

Adult/32yo
(spl email)

ONE STEP BEHIND

It's always just one step behind. You may have heard the footsteps. You most likely have seen the shadow. We all have felt the presence. When the hairs on the back of your neck stand stiff, when you get a sudden chill, or when your legs are more restless than usual. That is when it is near...just one step behind you. Prayer won't help, running won't get you any further away, and stopping will only give it time to prepare. However, there is one night per year when it can be negotiated with. On All Hallows Eve the veil it hides behind is thin and it welcomes making deals, but always with a price. It was on a night like this that it finally got one step ahead of fourteen year old Jack O'leary.

"Will you hurry up?! The streetlights are already turning on!" Jack's yell was muffled through the felt skeleton mask he already wore, but his frustration was still clear to his mother and sister.

"You can wait five more minutes Jack," his mother snapped back. "We are just waiting for the glue to dry!"

"You can't expect me to be a witch without warts." Sally's voice calmly followed her mothers. "Besides Jack, trick or treating is always more fun when it is dark."

Jack let out a groan and stepped out onto his front porch to impatiently wait for his little sister to finish getting ready. His spirit was lifted rather quickly as the smells and sounds of Halloween pervaded his senses. The smell of fireplaces being lit for the first time and fallen leaves on the seasonal breeze. The sounds of children running from house to house collecting their various treats, or the rustling in bushes while someone hides in hopes of scaring their friends. And best of all, the dim light that comes from the Jack o' lanterns in front of each house on the street. Jack loved this time of year more than most. Some kids were in it for the candy and pranks, but Jack loved the feeling that an October night would awaken in him and the other children. The feeling that there is something more to this night than just fun. The feeling that something could be waiting around every corner. The feeling that on this night, and only this night, the shadows are just as welcoming as they are daunting. Suddenly the door opened behind Jack and a green witch, warts and all, flew by him on a black broom with a cackle that echoed down the street.

"How do I look deary!?!?" Sally croaked at her brother in her best wicked witch voice. Jack had to catch his breath but managed to gasp out, "Wicked sis. Absolutely horrible."

While Jack may have loved Halloween, Sally absolutely adored the holiday. She had many of the same reasons she enjoyed this night, but she also was a fanatic about the history of the night. She insisted on calling it by its Pagan name of Samhain and was known to carve as many pumpkins as she could get her hands on during October. She always said it was to protect them from things that cross over from the land of the dead.

Sally was particularly excited for this year, because now that she was ten she was allowed to go trick or treating with her big brother and without mom tagging along. She even told them they could stay out until ten!

"Make sure to keep your gloves on honey." Mom muttered while adjusting the scarf she had managed to hide underneath Sally's costume. "I don't want you catching a chill out there."

"I'll be fine mom!" Sally groaned as she shrugged her mom off of her.

"Jack. Please keep a close eye on your sister, and come straight home if there are any problems!" Their mom had to essentially yell down the block to them as Sally had already grabbed Jack by the hand and was dragging him away. "And no big scares Jack!"

"Trick or treat!"

"I got a king size!"

"Who gives out apples?"

"Did you just see that shadow move?"

"Watch for cars Sally!"

"I see you hiding their Jack!"

The night was well underway. Jack and Sally, as Skeleton and Witch, had covered their block and the next four blocks to the west. Their pillow cases were growing heavy with candy and their feet ached from their haunted march, but the two had no intention of slowing down. At this point in the evening there was no remnant of sun to be seen on the horizon. Darkness was more present than ever on this moonless Halloween night. That didn't dissuade Jack or Sally, but they both began to watch the shadows a bit closer as they found themselves further from home.

Their pace slowed and they began to talk in between houses. They pointed out costumes they liked, pumpkins Sally wished she had carved, and eventually shared how special this night was for them as siblings.

"I'm really glad I got to come out this year." Sally said while giving her brother a light side hug.

"Me too kiddo. It was really great of mom to let us go alone this year." Jack responded while tearing open a bag of chocolates.

Sally stopped walking, "Not just because of that Jack. I'm glad I get to be out here at all! Last year was the worst." She looked into the dark sky while she spoke.