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There are some things in this world that you just can't explain, no matter how hard you try.

This is one of those stories.

It happened to me and my friends last fall, and to make things even creepier, it happened on the scariest day of the year.

October 31st.

Halloween.

It was Friday, and I was in my bedroom doing my homework when my brother, Brad, suddenly jumped into the doorway. He was dressed in a

ghost costume. I have to admit, he surprised me a little, but I wasn't about to let him know.

"Hahahaha! Gotcha!" he laughed, his arms raised up in the air. His costume was only an old white sheet with holes where his eyes were.

I shook my head and frowned. "You didn't get me at all," I said. "You look like a skinny marshmallow."

He dropped his arms. I could see his beady brown eyes staring at me through the torn holes in the sheet.

"Come on, Mike," he pleaded. "Why don't you just bag that stuff until Sunday?" He pointed to the homework on my desk.

I shook my head. "I'm going to get it done now so I don't have to worry about it all weekend," I replied.

He shrugged and left, and I returned to my homework.

That's where Brad and I are different. I'm twelve, and one year older than he is. I like to take care of things and make sure that they're done right.

Brad, on the other hand, is a little more

carefree. Oh, don't get me wrong. He's no doofus. He just likes to have his fun.

I guess we all do, now and then.

And I have to admit, I was really excited about that night.

Halloween.

My brother and I, along with Sarah Wheeler, were going to go trick-or-treating. Sarah and her family just moved into the house across the street. We live in Albany, New York, which is about one hundred and fifty miles north of New York City. That's where Sarah and her family moved from. She's becoming a good friend, and the three of us had been hanging out together.

After trick-or-treating, we were all going to go to the big Halloween party in the school gym.

We would never make it.

In just a few short hours, we would be running down sidewalks, house to house, ringing doorbells and knocking on doors.

The usual Halloween stuff.

Only, tonight would be different.

Tonight wouldn't go as planned.

Tonight, Brad, Sarah and I would find

something that would lead to the scariest night of our lives.



I had just finished my homework when I heard the doorbell ring. I could hear Brad talking in the living room, and then I heard Sarah's giggle. I'd know her laugh anywhere. Sarah is the same age as Brad, only she's a little taller. And they both have the same black hair, except Sarah wears hers a lot longer.

In the next instant, there was a ghost and a witch standing at the door of my bedroom.

"Hey!" I exclaimed, admiring Sarah's costume. "That looks great!"

Her eyes grew wide, and she let out with a sharp witch cackle. It was funny, and we all laughed.

“You’re not even in costume?!?!” Sarah said to me. “It’s almost six o’clock!”

“He’s been doing his homework,” Brad sneered from beneath the white sheet.

“It’ll take me ten minutes,” I said. “You guys go down to the park and I’ll meet you there.”

They left, and I put my homework into my folder and slid it under my bed. I guess it was going to wait, after all.

Then I put my costume on. This year, I was a vampire. I made the costume myself, using one of Mom’s old tablecloths as a cape. I bought a cheap Halloween make-up kit at the department store, and I made my face all white, with dark, shadowy circles around my eyes. I slicked my hair back with gel and placed a set of plastic fang-teeth in my mouth.

I stared in the mirror and smiled. I really *did* look pretty scary.

Cool.

Minutes later, I met up with Brad and Sarah at

the park.

“Mike, you look *awesome!*” Sarah shouted as I approached.

“I want to drink your blood!” I said, wrapping my hands gently around her neck. Sarah laughed and drew away.

“Come on,” Brad said from beneath his white sheet. “There are people already trick-or-treating!”

We started out. The evening sun had fallen below the trees, but it was still light out. The night was warm, too, for which I was thankful. October can be chilly in Albany, and I didn’t want to have to wear a coat over my costume.

There were a lot of other kids trick-or-treating. I’m sure I knew most of them, but it was hard to recognize anyone in their costumes.

And then: disaster struck.

We had just rounded the block, when all of a sudden a dark form came from around the bushes at the corner. I tried to get out of the way – but it was too late!

The figure slammed into me, and I was sent sprawling into the bushes. Branches scratched my

face, and my bag of candy went flying. I heard Sarah scream. Brad gasped.

“Hey!” Sarah shouted angrily. “Why don’t you watch where you’re going!?!?”

“Mike!” Brad said, scrambling to help me. I was still tangled up in the thick brush. “Are you okay?!?!?”

But I wasn’t paying any attention. In fact, I barely even heard him talking to me.

My attention was focused on what was partially buried beneath the dead leaves on the ground. I struggled to pull the branches away, then I swept the brittle, brown leaves aside. Now I could see the entire object.

My eyes grew.

My heart drummed.

Time stopped.

“Wow,” I whispered beneath my breath.

What I had found was *incredible*.



A mask.

That's what was buried within the leaves.

But it wasn't just *any* mask. At least, it sure didn't look like any ordinary costume mask.

"Mike? Are you all right?" I heard Sarah ask. I felt a hand grasp my foot, and someone started to pull me out of the bushes.

"Hang on a second!" I said excitedly. "I found something!"

"Yeah," Brad sneered. "You found a bush. You fell into it when a big kid bumped into you."

I ignored him. I was too interested in my discovery.

The mask was dirty and stained from being in the weather. I picked it up, then struggled out of the bushes, without help from my brother.

"Check this out!" I said, scrambling to my feet. I held the mask up for Brad and Sarah to see.

"That's cool," Sarah said.

"What is it?" Brad asked.

"It's a Japanese Kabuki mask," I replied smartly.

"A *what*?" Brad asked again.

"A Japanese Kabuki mask," I repeated. "And it's *old*. It must have been in those bushes for a long time."

"How do *you* know what it is?" he asked. I could tell he thought that I was making it up.

"Because I'm older and smarter than you, that's why," I replied.

I wiped some of the dirt away from the mask. It was a reddish-gold color, but it had faded with age. The mask was heavy, and appeared to be made out of wood or some other thick material. It sure wasn't made of cheap plastic like those

masks you buy at the store!

"Let me see," Sarah said.

I handed her the mask, and she held it up.

"This is cool," she said.

"Is it part of someone's Halloween costume?"

Brad asked. He reached out with his ghostly arms. Sarah handed the mask to him.

"No," I replied. "Kabuki is an old form of Japanese theater. The performers use masks like these."

"I'll bet I could scare some kids with this thing!" Brad said, holding the mask up to his sheet-covered face.

"Brad, don't do that," Sarah said sharply.

"Why? Are you afraid of what I'll look like?"

"Give it back to me," I ordered, reaching out to take the mask away.

Suddenly, Brad placed the mask over his face.

"Ha ha ha!" he said, his voice muffled. "Ka-BOOOO-keee!" He held the mask to his face with one hand, then raised his free arm. "Get it? Ka-BOOOOOO-keeeeeeee!"

"Stop being a goofball!" I ordered. "Give me the mask. I'm the one who found it!"

“Ka-BOOOOO-keeeeee!” Brad repeated.

“Brad! Stop it!” Sarah said.

“Why?” Brad asked from behind the mask.

“Am I scaring you?” He placed both hands on the side of the mask.

Then he paused.

“What the . . . ?” he said. There was a hint of panic in his voice.

“Hey!” he shouted. He was gripping the mask, trying to pry it from his face. “It’s . . . it’s got me! Ahhh! *I . . . I can’t get it off!*”

And then he began to scream.

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