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Costumes

COSTUMES

by

Ryder W. Miller

The three children were reluctant, but Chad Everett, the father, convinced them to go to the costume store that evening. It was a cool evening and slightly windy, but there was no humidity or threat of rain. They walked down the dimly lit streets near their house on their way the main drag where Tricksters Costume Store was.

Tricksters was open late that evening because of the Halloween season. Halloween was only a week away, but it was mid-evening and the store would not be overcrowded with people because most would be at dinner.

"I would rather spend the money on cookies. Rather than a costume you can buy me cookies for a whole month?" asked young Pierre.

"I want a haircut instead," said the blonde pre-debutante Betty.

"I want roller skates or a cool skateboard," said teenage Frank.

"Your mother told me that we will be celebrating Halloween this year. We will all need to make some sacrifices to keep our home a happy home," said Chad.

They had not spent much time in the store when a young woman in a black dress asked if she could be of assistance. She was young but older than Betty and the other kids, with black hair and red lipstick. Her hair was tied back and she sounded like she was from The South.

"We have the chain store costumes in the stands in the middle here," she said.

"Can we get ice cream for dessert?" asked Pierre interrupting her.

"I only have so much money. We need to buy the costumes first," said Chad to Pierre.

The lady smiled, "In the back we have hand made costumes."

"This is a bit ghoulish for me," said Betty.

"Everybody already knows who I am going to be," said Frank.

"Frank is going to be Frankenstein," said Pierre laughing.

"Frankenstein can be cool. There are a lot of Frankenstein costumes," said the store lady.

"Here let me show you the costumes in the back. These were homemade or at least not mass produced," she continued.

The family followed her, but Betty and Pierre walked slowly and reluctantly.

"Here is Madam Trickster's own brand. Your Halloween colleagues may be jealous that you have not brought the chain store brands, but for the fashionable dresser these will set you apart."

Pulling the dress off the rack and talking to Betty she said, "You will be fetching in this dress."

Betty was shy and looked at Chad somewhat uncomfortably. She smiled and took the dress to see if it would fit her. The dress was open and not too tight on the chest. There was also ornate stitching in black. In a pocket on the side there were a set of plastic vampire teeth and a small vial of "blood".

"Men will think twice about saying no to you in that dress. If your hair was also black you would be unstoppable. Your

complexion is fine, but you will also need to wear black shoes.”

Betty was now smiling. Chad reached over to look at the price tag. He grimaced slightly but maintained his composure.

The lady smiled and started talking to Pierre.

“And for you there is the wild man werewolf look. You will not need to buy a costume. Just some old ripped clothes will do, and you do not need to comb your hair. Here is a mask?”

Pierre took the ghastly mask from her and after looking at it put it on his face. He made a fast shrug towards Frank who didn't budge, but laughed instead.

The eyes were highlighted by the mask which was made of sturdy materials. The mask was a little big for Pierre, but there was string that would enable it to be tied around his head. Pierre looked at it closely and was surprised to find that he was smiling.

“And now for you, and is it really Frank?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Frankenstein sometimes wore a suit, but he was green in complexion. Here is the Frankenstein package and here is the suit,” she said pulling it off the rack.

Frank was impressed by the weight of the suit.

“I can also wear this at funerals,” Frank said with a smile.

Chad looked at the price and grudgingly smiled.

“And for you?” the Shopkeeper said to Chad.

“I have something at home. Just for them today.”

The shopkeeper looked slightly annoyed, but she smiled instead.

“Are you all satisfied?”

“Can we get ice cream dad?” said Pierre.

The shopkeeper smiled and said, “We have some candy at the counter.

Pierre and Frank smiled.

Chad led the way to the counter to pay for the costumes.

“I will have to pay by check,” he said.

“We usually do not like to do business by check. Do you have a credit card?”

“I don't actually.”

She now looked annoyed, but said “Okay.”

At the counter she now was smiling again and she gave Frank and Pierre some candy.

“You will be spectacular as a vampire. You will be ghastly as a werewolf. You will be intimidating as a Frankenstein,” she said and then looked at the father.

In the spotlight he said “I will be a pirate and my wife a witch queen.”

She smiled, and then smiled again when Chad handed her the check.

Chad did not buy them ice cream that night and they walked quietly back through the dark streets. The children were excited about having the new costumes. They were also a little nervous about the week ahead of them. They preferred to ignore this season, but mom wanted them to participate this year.

When they got home there was dinner on the table. Jody had baked a chicken and prepared sweet potatoes, salad, and pumpkin pie. The windows were open and there was a breeze in the house.

“Thank you for dinner,” Chad said as he sat down at the table.

Jody seemed pleased as he looked at the costumes they had brought home.

“Madam Tricksters,” Jody said with a smile.

“Yes. And I will be pirate again and you a witch,” said Chad.

“Okay. I am actually getting better at being a witch. I have had some practice,” Jody said with a smile.

“You sure have and so has your cooking,” said Chad.

“Baked chicken again? Why can't we have hamburgers,” said Frank.

“Is there ice cream for the pumpkin pie?” asked Pierre.

“My teacher at school said to never cook more than your share for a man,” said Betty.

Jody was now smirking.

“You leave your mother alone now. She just cooked a big meal for us. Eat it like you enjoy it,” said Chad.

After dinner Chad helped in the kitchen with the dishes. Talking to Jody he said, “You know we have to give them chores. That would make them more appreciative.”

“Yes. When they are a little older,” said Jody.

“I think they are old enough to do some of the cleaning around here. Betty can help with the cooking, and Frank can do some of the housework. Pierre is a little young.”

“Let's wait until after Halloween.”

“Okay, we will tell them then.”

As Halloween approached, the Everetts tried to proceed into the season as they would have otherwise. Betty was extra studious and Frank spent extra time playing sports. Pierre, the one in the family with the sweet tooth, was on the lookout for extra candy. Their fellow students were already wearing costumes a few days before Halloween, but the Everett children were not very interested in the holiday. It actually took some prodding on the part of Jody to get them to wear their costumes to school on Halloween.

“We paid good money for those costumes,” said Jody who was already dressed like a witch when they woke that morning.

Jody reached down and made another tear in Pierre's shirt. Jody and Pierre smiled and Pierre put on the mask. “Here are some earrings to go with your dress and use extra make up today. Red lips to say that you want some blood.”

Betty was reluctant and shy, but she did as told.

“Frankenstein was green, put on the green makeup Frank,” said Jody.

Before they were ready to go to school, Chad walked down the stairs in a pirate costume.

“How are you mates and laddies,” he said to the family.

“You run on now. You will be late for school,” said Jody.

“There will be candy later?” asked Pierre.

“Only if you wear the costume. And you Betty could probably practice having a boyfriend for a day. And Frankenstein, you can probably settle some old scores,” Jody said not quite seriously.

“Oh Mom,” Betty said as they walked out the door.

Many of the students and some of the teachers were also in costumes that day, but most at the school could recognize who was behind their costume. Frank seemed older and maybe ready to have a girlfriend on the cheerleading squad. Betty was shy and anxious, but a number of the boys took extra notice of her. There was candy in some of the classrooms and Pierre took more than his share so he would have savings for the rest of the fall.

The day was going well. Most people going through the motions of being at school, but when the school day ended the change occurred for the Everett children. It would be an afternoon like none other, an afternoon they would never forget. There was an afternoon Halloween party at the school at the end of the school day, and the Everett children decided to explore.

Betty found herself unusually hungry and thirsty, thirsty like she had never been before. She desired the taste of salt and liquids. The hunger subsumed her, and she spent much of the afternoon with a longing she never had before. She decided to talk

with Jock who was wearing his football costume that day. He was sitting alone eating food privately. Jock was surprised when she sat next to him uninvited and on his side to the table.

"Hello Betty," he said uncomfortably.

Betty smiled and drank some of her grape juice with a disappointed look on her face.

"Would you do a girl a favor," Betty whispered into Jock's ear.

"Okay."

When Jock started eating again Betty licked his neck. Jock smiled. Betty then bit into Jock's neck and he smile at first, and then backed off angry.

"What the hell to do you think you are doing? I have a girlfriend. If she catches me with a hickey we are done for."

Jock touched his neck and looked at his hand, "I am bleeding. You bit me. You are taking Halloween too seriously."

Jock reached down and grabbed the rest of his sandwich. He then glowered at Betty and walked away angry.

"You are crazy," he said.

Betty felt dejected and didn't feel comfortable finding someone else to bite. She usually would laugh about such things, but today she found herself melancholy. Everybody seemed so immature. She decided not to stay at the after school Halloween party for too long. She would go home and call it an early evening. What she needed was a good meal. A good meal would make her feel better. The juice was not doing it for her. The blood was actually delicious, but she did not want to take Halloween too seriously.

While most to the students were in the courtyard, Pierre got caught taking too much candy in one of the classrooms. A teacher stopped him.

"That will have to do for the rest of the class as well," she said.

"It was just sitting there. Nobody took any," said Pierre taking his hands out of his pockets where he put the candy.

"Who is in there?" asked the teacher.

"Why it is me. It is me Pierre."

"Take your mask off."

Pierre tried, but mask was stuck on his face. Something had changed. The mask had changed the features on his face. He tried to shake it off, but couldn't.

"I have to go," Pierre said and ran away. The teacher started laughing.

Pierre was now worried and did not know what to do. What if he could never take this mask off? What if he was stuck being a werewolf his whole life? Werewolves only came out on the nights of the full moon, and he may be stuck looking like this every day. As he ran through the school people quickly got out of his way. He was surprised to hear himself howling like a wolf. He had now gotten far enough away from the teacher where he could walk again. He decided to take a look in the bathroom mirrors. He sure looked ugly in the mask, but it was attached to his face and he could not take it off. Actually it seemed as if the mask had merged with his face.

Pierre started crying in fear and decided he would go back to the store with dad and get their money back. He had not agreed to be a werewolf for life. He was angry and despite his small size people were now afraid of him. Pierre did not want to talk with the school nurse. He would be able to get help from his parents when he got home.

Frank was having fun as Frankenstein. He seemed bigger and stronger, more intimidating in his Frankenstein suit. His skin was green, he had a crack in his head, and electricity plugs on his neck. There was a score he wanted to settle today.

Some of the guys on the tennis team had gotten too friendly with him and the other members of the soccer team. The tennis

team captain, Fred, had called him “A doo doo shit.” He was only joking, but Frank had not taken it very well.

He found Fred with a few of his friends at a table eating pizza. Fred and his friends were wearing a buccaneer outfits.

“How are you doing, lad, or should I say monster?” Fred said.

“I challenge you to a wrestling match,” said Frank, angrily.

“Tennis is our game here. You have found the wrong crowd, you monster, you,” he said.

His friends started laughing.

Frank felt emotions running through him that he had never felt before. He was full of rage and grabbed a drink off the table and threw it on Fred. Fred and his friends were angry and attacked him. Frank realized that they would have strong arms being tennis players and all, but they were no match for Frank that day. The first one to approach Frank was kicked between the legs. The second Frank picked up and threw. Then Fred rushed him to tackle him, but Frank side-stepped and tripped him.

There was a girl watching who yelled for them to stop. All three of Frank's adversaries were on the floor, and Frank made some distance from them.

“You better go home or you will be in trouble,” the girl yelled.

The three stood up now but did not approach Frank.

“You think some girl is going to dress up looking like the bride of Frankenstein for you. You need to learn to take a joke, and if you don't go home I am going to tell the teachers. Frankenstein learned that he did not belong. He did not fit in. You should read the book,” the girl yelled. She was not in a costume and Frank had never met her before.

Frank nodded and walked away.

“You better not try to do this to us again,” Fred yelled.

Frankenstein laughed.

“Be quiet or we may have to fight him again,” said one of Fred's friends.

Frankenstein smiled to himself, but then he was sad. He had ruined his chance with the girl who had chased him away. Most of the students shunned him when he walked away from the school. He would have to walk on the side of the road all the way home. He then realized that he had changed. He was much stronger than he ever was and there was a strange smell he now exuded. Frank got nervous when he could not wash off the green make-up. What if he was stuck being like this? Frank decided he needed some parental advice.

Betty was the first home. Frank met Pierre on the road. The two brothers decided to go to the store with dad to get their money back. When the two brothers got home Betty was crying.

“Something has come over me,” she said sobbing.

“Us too,” said Frank.

They decided to wait at home for the parents. It was getting dark and the parents would be home from work soon.

Frank and Betty decided to make a meal.

“I want my barbecue steak medium rare,” Betty said.

Pierre put all the candy he collected in a bowl.

“I have enough for all of us,” Pierre said.

The parents arrived together. They had had a happy hour drink at the bar that night. When Jody arrived she could immediately sense that the children were upset. Chad thanked them for cooking dinner.

“We are monsters mom. These costumes made us into monsters. I really want to drink blood and I am afraid to go out in the daylight again,” Betty said.

“I cannot take this mask off. I don't want to look like the werewolf every day of the month. Frank is permanently green,” said Pierre.

“And extra strong, but I reek. Nobody is going to want to have anything to do with me like this,” Frank said.

Chad was unsure what to say but he looked concerned.

“It serves you right. You were not the best of kids. You were always sort of like monsters,” said Jody.

She looked angry then said, “Do you think it is easy being a parent?”

Pierre growled softly.

“I didn't really mean it. Maybe it will wear off tomorrow.”

The Everetts decided not to go Trick or Treating that evening. Pierre had lost his taste for candy. Betty ate her steak bloody. Frank used deodorant. They all sat down to watch a horror movie and then went to sleep early that evening. They did not know what they would do if they did not turn back to normal the next morning. But luckily in the morning the children were normal again, and they felt repentant. That was one of the scariest Halloweens of their lives.

“Madam Tricksters,” Jody beamed over breakfast.

The Sunset

by

Joel Zartman

A cloud rears up against the setting sun
with glory rimmed and lighted from within
with patches here and veins where it wears thin,
the fire making light and water one.

A fountain plays below the blazing cloud,
its waters rising luminescent white
send sparks of shooting spray in arching flight—
the fountain's joy a joy the sunlight has allowed.

Below the cloud, a silhouetted tree
waves shapes in sunset's mystical, light breeze;
a dust of gold envelops it in seas
of unconditional eternity.

The moment fades out of the west: the cloud
is grey, the tree is dim, the fountain bowed