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1,924 words.

<Cursed Pumpkins>

by <Growing Desires>

## Chapter 1

The cold air swept between my legs; my “thermal leggings” were not quite enough to safeguard against the autumn breeze. I was dressed up for Halloween taking my nephew out trick or treating. It was a tradition that me and him started many years ago, now rushing around in the night bravely, he almost didn’t need me.

*Seven years old... Where does time go?*

In that time, I had finished school and was taking a gap year before I went to university and working two jobs just to keep myself on the road. The balance of life, I was quickly finding out, was a tough one.

*One more go around.* I told myself.

I was quite sad about it all, it was something I did look forward to, even if my friends weren’t into dressing up, I always made an effort for Carter. He appreciated it at the very least. This was our time.

This year he was dressed up as a werewolf, classic stuff. He had a fascination with them. Apparently, there was some new show where a kid could turn into a werewolf and save the day.

*What will they think of next?*

I however had also gone for a classic, the witch. I was dressed in a short skirt and a tight crop top. Admittedly it was meant to be warmer when I first chose this outfit. However, the weather

had taken a bit of a turn in the past few days.

*Cold snap... In October...*

The outfit was also to be repurposed for the party that I was going to tonight. Until then, it was Carter time.

“Trick or Treat” He yelled to the occupant of the house; the old lady almost jumped out of her skin.

So here I was, currently standing at the end of the drive to someone’s house, freezing my tits off. I couldn’t feel my legs, despite the “Thermal leggings” My midriff was numb, as were my arms and face. I watched my overly happy nephew run back from the door with his treat bag bouncing in the wind, almost tipping out.

“Julie! Julie! Look! The lady gave me three bars, she said she was closing for the night, she thought I should have them. She really liked my outfit” He proudly said, puffing his chest out.

“Of course, you are the coolest werewolf around here, I mean look at that craftsmanship. Someone really cool must’ve made that.” I placed a finger on my chin musing.

“Julie!” he groaned.

“What?”

“You made it!”

“Oh yeah!” I said, giving a dumb smile to him. Carter just laughed at my lame joke.

*Kids are great.*

I looked around and realised that we had gotten to the end of the street.

“Hey buddy, I think it is time we head back, Mum is probably wondering what took us so long. “

“Awh...” He frowned before looking around, “there has to be another place...” Carter groaned, looking around for any excuse to keep getting more sweets from strangers.

“I mean... There is one more.” I said with a grin on my face. “If you are up for it this year...”

The house in question was number 13, it was set back from the road, it had a huge surrounding plot of land, but it wasn't well maintained. The grass was overgrown, the house was a shambles. It might as well have been abandoned, except for a few things; There was someone living there, there were decorations on the gate and in the yard and there was a light on the porch.

"Oh... Umm..." Carter stammered.

"I mean, if you are too scared, we can go home."

He took a deep breath and grabbed my hand.

"Let's go."

He marched me to the gate and feeling that his bravado had dried up, I took charge and dragged him down the long pathway to the house. I must admit, it did give off a creepy vibe. The whole path was decorated with lots of Halloween looking decor, but none of it was store bought, it was all handmade. It added to the effect. The porch was littered in candles and jack-o-lanterns. Even with the wind, the flames never wavered.

"Julie... I'm scared..." Carter clutched my hand and walked close to my side.

"It's Okay bud, we will knock, get candy and be on our way."

Standing on the wooden porch, the large and imposing door stood before us, it was etched with lots of strange runes. I pushed Carter forward to knock, but he was too afraid. Lowering myself down, I crouched beside him, and we both knocked the door together.

***\*Knock, Knock, Knock\****

As we finished the final knock, the candles, which had been immune to the weather at this point, flickered. It made Carter yelp, and it did spook me. The metal handle started to slowly turn. I stood up and felt Carter's grip tighten. Slowly, the door creaked open. Slowly revealed to us was a short woman who looked incredibly old. Her eyes were dull, and her slow movements made me feel uneasy.

"Trick or treaters. I must admit, it has been a long time since anyone knocked on this door." Her voice was flat, devoid of life almost. "Good thing I am prepared every year." She said, turning

around to grab something from inside the house. Upon turning back around, I was surprised to see her holding a pumpkin.

I raised my eyebrow and looked at Carter, he was too fixated on the woman to notice the pumpkin before him. The old woman wasted no time and removed the top of the pumpkin, she had cut it out previously it would seem. Inside there were sweets.

“Oh, how cute, I never thought to use a pumpkin before.” I tried to add some light conversation to the eerie interaction.

The old woman looked at me and did nothing more.

*Alright then...*

“Go on Carter, grab one.” I pushed him forward.

He was so brave before, but now, he was trembling. I stepped forward and reached in for him, my hand rummaged around for a few seconds before I returned with a single lollipop for Carter.

“There you go bud.” I patted him on the head and placed the sweet in his bag. “Thank you very much.” I said to the woman who remained motionless in the doorway.

Carter turned and ran down the path, clearly still spooked. I watched him run to the end of the path, only stopping to turn and see if I was following him.

“Kids...” I said under my breath to nobody in particular.

“They are a blessing. You are so good for what you do each year Julie.”

I felt the hairs stand up all over my body.

*How did she know my name and was she really watching me each year?*

I turned back to the woman and saw an expression on her face for the first time. It was a smirk, evil and sinister. I took a step back out of instinct alone.

“Let me bless you...” She turned again, returning with two conjoined pumpkins, they were very small, each only about the size of a tennis ball, they were stuck together. “I know you crave attention from boys, these will help.”

“What the?”

I restrain myself from swearing, too freaked out, I take the pumpkin from her decrepit hands and start to walk down her path. “Thank you.” I reply out of courtesy.

Carter kept his eyes on me the whole time, peering from behind the wall surrounding the house.

“Oh, there is my brave little guy.” I tease.

“Julie, she was super freaky... I didn’t like her.”

“I know, she did seem a bit odd.” I admit.

“What did she give you?”

I hold up the pumpkins and we both inspect them for a few moments before we feel some raindrops land on our heads.

“Quick, back to mum’s house.” I tell Carter. He runs ahead, I jog and catch up, keeping his pace as we rush in before the rain comes and gets either of us drenched.

We burst through the door just in the nick of time and Carter runs into his bedroom to count his sweets. He did it every year, it was rather sweet how he hadn’t changed in so many years. I walked into the kitchen to meet my sister, Cassie. She was ten years older than me; she had Carter when I was thirteen, I think that is why me and him are so close. Cassie was a lovely mum, she had a nice house and a lovely husband, John. Everything was in place, they seemingly had life sorted out. It was always nice to see her, due to the age gap, she was more like a Mum to me than most sisters are to their younger siblings.

“Hey, Carter counting upstairs?” She guessed.

“Yeah, I think he might have broken his record this time.”

“Oh yeah? I guess that is going to be fun for me.” She jokes.

“Yeah, we went to number thirteen.”

Cassie froze. “Did Carter go...”

I nod. “Yeah... Why?” I nervously respond.

Tears fill Cassie's eyes. "Did he... Get a sweet from there."

I nod again.

Cassie runs out of the room, quickly scaling the stairs and bursting into his room. I follow behind and see Cassie rustling through the pile of sweets for anything out of the ordinary. That is when she sees the unmarked bar of chocolate. Cassie grabs it and breathes a huge sigh of relief.

"Carter, Mum needs this one, I'll get you three more to replace it, ok honey?" The whole ordeal was so quick that Carter was just dumbstruck. "Hun?"

"Why?"

"Never mind, you can have three though, how close does that put you to the record? This haul doesn't look very impressive." She teases him, taking his focus away from the bar she just took from him.

"What? Let me count, I was doing well until you stormed in here." He said with a serious childish tone.

"Me and Julie are going to leave, you get counting."

Cassie started to leave, and I followed her. When she passed me, she was cold, almost like she had just seen a ghost. We both remain silent until we get downstairs, sitting at the dining table Cassie lets out a few tears. I rest my hand on her palm.

"What was that all about?"

"Number thirteen is cursed Julie. That is why we don't go there." She said between sobs.

"Cursed? What are you talking about?"

"The woman living there is a witch or something, she never leaves anyone who enters her property, she tries to curse. This chocolate bar, it is cursed, I just know it."

"What are you on about? It is just a chocolate bar..." I replied to my sister.

"No. There have been stories, lots of them. Children, Men, Women. When they go on her property, they are changed when they come back... I just hope she didn't do anything to Carter."

Cassie begins to sob again.

“I’m sorry Cass...” I console her, confused and a bit panicked.

She can’t believe this crap...

“Look, let’s forget it, we got the bar, let’s just move on.”

As if on cue, Carter comes downstairs. “Mum! How many did you say you’d give me?”

“Three Carter.” Cassie said, wiping the tears away.

“New record!”

Carter rushes over to Cassie, he excitedly celebrates, and Cassie squeezes her son, whilst fighting back tears.

*Cursed... No way...*

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