

BE AFRAID . . . BE VERY AFRAID!



GOING HOME

A spooky tale for Halloween

TOM GOYMOUR

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A DARK TALE FOR HALLOWEEN

BY

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If you venture out on halloween be careful what you wish for. Things might not turn out the way you have been expecting. In fact, I dare you. At the very least, be on your guard, and be afraid . . . be very afraid.

If only I had listened and followed my instincts then I wouldn't be here in this position and I wouldn't be telling you this story.

* * * * *

GOING HOME

Apart from the complete darkness, the thing that hit me most was the sudden quiet, the almost absolute silence that surrounded me. The door had of course now clunked shut behind me, and immediately I sensed that I wasn't alone. My mouth was dry and my breath weak, as I was drawn towards the tiny chink of light coming from the slightly open doorway somewhere across the other side of what seemed to be an old hallway. As I pushed against a hard, battered oak panel it gently parted company with its frame – as if it was meant to fall away to reveal something. I could now see what was in front of me quite clearly, and I soon knew that I was welcome.

If you dare to go out into the dark tonight, or any night in quest of adventure, in search of satisfying that deep desire within that we all have to be excited by the unknown, then be aware, be very aware. Things can happen - sometimes very strange things when we least expect them. I did not see this coming, and I doubt if you will either.

It all started with a phone call my mother received yesterday evening, October 30th:

She took the call. I could tell by the manner of her voice she was speaking to someone that she knew but perhaps hadn't seen for a long time, she didn't tell me who it was until this morning. Dad is away on business, so she rang him to tell him about Andrew - this guy who was apparently popping over to see us tomorrow. Dad sounded quite pleased, so everything seemed fine. It's just a pity he wasn't able to make it back home in time for tonight!

So, Uncle Andrew (whom I'd never actually met) came over, and I was introduced to him shortly before the boys came over. When I was a kid I remember watching this creepy TV show where the host would always large up to the camera and warn us to '*expect the unexpected*'. We certainly never really expected such an old

guy to be so enthusiastic about going out with us youngsters on our planned halloween jaunt. It was weird, but cool. His features reminded me more than a little of Albert Einstein, with his expression permanently quizzical, and his whisky grey hair arranged somewhat strangely. My mates Ricky and Paul took to him right away, they said he was the ideal 'scary old git' to tag along with on halloween. Kirsty wasn't so keen though, she said he gave her the creeps.

The boys arrived around 5.00. Mum had kindly offered them tea and we all sat and had hot dogs with mum and Andrew around our kitchen table.

"I'll do yo all some hot soup when you get back." she said. "That will be something to look forward too!" Paul and Ricky grinned, I wasn't sure exactly what they were thinking to that. I wasn't sure either what uncle Andrew was thinking, he seemed to hold this permanent expression of being just about to break into a smile and say something, but he rarely joined the conversation, in fact, generally he said very little.

We dressed up quite enthusiastically. It was coats and scarves tonight as well as the costumes we'd prepared. The wind carried a distinct chill. Kirsty arrived and we set off in our little group of five - complete with masks, a pumpkin-shaped lantern and a few poorly practised pranks. Paul was going to do his 'Dracula' impression - he had some sound effect gismo to activate when he talked. Kirsty had her face painted a ghostly white and Ricky wore a zombie mask (it suited him I thought.) Uncle Andrew held the pumpkin lantern aloft as we started off down the street.

The night was quite welcoming, many other groups of youngsters were scattered throughout the vicinity doing much the same as ourselves. There were teenagers in their two's and three's like us, mums and dads with their smaller offspring, and occasionally the familiar chant of '*Trick or treat*' would be brought to us by distant vibrations riding on the early evening breeze. We were given many sweets in appreciation of our efforts as we trudged from house to house. At this point Andrew seemed to be leading us, which was fine by me as no one else showed any interested in doing so. We've only lived here a few months - some of these places I

didn't actually know!

The evening was looking to be an enjoyable prospect. Kirsty looked spookily attractive with her white heavily marked face paint. Her sister was doing A-level art and had spent over an hour contributing to the effort of authenticity for the evening prior to her coming out. People were generous; and so, the costumes, Uncle Andrew with his lantern, and the promise of refreshments on our return, all contributed towards forming a pleasant and authentic atmosphere.

We shared out the sweets as I pulled at the knocker to yet another cosy dwelling.

Then something a bit odd happened . . . Kirsty got invited in! A woman answered the door and clearly claimed to know our friend who suddenly seemed a little uneasy about something the woman had just whispered to her. She called her husband to the door, they said nothing to us, but then, Kirsty turned and said;

"I won't be a minute. . ." . . . the door just shut with Kirsty the other side of it. We waited, we knocked again, but after a minute or two Uncle Andrew said it was best just to leave her be and move on. Ricky and Paul started blaming her, saying they could tell she was getting freaked out and stuff, and she had probably asked to go in because she was scared and she knew the couple. They reckoned she'd probably planned it right from the start and didn't want to lose face with the rest of us. All the same, I was slightly uncomfortable about it. I was beginning to look forward to going home . . . and my hot soup.

We turned into a dark alley, and immediately a black cat brushed in front of us. It startled Paul, but Uncle Andrew let out an exclamation of 'good luck!' as he pointed to where the animal, so fleet of foot, had just been. He was making the point of the superstition whereby good luck is supposed to surround the action of a black cat crossing one's path!

He led us on, striding ahead still holding the lantern aloft. Paul and Ricky were loving it:

"Man, this is cool" said Ricky starting to let out indiscriminate bursts of spooky sounds as he knew that right at that moment in the unlit alley-way, no one other

than ourselves was really listening.

"Follow me boys" Uncle Andrew called out, and that kind of startled me a bit. Ricky quickly ceased his aimless wails, and Dracula, Zombie and Einstein plundered on into the night. We came out onto the roadway at the end of the cut and both Ricky and Paul seemed to freeze, as if they weren't up for going any further.

"Come on," I said, "the old guy knows where." I gestured towards Uncle Andrew who now seemed to be holding the glowing orange sphere above his head with just a little more urgency.

"I don't know, I reckon we should be getting back soon." began Paul.

Ricky had gone a little quiet as well. I wanted to talk to them both but I didn't get the

chance right then, as the old man had taken a left and was moving with intent towards the outskirts of the village. Why were they sceptical? was it something he'd said? - there certainly hadn't been much of that!

Suddenly, came a noise! Voices, people - more than one. Paul and I paused as we looked back. We called ahead to the others but there was now a thirty metre gap between our two groups and they didn't hear our cries.

A crowd of creatures were creeping callously towards us, calling out their curses vehemently, capitulating with one phrase called in unison:

"Come, stay with us."

My heart skipped a beat and my throat started to dry up. I wanted to shout back but I couldn't. Boy, was I ready now for that hot soup waiting for me. Right then I longed to be just going home.

I allowed myself to lose focus for just that split second as the disfigured collection of green, brown, grey and white humanoid shapes descended upon us. They surrounded Paul, the conversations were low key and private. I seemed to be excluded, but he had become one of them. It was then that I realised they were just boys like us - dressed up. Why so startling? after all it is halloween!

I turned and called aloud to Ricky and the old man who were now way up

ahead.

"Hey, you guys, hang on will you?"

I turned back to face the mob, but I was already too late,

"Hey, wait!" I shouted out in protest, but in an instant Paul was gone. I thought I heard him call out in distress, but it was hopeless, there were too many of them, he'd been lured away and I never saw him again. He'd been taken.

Now, isolated, I panicked. The other two were a long way ahead. It was time to run. Things had started so well, but now the plan had to rapidly change. I thought of mum waiting at home with the hot soup. I thought too of dad, if he'd made it back from his business trip he would probably have come along with us, and maybe now, at this moment, I would not be alone. Two of my mates had gone in what seemed an untimely fashion, and the two others were ahead of me, apparently oblivious to what had taken place behind them.

I thought of going home. I ran on down the road -the only road I could take - the road that was to lead me to where I was to find some answers, only, right then I had no idea how where or when!

Shimmering shafts of light shone from the street lamps all around, and the very act of running caused a strobe effect in my vision as I tried to shield my eyes. Now, everything was silent, there were no cars, no cries, no cats wailing distantly, just the sound of my own breathing as I panted ever closer to Ricky and the old man.

The man with the pumpkin lantern strode on. I caught up and blurted out breathlessly, trying to explain to them both what had happened to Paul, but my words fell on deaf ears.

"All will be as all will be" said the old scraggy, grey-haired figure, seeming quite unconcerned. Ricky was shaking, but I finally managed to get his full attention. He started to tell me of his fears about where we might be heading, where Uncle Andrew seemed to be leading us, and what he knew of the stories people in the village had whispered in the past. He started to speak to me in low garbled tones so as the figure in front would not get wind of what he was saying . . . but he was not

able to finish his story . . . and I was not able to help him.

Now, there were a few large houses, mostly old, scattered to our left and right as we approached the very edge of the village. The low stone wall in front of us betrayed the morbid treasures it enclosed; we were being taken through the graveyard. A waning moon gave out a brilliance that seemed to be guiding us, but for Ricky it was all too much. His zombie eyes darted from left to right as the creased folds on the mask that covered his face seemed suddenly real with the incandescent illumination from above. He began to run, screaming as he went . . .

"No, no, go. Get away."

I yelled after the swerving form as it negotiated the gravestones that lay before it.

"Ricky come back!" I called, but I knew it was hopeless. Something had made Ricky very, very scared, and now it seemed the graveyard had claimed him.

I stood for a moment helplessly amongst the cold stone and the long grass. Mist swirled gently around me as I watched my exhaled breath mix in and become part of the night – this very night . . . *tonight*.

Here I was, scared senseless in the middle of a graveyard on halloween. Three of my friends had gone and as of now I knew not why. All I knew was that I was pretty damn scared . . . and now we were down to two!

'Trick or treat' seemed a distant cry, the likes of which I'd not heard for some twenty minutes or so since we had deviated from the main street. I was not to hear those words again.

What had happened? why had my friends suddenly disappeared? Hell, I didn't believe in all that Halloween crap . . . I mean, not really. My mum's side of the family were devout Catholics . . . at least I'd always thought so anyway. All Hallows day - that's what it is really suppose to be - all the Saints are supposed to be remembered on October 31st. Somehow the evening was going very wrong for me, right then I wondered how I would be remembered!

The figure up in front holding the pumpkin lantern had stopped. He was calling me forward. Suddenly my mind conjured up an image it was dream-like:

'Lights will guide you home' echoed in my head - words from the song by 'Coldplay', and for a moment, just for that moment I really believed he could help me. I moved closer to the silent beckoning figure. I watched the gaze of his steely eyes as he moved the pumpkin lantern away from his face, and without a word, pointed across the street. At the same time he smiled, his whisky grey hair just slightly disturbed by the wind. I looked, and I had to go. Were we going home now?

He was calling me to walk towards the large building the other side of the road. I was terrified but it seemed so right, as if it was where I had to be . . . right now!

I walked slowly passed the strange figure, and, with a deep breath headed towards the dark, solemn ancient and surely uninhabited property stretching before me. It was as if it were there just for me, like there was no escaping it - whichever way I tried to head I would surely enter that building, I knew it.

As I passed through the gateway, I shuddered as my eyes struggled to focus upon the stone carved plaque that bore a name . . .

'Mesmeriano' I read to myself. I felt a deep pang in the pit of my empty stomach, and suddenly I had that yearning out of nowhere again - how I wanted that hot soup right now! How much I wanted to be home.

Ancient leaves brushed by my face, and there was a smell . . . yes, that smell of damp wood, rotten and decayed. I faced the large wooden door that stood before me covered with strands of dangling ivy that entwined their way across the pitted panels. The door was partially open and my hand reached out to push it open a little further - I couldn't stop myself. I looked back over my shoulder and I could still just see him - the faint figure that stood gazing towards me, with lantern still held aloft as if he was waiting for the moment . . . that moment when he could be sure that I was inside. For a second or two I could hardly catch my breath, my heart was pounding. And, then, as I stared . . . he vanished from view . . . I stumbled forward and all around me became suddenly dark and still. There was a single sound, just that one sound of a door clunking shut behind me. I was alone inside that old place.

My mind was swimming, enveloped in fear. I couldn't scrape together any logical thoughts for a few seconds, but what happened next, nothing could have prepared me for.

I felt a vibration, and the bulge in my trouser pocket emitted a dim pulsating light.

'Of course' I thought, 'my mobile.' I took it from my pocket and read the text from Ricky . . . and that's when I realised why I was here:

"You gotta get away from the old man, some guy died in a house up there and that's where he's taking you - no one goes there - everyone in village knows - no one ever came out that's what they were saying - it's him . . . it's actually flipping him!"

For a moment I froze, then as I found myself there in the pitch black, with the the silence ever growing around me, pieces floated together in my mind, and I thought, had anyone *really* checked him out?

Deep down I knew . . . I haven't really got an Uncle Andrew!

So, I headed instinctively towards that chink of light coming from the crack of the door that stood slightly ajar. It was the moonlight, bathing a sacred room in swathes of secret light, it was drawing me in . . . and I *was* welcome.

On the moonlight wall of decaying pastry-like plaster, there was a picture, old and dirty, of a noble-looking gent of many decades past whom I thought for a second I recognised. Underneath there were some words. As I read them, the silence was broken as the wall spoke to me:

"We are now one, you will not leave,
This place is all you'll ever breathe.
Come, stay with us, and soon you'll see,
All will be, as all will be."

So I *was* going home, to where I was destined to be - just didn't ever think . . .

As I look now at the painting of that noble figure, I do think he reminds me more than just a little of Albert Einstein . . .

* * * * *

I hope you enjoyed reading this little tale as much as I did writing it.
I'd love to hear from you.

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The world is indeed a strange place, and unexplained things do happen
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