

Random People

She watched and waited for a very long time, just as her parents had instructed. When she was finally certain nobody was watching, she dragged herself out from the small eight inch hole under the rock well in the overgrown backyard. The sagging roof and hole riddled porch of the house indicated the time it had been unloved and unused could be measured in years.

Finally standing upright, Mona was not much more than a silhouette in the crisp and still October night. The deathly smell of decaying leaves brought a smile to her face as she brushed off her purple tutu with massive grubby hands. Distant shrieks and laughter could be heard from some location on the other side of the house so she deftly made her way to the front corner for further inspection.

The street before her was alive with witches, goblins, and cowboys. One group would barely be out of someone's yard before another took their place. Dotted among them, parents waited along the street or even took the younger ones right to the door. No doubt they were trying to prevent a repeat of Two Years Prior.

Mona loved October thirty first. It was the only night of the year she could come out without putting on a costume. (Save for one of a pretty ballerina.) She enjoyed being around what she considered her peers, and was actually getting to recognize a few faces at this point. It was unfortunate she didn't get out the previous year, but with what had happened just a few years ago, Monas parents had agreed it was the best thing to do. Even this year had been uncertain. Mona's Ma had to convince her Da. And then

sell him on the fact she was ready to go on her own, unescorted. "She's almost eighty, dear. She can do this on her own. She won't be young forever."

Scanning around the yard, Mona realized she wasn't the only one observing the revellers. A well groomed orange tabby cat was ahead of her off to an angle. It was so preoccupied trying to make sense of the invasion of monsters and fairies, Mona was able to get thus far remaining undetected.

She inched towards the cat. Mona was very quiet.

The tabby realized a moment too late the high stakes game that was in play. With the survival instincts and reflexes of a thousand years, it arched and twitched so hard its collar came off, falling to the ground in the fray. It desperately tried to bite and claw its way to salvation. But it was too late. Mona's hands were far too quick and far too strong. The cat was crushed mid shriek and immediately went limp. Its eyes still open, now stared into nothingness. Its mouth too remained open, just enough to make one think it had something to say.

Mona turned the cat over and took a few hearty bites out of its stomach. The blood was warm and sweet as it ran down her chin. She then threw the remains into her treat bag. She wiped her bloody mouth on her arm and walked towards the street.

Once there, she scanned left and right trying to decide which way to go. Turning, she almost got mowed down by a fireman that seemed to barely take notice of her. He had outgrown his yellow plastic helmet and jacket since last year, but they still served their purpose. Struggling to keep up, a six year old green and black witch named

Georgia repeatedly lifted her loose hat above her eyes. She had a funny smell to her, thought Mona.

Franklyn Ray, a fourth-grade student at Middlebrook P-9, was on a mission. He had learned years ago through the pipeline that this subdivision was the Halloween go-to place for getting the most bang for your buck. It was well worth the twenty-minute walk from the housing authority he and his little sister lived in.

“Sorry,” he offered to Mona. He didn’t stop for a response.

“Franklyn, wait.” Georgia whined.

Mona decided to follow them.

The two children had already been given their allotment of chips by the elderly woman at the door. The dull yellow glow of the forty watt porch bulb was just bright enough for her to examine and smile approvingly at them. As Mona came up beside the others, the woman’s smile faded. Now looking repulsed, she quickly dropped a few bars into Monas bag, not waiting for a thankyou before slamming the door shut.

Mona’s chocolate bars hadn’t gone unnoticed.

“Oh, man. You got bars. I only got chips. Bars are awesome. You wanna trade?” Franklyn tried to hustle her as the three walked down the dark driveway. Mona thought it over for a moment, then meekly countered, “Do you have any Tootsie Rolls?”

“Yeah, they suck. Wait- do you mean you want to trade for that? For sure!” Franklyn stopped immediately to fumble for his corn syrup and cocoa abominations. This was too good a deal to pass up.

Mona quickly found her three bars. They were the only thing in the bag, aside from a half-eaten cat.

He dropped his Tootsie Rolls into Monas bag, as she waited to return the favor. Monas hands enveloped the bars, now tainted with sticky congealing cat blood. She dropped her gifts into his bag. The transaction complete, the three continued in and out of people's yards speaking very little to each other. Most of the talking that did take place was by Franklyn. Most every house was the same. The cheerful smiles for Franklyn, and more so Georgia, would vanish into disgust as Mona stepped forward, regardless of how polite she was. The doors closed much quicker than one would expect.

Near the end of one of the driveways, Franklyn noticed a group of five or six kids with glow sticks walking towards them.

"Let's cross!" he didn't wait for agreement.

They went to one house only to be given water bottles for their efforts. They walked down the driveway and promptly threw their bottles into a growing pile at the end.

It wasn't too long after this they landed to a yard Franklyn was quite familiar with. Bobby Pickett was belting out his Monster Mash as they entered a foggy carport. Cobwebs were strewn about, obviously the work of some giant spider that had fortunately stepped out. Perhaps to get her own treats.

"Do you know Nibbus?" Mona asked before she realized the cobwebs were fake. Neither Franklyn or Georgia had, so Mona didn't discuss the giant spider anymore.

A middle-aged woman dressed rather scantily as a police officer greeted them at

the door. "How are you guys!" She threw handfuls of chips AND chocolate bars into the bags. "No water here," Franklyn murmured under his breath as he received his bounty.

The three were turning to leave when the long paw of the law held them once more. "Wait. Anyone want some of these?" She held up a bunch of glow sticks.

"Yes! Yes!" Franklyn exclaimed. Georgia's grin was ear to ear.

Mona didn't understand the whole to-do about the sticks, but readily accepted them. She knew they could come in handy for more trades later.

They made their way back to the street to cross again. Mona caught Franklyn far enough away from Georgia and asked him if Georgia was sick. Not understanding the severity of what she meant, he simply responded, "Ummm, no, I don't think so."

Georgia was so preoccupied with her glow stick she didn't notice the patrol car coming up the street. She walked right in its path.

Constable Peggy Lann saw the movement above her hood just in time, and braked mere inches from the young girl.

The constable also had been distracted, but for a less joyous reason. Her son, who was home doling out treats had just informed her their Persian cat Alani had gotten outside when some punk rocker in a group of young teenagers scared it out of the porch. She was certain Alani would resurface but was likely just hiding out for now. This didn't stop her from scouring the neighborhood for him however.

The officer put her window down and had plans of lecturing the child. She stopped short, however. She was quite certain she recognized them from the other side

of town. She had been called to their house before. She forced a smile and told them have a safe night. And that she loved their costumes (even if the little green girl with the large prosthetic hands was a bit too creepy) and to watch for cars. And lastly to be careful, as NOBODY wanted a repeat of the situation Two Years Prior.

Franklyn and Georgia didn't trust cops. Too many bad experiences with them. The siblings nodded, forcing their own smiles. Then hurried off, just ahead of Mona.

That left just Constable Peggy and Mona. "Any contraband in the bag?" Peggy tried to joke to the odd little ballerina.

Mona clutched her bag tighter. Then ran off to join the other two as Constable Peggy continued on her way.

Mona quickly caught up to them. They were all quiet for the next few houses. Periodically, Franklyn and Mona would swap goods. Each time Mona dropped something into his bag, it came tainted with varying degrees of cat DNA. Coming down the driveway of one home, Franklyn slowed, and tensed up. "Shit," he uttered under his breath. The same group of kids he had avoided earlier were coming up the drive. It was impossible to avoid them.

"Franklyn!" one of the kids, sporting a purple mohawk and fake dangly earrings exclaimed. Sam Hathaway was two years older than Franklyn. He was a grade five of the four-five split Franklyn was in. Sam missed no opportunity to give the gears to the smaller, younger boy.

"Hey, hey, hey! Let's see what's in the bags!" he grabbed at Franklyn's stash. Franklyn clutched his bag. He was poorly outmatched by the bigger kid.

"Leave us alone!" Georgia stepped up, unafraid of any physical repercussions if it meant getting Franklyn out of harm's way.

Sam looked at Georgia. There's no doubt if he had been able to smell what Mona smelled, he and his friends would have left the group alone. But he couldn't. So he didn't. Instead, he pulled Georgia's hat down over her eyes. "Beat it, squirt."

The other boys laughed. Franklyn tried to insert himself between his sister and Sam. Trying to speak above the crowd, he raised his voice. "Screw off, Hathaway."

Sam grabbed Franklyn. Took Franklyn's treat bag and passed it to one of his friends. He was about to pop Franklyn one in his eye when finally, Mona spoke.

"I think you should leave us alone." She said calmly with a cold stare. She knew from her parents, and from the incident a few years ago, she, above all, was not to get involved with anything topside. But she liked Franklyn. And really liked Georgia.

Sam let Franklyn go, now turning his attention to Franklyn's friend. Despite himself, he had to admit her outfit was jacked. "I'm sorry?" Girl or not, she may get a pounding too.

"I said, 'You should leave'. While you can." This greenish grayish chick spoke with a self assurance that Sam and his cronies found unsettling.

As much as he may have wanted to, Sam couldn't back down. Not in front of his crew. For a moment, he imagined Mona as being legit. No makeup, no costume. That her pointy ears and olive skin was real. That her nasty teeth and piercing eyes weren't

fake. That her hands, which put his father's hands to shame, actually belonged to her. He tried to dismiss the thought. He tried hard.

In the police report that followed, he wouldn't be able to say exactly why he tried to touch Mona's nose. Just that he had to know. What happened next is up for debate. The general consensus is as follows:

Time slowed as Sam's index finger of his right hand went up towards Mona's face. Her eyes were the only thing on her that moved as they watched the finger trace an arc, hovering just before touching her long pointy sniffer.

The next part, everyone agreed, happened very very fast. In the blink of an eye, Mona's right hand clasped his. Her hand enveloped his except for the index finger which now had nowhere to call home. Once considered adventurous, this index finger would now suffer the fate of its arrogance.

It was at this time one of Sam's buddies, after rooting in Franklyn's bag of treats, pulled out a blood covered chocolate bar.

Mona's mouth opened as she forced Sam's hand and exposed finger towards her now bared teeth.

Sam now knew this thing before him was the real deal. No dress up. Sam Hathaway may have been a big shot in the four-five split, but here he was jack shit. He tried to mouth the word "please" as Mona's chompers sank into his flesh. The crunching of his proximal phalanx gave Sam new strength as he tried to yank his hand and finger from Mona.

Mona released his hand and opened her mouth. The final ribbons of tendon broke as the finger dragged across Mona's sharp teeth. The finger then dropped to the ground.

Poor Sam didn't even notice that at this point he lost his bladder. In shock, he could only stare at the blood oozing out of his new nothingness once taken up by his finger.

Georgia was the first to scream. The other boys quickly joined suit.

The commotion began to attract the attention of surrounding kids and adults alike. Everyone's mind went to what had happened Two Years Prior.

The noise caused Mona to panic. She stooped down, grabbing the pale bloodied finger, and ran off into the night.

It took Constable Peggy almost two hours to land, see Sam off in the ambulance, and take statements. It was well past curfew before she could make final rounds looking for the assaulter (and maybe her cat.)

Meanwhile, Mona hadn't understood the whole curfew thing. She remained knocking on doors, long after everyone else had gone home. When Constable Peggy pulled up to her, Mona was walking down the street sucking on the marrow from Sam's finger.

Mona stopped and silently looked at Peggy as she got out of the cruiser.

Peggy recognized the girl from earlier, looking at her a bit more carefully this time. The girl really was quite unsettling. “Hi. It’s past curfew. Can I see you for a minute?”

Mona started towards her, then dropped her bag and ran. Peggy radioed in and gave chase. Through backyards and down sidewalks they ran. For her age Peggy was fast. Mona was much faster and at times could have been toying with the cop. Fortunately for both, Mona finally recognized a street she knew and ran down it.

Peggy just caught a glimpse of her running into the back yard of the old abandoned house that Mona had started from.

Panting as she got to the yard, Peggy shone her light around for signs of the girl. The yard was empty. Aside from an old swing, broke down car, and an old bike, there was nothing in the fenced-in jungle of a yard. Oh, and a well.

Peggy radioed in that she may have chased the girl in the wrong spot, and had lost her. Keeping her light trained on her surroundings, Peggy noticed a cat’s collar on the ground as she walked back out towards the front of the property. It was Alini’s.

