know that." Billy said grimly.

"The leukemia... it's been getting worse and worse..." Sammy said as he fought to contain his tears.

"That's right. It's past the point where anything more can be done." Billy said gently.

"No. That's not true." John interrupted.

Both Sammy and Billy looked at him with question.

"There may not be anything more that we can do to save your physical body, but that doesn't mean that there's nothing that we can do." John said firmly.

"I don't see what you're getting at." Billy said honestly.

"Do you know of some way to make me better?" Sammy asked uncertainly.

"Sammy... Mr. Ewok." John corrected with a pained smile, "What I'm trying to tell you is that even though you may not be able to choose 'if' you're going to die, you can still choose 'how'."

"He's right. Not everyone has the chance to prepare. You can decide what's most important and see to that before it's too late." Billy confirmed.

"All that's important is Jody. It's going to kill him. He's spent his whole life trying to take care of me."

"What do you want to tell him before you go? What's going to bring him the most peace when you're gone?" John gently asked.

"I don't know... I've told him that I love him. I've told him that almost every day of our lives. I don't know what more to say." Sammy said honestly.

"Maybe tell him that you don't blame him for the way things turned out." Billy suggested.

"I got leukemia, that's not his fault. That's no one's fault. I can't even blame it on my mom and dad."

"While it's true that this isn't Jody's fault, it still might help him to hear from you that you don't blame him and that everything he did for you was enough." John explained.

"Do you know when... you know... I'm going to... go?" Sammy asked haltingly.

"How do you feel?" Billy asked in nearly a whisper.

"Okay... actually, I don't feel anything. It's not hurting. I don't feel tired." Sammy said in rising astonishment.

"You passed away just after your brother stepped out of the room." Billy said regretfully.

"But you said that I still had time, that I could tell Jody that it's not his fault." Sammy said in turmoil.

"You can." Billy assured him.

"It's Halloween. On this night, the spirits of the dead can walk among the living." John quietly provided.

"So I can tell Jody all the stuff that I want to?"

"That's right. You tell him everything that you need to tell him. When you're done, we'll take you to what's next."

"What's that?" Sammy asked cautiously.

"You don't have to worry about that right now. Just spend time with your brother and do your best to give him what he'll need in the days and weeks to come." Billy said in his gentle but firm way.

"Just know that when you're done, we'll be here to help you. You're not going to have to face this alone." John assured him.

"Thanks..." Sammy began to say as the hospital room door suddenly opened.

"You're awake!" Jody said with surprise.

"Yeah." Sammy confirmed as he glanced to where John and Billy had been standing a moment before, only to find empty air.

"I asked the doctor and he said that you could have a little candy corn, if you wanted." Jody said encouragingly.

"Sit down, Jody. There's something important I need to tell you." Sammy said as he rested back in the bed, feeling the weight of his body, barely hanging off of him.

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"Do you think it was enough?"

"It's going to have to be."

"What if he tells Jody about us? Is that going to get us into trouble?"

"The ranting of a dying boy in his last moments... probably not. But I trust Sammy not to tell."

"Shouldn't we be in there with them?"

"No. There are certain landmark events that Sammy has to handle on his own or they'll have no meaning. This is one of them. We gave our advice, but the rest is up to him."

"This could take some time. Is there anything else you want to do, I mean, since it's Halloween."

"No. There really isn't anything in the world that interests me. How about you?"

"Not really. I thought about checking in on my mom and dad, but all that ever does is stir up old feelings that are best left in the past."

"Yes. I feel the same way about mine. I'm glad you're finally able to let it go."

"I guess that now it's going to be the three of us, watching over Jody."

"It could be. That all depends on the decisions that Sammy makes."

"What if he wants to watch over Jody all by himself?"

"Then we'll abide by his decision."

"I've never once regretted being their guardian spirit. I've never wanted for it to end."

"I know. Don't worry about it. I doubt that Sammy is going to ask us to leave."

"I feel like we should be in there."

"It's awfully quiet. We should probably check on them."

* * * * *

As they drifted into the room, they saw the older brother holding the body of the younger and crying as the spirit form of Sammy silently watched.

"How did it go?" John quietly asked.

"I said what I needed to say." Sammy said in anguish.

"No matter what happens next, he's not going to be left alone. We've sworn to watch after you and your brother and that's what we plan to do." Billy said firmly.

"I told him that I'd be watching over him from the afterlife. I can really do that, I mean, since you're here, I can do that too, can't I?" Sammy asked desperately.

"Of course you can..." John began to say, but was interrupted by Jody.

"I'm going to call the doctor now. Don't worry. I got what you were saying. I'm going to be alright. I promise." Jody said as he finally released the body of his younger brother.

"Let's give your brother some time to attend to things and we'll check in on him again in a little while. Right now, you're going to have a few decisions to make." Billy carefully explained.

"Actually, why don't I stay here with Jody while you guys take care of that?" John asked gently.

"I don't want to leave Jody." Sammy immediately complained.

"Don't worry. I'll keep an eye on him. He'll be here once you've decided what you're going to do." John said gently.

"Do you promise that I'll get to see Jody again?" Sammy cautiously asked.

"Yes. If you want, you can choose to stay with him forever."