

Trick or Treat

By

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‘Wow...That’s really freaky.’

Adam Fisher was chatting to his best buddy, Liam Harris, on his cam.

‘Yeah, it’ll scare ’em to death,’ said Liam, pulling a strange expression.

‘That’s for sure,’ said Adam. ‘What time do you want to meet up?’

‘Seven-ish, I guess, by the time I’ve finished up here.’

‘Yeah, ok... Usual place?’

‘Yeah, on the corner by the ‘One-Stop’.’

The corner store was a frequent meeting place for young teenagers to hang out. There was no real reason; it was handy but quite unremarkable. The shop sold pretty well anything you would need, provisions-wise, and was always busy early evening as locals called in to buy a ready meal or a bottle of milk. Perhaps it was the bright lights, a welcoming haven from the drabness of the surrounding streets.

Adam signed off and closed his laptop. He checked his own costume; not as scary as Liam’s, but not a bad effort he thought. The ‘Scream’ mask was his idea. He had trawled through the online catalogue of costumes and decided it was the scariest he could see, and it was just within the five pound budget he had been given by his Mom. The cape was not new; he’d used it before, but it would be good for another year at least. The old bed-sheet splattered with fake blood-stains certainly looked scary. He picked up his phone and scrolled through some of the pictures from last Halloween, just to check and maybe get some inspiration. There was one with Liam with a plastic axe which fitted over his head to make it look like it had been embedded in his skull. More fake blood down the face completed the illusion. When Adam first saw it he laughed his head off... not literally of course.

‘Adam, your tea’s ready.’

A call from downstairs; he turned off the light and left his bedroom.

The house was a small three-bedroomed terrace, one of a long block of around thirty similar houses, and the staircase led straight into the sitting room. The family ate their meals on a small table in the corner. The TV was in the opposite side of the room and a quiz programme was on. His elder sibling was already sat at the table as Adam entered the room.

‘Put that phone away,’ said his mother as Adam sat down at the table still texting one of his other friends.

‘I suppose you’re going out trying to frighten people tonight,’ said Emma, his sixteen year old sister.

‘Get lost,’ said Adam not rising to his sister’s jibes. ‘I expect you’re doing the same,’ he added.

‘That’s so immature,’ she said. ‘No, I have a party, if you must know.’

‘Well that’s very grown up then isn’t it?’ reposted Adam ironically.

‘That’s enough you two... Stop bickering and eat your teas,’ intervened their mother, June, as she dished up the beans on toast and sat down. She had been home less than an hour and was still in her Ward Sister’s uniform.

‘Where is this party, Emm?’ said June.

‘At Lauren’s.’

‘Lauren Gibbons?’

‘Yes,’ replied Emma.

‘Well, you won’t be too late back will you, only I’ve got to go into work early tomorrow?’

‘I don’t know why you have to wait up... I am sixteen.’

‘I just like to know you’re safe,’ said June.

‘Anyway I thought you were on lates this week,’ said Emma.

‘Yes I am, but there’re two people off so they’ve asked me to go in... and we can always use the extra money.’

‘So you’ll be working twelve hours tomorrow?’ said Emma.

‘Looks like it... Unfortunately people get sick all the time, can’t do anything about that,’ replied June.

Adam had lost interest and was back on the phone.

‘Adam, put that phone away!’ remonstrated his mother, not for the first time.

‘Whatever,’ said Adam, and placed his phone by his plate, picked up his knife and fork again to finish his tea. The rest of the meal was eaten in silence; the atmosphere was tense.

June collected the dishes and took them into the kitchen. ‘There’s no pudding, but there’s some fruit in the fridge.’

‘Someone left some oranges behind again?’ said Emma, more caustically than she intended.

‘They only go to waste,’ said June.

‘I’ll get something from the shop,’ said Adam, and he got up and retraced his steps back to his bedroom.

Emma did the same. She couldn’t wait to try on her new outfit for the party.

By quarter to seven Adam was putting his final touches to his outfit. He looked in the small mirror on the dressing table in the corner of his room. ‘Oh no,’ he said to himself, examining his chin. ‘Another zit.’

His pock-marked face bore the acne scars of puberty; his voice too frequently switched timbre as he left childhood behind. He opened the top drawer and took out a tube of ointment and applied a liberal dollop on his finger and rubbed it in concealing the emerging blemish.

Satisfied there was no visible evidence of his spot, Adam draped his ‘blood-stained’ cape over his jumper and jeans and was ready to meet Liam. His ‘Scream’ mask was pushed back from his face. Then he had an idea; he would test it out.

He left his bedroom and walked down the short corridor to his sister’s. He pulled his mask over his face and pushed the door open. Emma was sat on her bed in her underwear staring attentively into a hand mirror; her concentration totally focused on her eye makeup.

‘Aghhh!’ screamed Adam at the top of his voice. Emma jumped and dropped her mascara onto the bed.

‘You little shit... now look what you made me do... Piss off will you.’

Result, thought Adam.

He left Emma frantically trying to clean black mascara from the bed linen.

Adam went downstairs; June was in the kitchen finishing the dishes, still in her uniform; Adam’s mask was pushed back off his face again.

‘That looks good... You off now?’ said June.

‘Yeah, meeting Liam at seven,’ replied Adam.

‘Well, you behave yourself and don’t go getting into any trouble... Make sure you’re back for nine.’

‘Oh Mom, that’s rubbish... Can’t I stay out longer? It’s Saturday tomorrow; there’s no school.’

‘Look, you’re only thirteen.’

‘No, I’m nearly fourteen; anyway it’s Halloween, all my friends will be out late.’

‘Ok nine-thirty,’ said June. Adam still looked unimpressed.

‘My last offer,’ said June.

‘Oh... ok,’ said Adam reluctantly.

‘Have you got your key,’ said June.

‘Yes,’ said Adam, impatient at the delay.

‘Ok, see you later... and don’t be late.’

Adam left the house. There was no front garden the door opened straight onto the street. Left and right the terraced houses stretched for a couple of hundred yards either side, criss-crossed by other, similar

thoroughfares. Street lights shone brightly illuminating the brick facades. Adam could see several houses had their curtains open with pumpkins lighting up the window sill; neighbours took Halloween seriously.

It was late Autumn, winter, proper, was still a month or so away and it was not a cold night for the time of year; the promised rain had kept away, but there was a stiff breeze blowing as Adam turned right and headed for the corner shop a couple of blocks away.

The area was buzzing with people dressed up in strange costumes. There were mums with kids in tow going from house to house. The shout 'trick or treat' could be heard echoing on the wind as children coerced hapless neighbours into giving up sweets or other treats. Few wanted to risk the 'trick' element; it was open to all manner of interpretation. It was all light-hearted fun and everyone was having a good time.

Adam walked briskly to his rendezvous with Liam. As he encountered younger children; he pulled the mask down over his face and screamed, resulting in shrieks from the victims.

It was only a seven or eight minute walk and Adam stood on the corner waiting for his buddy. The shop was busy and Adam could see Mr. Khan, the proprietor looking after his clientele. Just after seven Liam appeared in his outfit.

'That is so cool,' said Adam as his friend approached.

Liam was dressed as a zombie with a spectacularly hideous mask. 'Yeah, just scared the dog; it was hiding behind the TV when I left, shaking like a leaf.'

'Well that's a good sign then,' said Adam.

Liam Harries was another of the many single-parent families in the locality; it was just him and his mother who was inclined to spoil Liam at every opportunity. The Zombie costume from the online catalogue was case in question. It was expensive, well over four times what Adam had paid for his mask. The outer garment was ragged and torn with stencils of bloody body innards at various places which from a distance looked like Liam's flesh had been eaten away. The mask comprised of a skull with pieces of skin protruding from it. The outfit was completed by a lank dark wig complete with spider's webs. A great deal of thought had gone into its manufacture to ensure maximum horror.

‘Where shall we go?’ asked Liam.

‘Well it’s no use around here, nobody’s got any money; we’ll only get sweets. I think we should go to the Dell.’

‘What, over the by-pass?’ said Liam.

‘Yeah, unless you’ve got a better idea,’ replied Adam.

‘No, it’s ok by me,’ said Liam.

‘I just want to get some chocolate,’ said Adam and he went inside the shop to make his purchase; he had a pound left from his pocket money.

Suitably armed with his dessert, Adam and Liam walked away from the corner shop towards the said by-pass.

‘Here, have this,’ said Adam breaking the chocolate bar in two and handing over a piece to Liam.

‘Cheers,’ said Liam. The two buddies shared everything.

The Dell was a recent housing development built on what used to be an old lunatic asylum about half a mile the other side of the dual carriageway which took the main road from the town centre to the Motorway. Most of the houses were new structures but some of the former hospital buildings had been utilised and converted into smart apartments.

Along the way they encountered several families on the trick or treat run; some with children in push chairs totally bemused at the goings-on. Liam received many compliments on his fancy dress as kids shrieked in horror.

After a quarter of an hour, they reached a cul-de-sac where a footpath led between the last two houses next to an electricity sub-station. There was an eerie hum emanating from the myriad of connectors, transformers and switches as they walked past. There was a ‘no cycling’ sign at the start of the footpath, not that anyone took any notice; there were always people on bikes making the shortcut. The path ran down a slope and under the dual carriage way. Although the rush hour was pretty much finished, there was

still plenty of traffic passing over the top and as they walked through the underpass the acoustics were just right for making noises.

‘Hello’ shouted Adam which echoed around the walls.

‘Hello,’ repeated Liam.

‘What noise does a Zombie make?’ asked Liam.

‘I don’t know,’ said Adam. ‘Something like...’ and Adam made a long whooping noise.

Liam copied him and there was a great deal of laughter.

‘Come on,’ said Adam. ‘Let’s see if we can get some real treats.’

It had taken the lads twenty minutes to make the journey to the ‘posh’ houses. It was a world away from the terrace blocks they had just left. Neatly mowed lawns, garages, satellite dishes; the houses were advertised as ‘luxury’ residencies on the large Estate Agents billboard which was still proudly displaying towards the passing traffic on the by-pass.

They came to the first house and went up the short drive. It was a newly-built, three-bedroom detached with an integral garage and lawned frontage. Immediately the area was illuminated by the security lights. It was like broad daylight. Adam was at the front door and rang the door-bell.

‘Who is it?’ shouted a voice from inside.

‘Trick or treat.’ Adam shouted in as spooky a voice as he could muster.

‘No thank you; you’ll scare the children,’ replied the same voice.

Adam hadn’t come across that response before; that was the whole point. They stood there discussing what they should do for a moment. Then the voice was back. ‘If you don’t clear off I’m calling the police.’

‘Come on,’ said Liam. ‘There’re plenty of other houses.’

They headed back up the drive. ‘Wait a minute,’ said Adam.

At the top of the drive there was an ornamental flower pot containing a large cascading fuchsia. Adam pushed it over scattering earth and plant across the drive entrance.

‘Oi, you, come here,’ bellowed a man’s voice.

The lads looked up at the bedroom window; it was open and a man was looking down at them.

‘Quick scarper,’ shouted Adam.

‘Which way?’ shouted Liam.

‘This way,’ replied Adam who was now a few yards in front of Liam and running as fast as he could. Liam followed. They heard the front door of the house open; they were being chased.

‘Quick, down here,’ said Adam.

They ran further into the estate then turned right. In front of them stood the old clock tower which had dominated the sanatorium for over a hundred years. The new houses were left behind as they reached the original construction.

They stopped for a moment; they could hear footsteps still in pursuit.

‘This way,’ said Adam. They came to a courtyard where thirty years ago inmates would arrive before being assessed and allocated an appropriate ward. The clock tower was now behind them; its silhouette visible against the glow of the street lights.

Their eyes gradually adjusted to the darkness. The footsteps had slowed; the follower was searching, listening.

‘Down here,’ whispered Adam.

They ignored the blue tape and ‘Construction in Progress - No Admittance’ signage. There were some stone steps that led down into what must have been a basement area. It was still being developed and the entrance door was hanging off its hinges. Adam gingerly pushed the door open wide enough for them to squeeze through.

They could hear the footsteps of their pursuer now at walking pace.

‘I think we’ve lost him,’ whispered Adam. ‘But we better go in a bit more in case he checks in here.’

Slowly they climbed over bits of rubble and walked further into the bowels of the building. The air was clammy and damp; drips of water fell from the ceiling into puddles, making plopping noises. They reached a chamber. It was pitch black but with their eyes now acclimatised to the dark they could make out the shape of a large metal oven along the side wall to the left.

‘This is the boiler room, I reckon,’ whispered Adam.

‘I don’t like it in here. Me Mam said it’s haunted,’ said Liam.

‘Well if they see us, they’ll shit themselves,’ said Adam and stifled a laugh.

‘No, I mean it... there were some strange goings on here. Me Mam said they used to burn the dead bodies. She read it in the papers... I think we should get out of here.’

‘Yeah, ok,’ said Adam. ‘Just give it a few minutes, just to be on the safe side.’

‘What’s that noise?’ said Liam.

Ten o’clock, June Fisher was seething. ‘That’s it,’ she said to herself. ‘He’s grounded.’

She tried his mobile again for the umpteenth time, but it just rang out. At ten-thirty she rang Liam’s mother. No sign; she too had not been able to make any contact and was getting very worried.

Emma returned home at just turned midnight. Her mother was pacing the sitting room.

‘I’ll kill him when he gets in,’ she said.

‘Don’t you think we should call the police?’ said Emma.

‘Well they won’t do anything, will they?’ said June.

‘Well they might know if they’ve been in an accident or something,’ said Emma.

‘Yeah, you’re right.’

June picked up her mobile and dialled.

Seven-thirty the following morning, two construction workers were preparing for the next stage of the development in the old sanatorium. They were checking around the basement area when a shout rang out.

‘Jim, Jim, over here.’

‘What is it Dave?’

‘Over here quick.’

Jim made his way to his colleague.

‘What is it?’

‘Look.’

Jim could make out two lads; they looked like they were asleep in the corner. They were covered in brick-dust and bits of plaster. One was dressed as a Zombie, the other had on what looked like a white smock covered in blood. Beside him was a mask of *The Scream*.

They walked closer.

‘Jesus...’ said Dave. ‘They’re... dead... Look at his face; it looks like he’s seen a ghost.’