

## *The Ghost of Easel Isle*

### **2 Days Before Halloween**

The wind howled ominously through the trees as James pulled the Halloween decorations out of his storage unit. It was his daughter's favorite holiday, so, he wanted to go as big as his budget would allow him to. Some cheap plastic pumpkins simply wouldn't cut it.

He settled on checking out the thrift shop on his way home, hoping he would find some tattered material he could repurpose into cobwebs or a mummy decoration. But, on his drive home, he spotted an estate sale that had just finished setting up. He pulled over and decided to peek inside.

James walked from room to room and found everything he expected to see at an estate sale: old china, dusty tables, and rusty lamps. The garage was taped off, so he assumed that all the best stuff must be in there. He looked around to see if anyone was looking and snuck in.

The light didn't work, so, he used his phone to illuminate the darkness. He immediately regretted his decision to pick through the garage. Everything was covered in a thick layer of dust, dirt, and grease - and it seemed to be a hoarder's dream. Knick-knacks were stacked to the ceiling and overstuffed cardboard boxes barely managed to stay upright.

James was certain he'd find a creepy doll or a taxidermy dog somewhere in here, but he would be digging through everything until Christmas. Just as he gave up and turned around, a tall skeleton fell from the ceiling, right on top of him!

He jumped back, just barely in time, or so he thought. The skeleton hung there, draped in tattered cloth, just barely above his head. James inspected the skeleton a bit closer. There had been a lot of detail work done to it to make it look weathered, and even real. He imagined someone who enjoyed making realistic crafts must have spent a lot of time on this - and it was terrifying. Terrifyingly perfect for his Halloween decorations!

He grabbed the skeleton and brought it to the estate sale manager. He imagined setting up a little jump-scare in the backyard, just on the other side of the shed. His party would be a hit and he could be his daughter's hero - if he was lucky.

"How much for this?" James asked excitedly. The estate sale manager cringed at the sight of the decoration as James held it up. After a few moments, he realized that it was shockingly heavy for a simple decoration.

"Where on earth did you find that?" he asked, disgusted.

"In the..." James trailed off as he remembered that he went into a restricted area.

"Oh, nevermind. You want the hanging skeleton-ghost thing?" he said accusingly. "I'll pay you twenty dollars to get it out of my sight immediately." James laughed and handed the manager a five dollar bill and walked away happily with his new decoration.

He placed it gently in the back seat of his car and even buckled it in.

"Can never be too careful, my man," James said jokingly before climbing into the driver's seat and starting the car. He pulled out of the driveway and started heading home. He imagined how he could set up the jump-scare beside the shed.

*Tkt-Tkt-Tkt-Tkt-Tkt-Tkt*

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of chattering teeth. He checked the review mirror to see if the skeleton's jaw was loose enough to chatter when they hit bumps in the road. He adjusted the mirror until he could clearly see the skeleton head. But he was greeted by two, piercingly red eyes staring back at him from the hollow sockets.

"What the-!" James slammed on his breaks and the car skid to a stop on the side of the road. He looked in the rearview mirror again, and the two eye sockets were empty once again. James laughed to himself. "You are working me up, bud!" he said to the buckled skeleton.

James got back on the road and readjusted his mirror to its original position, vowing he wouldn't do *that* again.

## **1 Day Before Halloween**

"I'm sorry Jim, but she can't come to your party," Beth said angrily while pacing in the backyard.

"Beth, it's her favorite holiday and I just got some amazing decorations that she is going to love," James argued.

"I'm sorry, but, no. She is going trick-or-treating and then she is going to bed. She has school the next day for crying out loud!" Beth retorted. "Besides, it's an *adult* party. You are serving beer and wine and playing games that are boring to kids." Jim sighed in agreement.

"Well, can we do a small Halloween party this weekend for her and her friends?" James begged. Beth rolled her eyes.

"Fine, but she has to come home right after," Beth relented. Moira, their daughter, was living with Beth primarily, but James had her every other weekend. This weekend, the weekend after Halloween, was Beth's weekend, so, she would be doing James a favor by letting Moira spend a day of it with James.

"Deal," James said with a smile. "But she's coming home jacked up on sugar!"

"Ugh, Jim, will you ever grow up?" Beth pleaded. "Okay, what is this creepy decoration you wanted to show me?" James couldn't help but smile.

"Oh, I hung it up on the other side of the shed to dry. I had to wash all of the dirt off of it from the estate sale," James said excitedly. "Go take a look, I have to finish putting together these trick-or-treater bags."

Beth rolled her eyes again and walked over to the shed. As she got just past the corner, she let out a blood-curdling scream.

"Oh my God!" she shouted. James couldn't help but laugh as the skeleton dropped from the tree and swung inches from Beth's face.

"Motion-activated sensor!" James shouted from the deck as he filled bags with candy.

"You are such a dork!" Beth cried out. "Grow up!"

Beth stormed out of the backyard, back to her car. James tried to control his laughter.

### **Halloween Night**

Dressed in his best Dexter Morgan outfit, James headed downstairs to rejoin his party. It was already pretty wild (for a 35-year-old) and he couldn't wait to unleash the skeleton on his guests, one by one. He would have to reset the skeleton every time, but it would be totally worth it.

His co-worker JoAnne was at the food table double dipping her pretzels into the ranch. This act volunteered her as the first victim.

"JoAnne!" James shouted gleefully at unsuspecting victim number one. "Bumblebee costume, I love it!" JoAnne pushed up her glasses and grimaced at James.

"Honeybee, actually," she corrected. "I wanted to raise awareness about-"

"Of course! Of course!" James interrupted her to avoid an hour-long lecture about the importance of honeybees. "I actually have a honeybee apiary just on the other side of my shed now," he lied.

"Really?" JoAnne asked excitedly.

"Yeah, you should go check it out!" he urged. "I have to go refill the ice bucket, but if you want to go now, I'll join you in a few minutes and I'll tell you all about my set up."

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