



THE LAST TRICK-or-TREAT

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It was halloween night, and the wind screamed through the empty streets like a warning nobody could understand. The moon was full, pale, almost too white; Like the face of a ghost watching over the town. I was walking home from a small Halloween party, still wearing my vampire costume, when I noticed something strange.

There were no kids outside. No voices, no laughter. Just the sound of leaves dragging across the pavement. At first, I thought everyone had just gone home early, but then I saw her. A little girl, maybe seven or eight, standing alone under a flickering streetlight. She wore a pumpkin mask and held a candy bag in her small hand.

"Hey," I said, half-joking, "aren't you too young to be out this late?"

She didn't answer. She just turned her head slowly, the mask glowing orange in the light. I could see her breathing heavily, like she'd been running.

Then she whispered, almost too softly for me to hear:

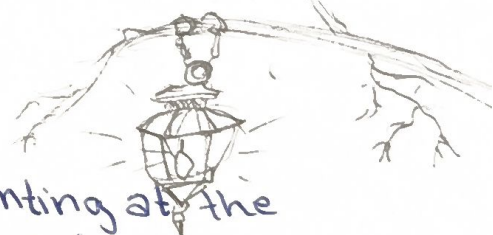
"They took everyone."

I laughed nervously. "Who did?"

She looked behind me, her small finger pointing at the shadows. I turned around, nothing. When I looked back, the girl was gone.

My stomach tightened. The street felt colder, emptier. The lights above me began to flicker one by one, until only the moon was left. I started walking faster, then running. Every few seconds, I heard footsteps behind me. Light, quick, like a child chasing me.

I stopped at the corner and turned again. There were dozens of pumpkin masks staring at me.





THEY WERE THERE



Children, or at least shapes of children. Silent fill.
Their eyes glowed red through the holes of the masks.

I ran as fast as I could, cutting through alleys,
tripping over garbage bags. My heart was beating
so loud I could barely breathe. I finally reached my
house, slammed the door shut, and locked every window.

But when I looked at the mirror by the entrance, my
reflection wasn't alone.

Behind me the little girl stood, holding out her
candy bag. Inside, something was moving. Something
alive.

I tried to scream, but my voice was gone. She
lifted her mask slowly, and where her face should
have been, there was only darkness. An endless black
void.

Then she spoke again, her voice echoing like a
whisper from another world: "It's your turn now".

The lights went out.

The next morning, the police found an empty
house, the front door wide open, and a single
pumpkin mask lying on the floor.

