



Our Halloween by Nicolle Caputa | 2017

“The things a mother will do for a child she loves shows no boundaries, although some people need to show some... All to ensure one fairy remembers the magic of childhood.”

Why is it that every year I buy her a costume, it snows? I know she hates me as I pull on the jacket, covering her sheer, green costume sleeves.

Her bottom lip curls up. “Mom, can’t I put my fairy wings over my coat at least?”

I hold the elastic straps in my hands. “I don’t think they’ll fit.”

Her eyes form pools. “I don’t need a coat!”

Her arms flap up and down as I try to zip up the black fabric. “I’m sorry, Teenie.”

“No you’re not!” She sniffs and stamps her foot.

Seeing her cheeks enflamed, I grab the tape and the wings.

“Lift up your arms.”

I push the elastic around her marshmallow sleeves and tape it to the jacket. For a moment, she looks up at me and grins. Then, when I finish, she goes into the bathroom to look at the mirror. She stares with glossy eyes.

“What’s the matter *now*?” I say.

She sniffs and then takes a deep breath. “I don’t really look like a pixie, do I?”

“You look fine.” I examine the tape-job.

“Oh.” She sniffs again while rubbing her eyes.

“Teenie, listen to me.” I stabilize her arms with my hands.

She stops looking in the mirror and turns her enflamed face toward me.

“Can you fix it, Mommy?”

I wipe the tears streaming down her tiny face and rip off the all the tape. I take the wings off and then the black marshmallow jacket. Jumping two stairs at a time, I go to grab several shirts. I pull two long sleeve shirts on her and put the dress sleeves over the top. With a final touch, I put the wings on.

Immediately she looks back into the mirror and beams. “Better.” She nods.

I grab her pink, jack-o-lantern bucket and lead her out the door with a blanket tightly wrapped around her shoulders. Kids run around in their jackets and snow boots. Teenie, in her green fairy dress and pom-pom ballet flats, walks around with her head high.

On the way from house to house I keep the blanket wrapped tightly around her. At every house she runs up the driveway and holds out her bucket, repeats the line, and runs back to me to be embraced in warmth. All the while, she beams from ear-to-ear.

Near the end of the night, she runs up to me and asks, “Can’t we go to Sarah’s house just real quick?”

I think of Sarah’s mother, and then look at Teenie’s face. “Fine,” I give in. “Just real quick, though. We aren’t staying.”

“Yes!” She skips down the curb with the blanket around her arms hanging down to the sidewalk.

“Teenie, wait for me!”

The elaborate gray house is decorated with fake tombstones, skeletons, and spider webs. The mob of kids, like every year, don’t see the plastic and anatomically incorrect rib cages. Instead, they gape at the decorations from the sidewalk. The girls stay on the curb, wary to go up. The boys taunt and push the girls, pretending they aren’t just as scared.

Teenie, unfazed by the strobe lights and fog machines, rips off the blanket and struts past the kids twice her age to ring the doorbell. Teenie motions for me. Sarah comes out wearing an elaborate, hand-made pirate costume and her mother stands behind her wearing a *very* grown-up version of the same costume her daughter wears. I cross my arms, covering my ‘Vampires eat Pizza’ T-shirt.

“Trick-or-Treat!” Teenie bellows.

“Mom, look at Julie’s costume!” Sarah smiles up at me.

Carra Anderson clears her throat. “Goodness! Where’s your coat?”

Teenie responds happily, “Didn’t fit with the wings, Ms. Anderson.”

Carra darts her eyes to me. “She’ll get sick!”

“You can’t catch a cold from being in the cold.” I say dryly.

“Sure you can! Of course you can! Didn’t they tell you that in medical school?”

I look around the yard behind me. “Nice decorations.”

“Yes, well, we decided to dial it down a bit this year.”

She brushes off the invisible dirt on her six inch skirt.

I look at the growing crowd. “Oh yeah, I can tell.”

“Well, you must be freezing, Julie. Come in, have some apple cider!” Carra grabs Teenie’s arm and pulls her inside.

I grab her other arm. “Thank you, but we’re not staying.”

Teenie’s eyes get big. “Please...”

“Just for a minute then. *It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* Halloween special starts at eight. We watch it every year.”

Sarah and Teenie run in the house and start drinking cider and sort through their candy on the marble tile living room floor. The inside of the house is just as decorated as the outside. As I walk through the door, scents of pumpkin spice and cinnamon apple fill my insides. The whole dining table is piled with witch fingers, brains, and bugs all made out of desserts.

With the girls on the floor, Carra pulls me to the kitchen. The unfortunate minutes I knew were bound to happen: ‘Mom talk’.

“How long did it take you make all that food.” I make small talk and avert eye contact with her obtuse eye lashes batting as she blinks at me.

“I really don’t think it’s responsible for you to take Julie outside with no coat.”

I turn my head sharply to face her.

“I’m sorry?”

She grunts, “I don’t see how *Emelia* would be happy with her daughter outside so late and in this weather.”

The woman looks straight at me and smiles. She *smiles*.

“I don’t see how someone, who didn’t even *know* my sister, could possibly tell me how to raise Julie.” I keep my eyes locked on her.

“Oh, well I’m just trying to he—”

“No you’re not. You never are. You’re here to judge and scoff me in your fancy house and inappropriate outfits.”

Her face melts into a ridiculous confused expression. “Honestly, Rachel, I don’t know what’s gotten into you.”

“Don’t tell me how to raise my kid, okay?”

She blinks, keeping a straight mouth. “Sarah, time for Julie to go.”

“But, Mom...” Sarah whines from the living room.

“Now.” Carra’s make-uped eyes don’t move from mine.

Teenie comes up with her bucket of newly arranged candies. She hugs Sarah while Carra leads us out the door without a word. As we begin walking home, the kids around the streets slowly go into their own homes.

Before going into our house, her small arms wrap around my waist.

“You know what?”

“What?”

“Ms. Anderson thinks she’s the cool mom.”

“Yeah that’s true,” I answer, annoyed.

Her round face looks up at me. “*You’re* the cool mom.”

The heat drains from my cheeks, “Yeah? I have a feeling you’ll change your mind in a few years, Teenie.”

“No, I don’t think so,” she says, matter-of-factly.

I ruffle her hair and we race inside to watch our annual Halloween movie while binging on candy and pizza...just like Emelia and I used to do.

A short story by Nicolle Caputa

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