

From the shadows...

From the bedroom window I see groups of neighborhood kids wandering up and down the nearby streets with candy buckets shaped like Jack O'Lanterns, or witches cauldrons. I marvel at the variety of their costumes, there are small vampires and skeletons, diminutive wizards and witches, even the odd runt of a werewolf.

Though if I'm honest, I fail to understand some of the older ones outfits. There's one with what appears to be dozens of large nails driven into his ghostly white head and face, and another wearing a red and black striped jersey, fedora hat and a glove with wicked looking curved blades attached to the fingers. They are such bizarre and hellish looking individuals; I do wonder who could have thought them up.

I know many of those that solemnly observe the Pagan roots of All Hallows' Eve detest all the joviality, and the knocking on doors shouting 'Trick or Treat'. But I think its great fun; the revelry brightens up what would just be another cheerless November night.

But regrettably, they never come knocking at our door, and to be truthful I don't blame them. The house has always had a well-deserved 'reputation', an unenviable past full of death and tragedy that would surely give any honest real estate broker nightmares. Even though I believe I may have been here all my life, I still think of it as 'the house' rather than my home.

The streets are starting to empty now as the younger children head back excitedly to their bedrooms in order to sort through their candy, which just leaves odd groups of teenagers roaming about. I move away from the window as I notice one group has stopped in front of the tall wire security fence surrounding the property, and are looking up the path towards the house. Maybe they will visit, and once again the house will be filled with light and life, and the wonderful sounds of people enjoying themselves. But I know they won't, for it's not just the fence that keeps people away.

As they turn and make their way up the street, the house seems to know, and from deep beneath it a terrible keening noise full of suffering and despair made by the collective voices of the lost, starts to permeate the very fabric of the building. Whether I am the only one able to hear their wretched wailing I know not. But I do know that there is a singular, age-old rage holding the others under its control.

The cries of misery briefly rise in intensity as the teenagers move further from the house, but they soon die down. I go to the nursery window, and by looking between its metal bars I see the church clock says eleven twenty-eight. Thirty two minutes until the so called witching hour.

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Making my way downstairs to the parlor I sit in my favorite high backed chair with its age faded green upholstery embroidered with fleu-de-lys in fine gold thread. I resist the temptation to pick at the horse hair sticking out from its arms where the fabric has been worn through.

Briefly closing my eyes I listen, the house remains silent, but it does not sleep, it's always restless, never to be at peace. I feel sure it is watching me, as it waits like any other ambush predator for unwary prey to happen upon it. Suddenly I am torn from my thoughts as the kitchen door knob rattles. A few seconds later, there's the staccato sound of shattering glass, and I hear the shards fall tinkling to the floor as someone attempts to break in. I swiftly move from the chair and hide behind some long heavy drapes.

From my vantage point I see the group of teenagers from earlier make their way into the room.

They have come to visit me, such rapture! Three girls and two boys.

I watch as they deftly draw a pentangle on the floor in white chalk and place the small black candles they have lit on the five points. They then sit in a circle around the pentangle and join hands.

No, please... Not this time! Not these ones!

But already the darkness has started seeping out through the joints in the floorboards. From shadowy corners it snakes out through the air concealing itself in the dark. It is a cruel, pitiless blackness formed from an ancient hatred, and the collective misery of all those it's taken before. Closing in on the group, it silently bleeds into their shadows, the ones ironically cast by the flickering light from their own candles.

Too late one of the girls either sees or senses it, but the scream is swiftly strangled in her throat as the darkness suffocates all life from those it touches. Finally even the candles splutter and die. Now sated, it withdraws back into the house where it resides in the cheerless dark recesses.

I always yearn that those it touches will be able to join me, but once again these ones are to be held with all the others it has taken over the years. Why does it always have to keep them for itself, leaving me forever on my own?

So while the night holds the balance of power over the light, I once again dispose of the bodies in the cellar and mend the hole in the tall wire fencing surrounding the house.

My tasks completed, I return to my eternal prison. For I am surely the true Jack O'Lantern, forever denied entry into either Heaven or Hell.

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