

Halloween Horrors

Alan Toner

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[HALLOWEEN HORRORS.](#)

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1. The Halloween Mask

“What made you buy that thing? It looks hideous.” Mrs Parker looked at her 13-year-old son, Jimmy, and what he’d just bought from the novelty shop, with a mixture of disapproval and disgust.

“It’s meant to be hideous, Mum,” Jimmy argued. “It’s a monster mask.”

“Yes, I gathered that,” his mother replied. “But,” - she shook her head - “really, it must be the most horrible mask I have ever seen. Why didn’t you just buy a Frankenstein or Dracula mask, or something like that?”

Jimmy just laughed scornfully. “What, Franky or Drac? You’ve got to be kidding. Those monsters are old hat now, like the Wolf Man and the Mummy. They’re just not scary anymore.”

“Well they certainly scared me when I was a kid. I can remember, quite vividly, staying up late and watching them on my parents’ old black-and-white TV, and literally being scared half witless.”

“Yeah, but that was years ago, Mum, before all the blood-and-gore movies - the real SCARY movies - came out. The old Universal movie monsters you used to watch have been done to death. People these days are more into the likes of Freddy Kruger and Jason Voorhees.”

His mother sighed resignedly. “Yes, I suppose you’re right.” She finished washing the dishes and stacked them,

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one by one, in the plastic rack by the sink to dry. Then she removed her apron and looked back down at her son. “Well, by all means, you can wear it, I’m not stopping you.” Then a teasing glint appeared in her eyes as she added: “Just as long as you don’t scare half the neighbourhood to death with it when you go out trick-or-treating tomorrow night.”

Her son just laughed again. “What, me scare them to death? Ha! It’ll be the other way round, I think, considering some of the real ugly mugs that live in this dump.”

His mother shook her head and tutted. “Now, now, Jimmy that’s not nice.” However, she couldn’t help but smile at her son’s facetiously cruel description of the more seedy characters of the neighbourhood.

Mrs Parker certainly did have a point, though, about her son’s monster mask. It was indeed quite an ugly specimen: all made of rubber latex, completely covering the head in the style of a Spider-Man mask, the disturbingly grotesque countenance resembling a cross between *The Exorcist* and *Friday The 13th* (the face beneath Jason’s hockey mask, that is). It was just . . . well, so horrible. So authentic looking too, in a strikingly weird sort of way. And those eyes . . . those big, bulging, yellow eyes . . . they seemed to follow you all around the room, seemed to bore deep down into your very soul. When Jimmy had slipped it over his head and crept into the kitchen to surprise her with it, she had jumped out of her skin, nearly dropping a dinner plate in the process. It was as if that the minute he’d donned that mask, he’d actually become that monster. A crazy thought, yes, but that was the way it made her feel. It was quite surprising what these horror mask designers could come up with these days. It was just like the special effects guys in all these modern-day horror movies that Jimmy had referred to earlier.

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Sometimes, though, their consummate skill in creating such realistic horror stuff did tend to make them go just that little bit over the top in their constant strivings towards scaring the living daylights out of their audiences. Such contemporary extreme horrors might be okay for her horror-fanatic son, but give her the good old Boris Karloff black-and-white movies any day.

Yes, tomorrow was Halloween – Jimmy’s favourite night of the year – and he would certainly be getting all decked out in his new monster outfit to go out trick-or-treating with his best friend Rick. Jimmy couldn’t wait to try out his new monster mask on all the residents, couldn’t wait to see their reactions when they opened the door to him. Last year, he had tried a Scream mask, but unfortunately had only incurred more skits and sneers than shivers and shakes. “Oh no, not another bleedin’ Scream mask!” one ratty old man had moaned when Jimmy had knocked on his door. “That’s the fifth bloody one tonight.” Not surprising, since Scream happened to be a popular movie at that time, and so nearly all the local kids had been going around that Halloween’s night wearing Scream masks. Too much competition here, Jimmy had thought with an irritated scowl.

But this year, he had made sure that things would be entirely different, oh yes. This time, he had chosen the most scary mask in the whole shop, and so felt sure that this Halloween would prove to be much better, more enjoyable, than last year’s total washout. As far as he knew, nobody else in the area had copied this mask, like they had done with the Scream mask last year. This mask was truly unique. Oh yes, in this town, the more original and realistic-looking the mask, the better would be your chances of making more money from your trick-or-treat rounds.

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Yes, Jimmy felt sure that this Halloween really would be a night to remember.

And it would be.

But certainly not in quite the same way that Jimmy imagined.

“Did you get rid of it then?” asked the old woman, her voice tense and expectant as she posed the question to her husband when he got in from work that cold, wet October evening.

“Get rid of what?” her husband replied, hanging his hat and coat up in the hallway before following her into the kitchen for his tea.

“You know, the mask.”

“Oh, that. Er, yes, I did actually.” He sniffed the air and smiled with relish at the delicious aroma emanating from the big pan of stew his wife was boiling on the cooker.

“Good,” the woman said, sighing in relief.

Her husband grinned at her as he pulled back a chair and seated himself at the dinner table. “I knew you’d be pleased. You didn’t like that mask at all, did you?”

“No, I didn’t.” The old woman’s eyes darkened at the thought. “It was a horrible mask. It gave me the creeps.”

Her husband laughed. “That’s what horror masks are supposed to do, dear.”

“Yes, yes, I know that,” his wife snapped. “But that one . . . well, I don’t know exactly what it was. Couldn’t put my finger on it.” Then she shrugged dismissively and turned to stir the stew. “It just gave me the creeps, that’s all.”

“You should have seen the geezer that sold it to me.” Her husband gave a short laugh at the thought. “A right weird looking guy he was. Spoke with an accent too - German, I

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think - and with the kind of piercing, intense stare that would have put even Bela Lugosi to shame.”

“Perhaps that’s why the mask was so creepy looking - y’know, modelled on its maker.”

“Maybe,” grinned her husband.

His wife switched off the cooker and prepared to dish out the pan of stew. “Who did you sell it to then?”

He shrugged. “Oh, just some teenager. Seemed to fall in love with it the instant he clapped eyes on it. Said he wanted it to go trick-or-treating with tomorrow night.”

“Oh yes, it’s Halloween tomorrow, isn’t it?” She shook her head and sighed wearily as she ladled out the delicious-smelling stew to each of their two plates. “That’s soon come around again, hasn’t it? The years are just flying by. It only seems like yesterday it was last Halloween.”

“Yes, and the older you get, the more quickly they seem to go by too.”

“I know. Well, let’s just hope we don’t get pestered too much by all those trick-or-treaters like we did last year. Bloody nuisances they were, knocking on the door every few minutes.”

Her husband just laughed indifferently. Unlike his wife, he never had any objection to kids and their nocturnal, harmless little Halloween capers. “Oh don’t let them get to you, Nora. As long as you don’t get an unexpected little visit from the lad who I sold your favourite Halloween horror mask to -“

“Oh shut up, you!” Nora retorted, seeing nothing funny whatsoever in anything even remotely relating to that horrid mask. “Enough bloody talk of that mask. It’s gone now, and as far as I’m concerned, good riddance to it.”

Her husband held up a hand. “Okay, okay, point taken.

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The mask has gone now, and that's that." Then, as he watched Nora dish out the last helping of stew on to his plate, he added, with a reflective smile: "And I'm sure that it has gone to a good home too."

Nora paused with the stew-dripping ladle and looked at her husband a little strangely. "Huh, you make it sound like some living, breathing pet you sold rather than some silly monster mask."

Her husband shrugged. "Just my way of speaking, dear."

Halloween's night was, up to now, turning out to be a rather wet and windy affair. But the bad weather certainly didn't put all the young trick-or-treaters off, for they were all out in force, dressed up in their Halloween costumes, Jimmy and his mate Rick included.

"Hey, that's a real cool mask you've got there, Jim," Rick, also 13 years old, remarked as he met up with him on the corner of the street from where they would commence their trick-or-treating.

Jimmy's flattered smile could not be seen beneath the clinging rubber of the horror mask, but his tone oozed his sheer delight at his friend's praise. "Glad you like it." Then he took a quick scan up and down the street. "Right then, shall we start on this side and work our way down?"

Rick shrugged. "Whatever."

The autumnal wind howled and blew their black capes up wildly as they went up the garden path to their first house. Grinning mischievously under his skull mask - which, unlike Jimmy's, did not cover the whole head - Rick knocked three times on the door and waited for the occupier to answer. As it turned out, the two boys waited only a few seconds before the door was pulled open and the face of a rotund middle-

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aged woman peeked out at them. “Yes?” she said brusquely.

“Trick or treat!” yelled the two friends in gleeful unison.

Without batting an eyelid, the woman calmly said: “Bugger off.” She then slammed the door in their faces before they could even have a chance to answer.

Jimmy snorted with disgust. “Charming!”

“Yeah, I know. Miserable fat old cow!” Rick upped with his hand and gave a quick V sign to the closed door.

“C’mon, let’s try next door,” Jimmy said with a crestfallen sigh, thinking: What a great start to the night!

The two teens trudged back down the path, capes still billowing in the cold wind. Jimmy opened the gate and slammed it shut behind him in spiteful protest at the extremely rude manner in which the woman had greeted them. He slammed it with such force that he very nearly knocked it off its hinges.

Their second port of call proved to be much more hospitable, and quite profitable too, for this tenant rewarded them with the most cordial of smiles and the most generous treat of £2 each. Naturally, after the offending and disastrous start they’d encountered at the first house, the lads were elated. Their cash bucket had just earned its first little profit, and if the rest of the residents turned out to be equally generous, then it wouldn’t be such a bad night after all.

As the evening wore on, and they called on more and more houses, the teens were very glad to see that, just as they’d hoped, their cash bucket was filling up very nicely, thank you very much. They were certainly doing much better than they had done last year. Of course, there were still the odd one or two grumpy ones, who gave them nothing more than a hostile stare and a slammed door, just like Fatty before, but on the whole, people had been very

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approachable and pleasingly generous. Also, many of them had commented on how impressed they were by Jimmy's authentic-looking horror mask, their laudatory remarks ranging from "Hey, I like the mask," to "God, young man, you'd even frighten the Devil himself with that face!"

Naturally, Jimmy revelled in all these appreciative comments, and even began to feel a little big-headed that his mask - by all accounts, the BEST Halloween mask he had ever worn - was outshining the plain, unimaginative skull-face effort that his friend Rick was wearing. Consequently, he was beginning to sense Rick's jealousy, and that jealousy was finally voiced when Rick could no longer contain his feelings after yet another outpouring of praise for Jimmy's mask by a resident.

"Huh!" Rick said, his eyes indignant through the twin apertures of his skull mask. "You're certainly attracting a lot of attention with that mask of yours."

Jimmy smiled smugly. "I know. Great, isn't it?"

"Well, for you, yes, but not for me. I haven't had one single comment on my own mask all night. Even a skit or two would have been something, at least." He sighed despondently. "I dunno. They just look right through me, as if I'm not there."

"Well that's your own fault, matey, for getting dressed up as The Invisible Man," Jimmy sniggered. But then he sensed Rick's scowl of displeasure through the skull mask, and guilt quickly replaced mirth. "Sorry, just joking."

"Well I'm not laughing. It's not nice being ignored, being looked right through. It hurts, Jimmy, it really does."

Jimmy sighed and touched his friend's arm sympathetically. "I know, mate, but what can you do? Perhaps it would be better if you ditched the old skull-and-

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crossbones next time and picked a more original, more scary Halloween mask.”

Rick lowered his eyes resignedly. “Yeah, I s’pose you’re right.”

“Anyway, don’t worry about it. C’mon, we’ve still got a few more houses to do, then I think we’ll call it a night.” He held the bucket up with one hand and shook it, relishing the jangle of all the coins inside. “We’ve made quite a few bob here tonight, so we might as well round off the evening by seeing if we can make a bit more.”

The night air was getting colder, the October wind increasing in strength as it gusted through the lamp lit street, disturbing the fallen autumn leaves and scattering them all along the pavement. The rain had now eased off to a light drizzle. Most of the other young trick-or-treaters had melted away, so that there were now only one or two left apart from Jimmy and Rick. Well, it was getting on for ten o’clock, and most of these kids had to get up early in the morning for school.

Despite the biting chill of the autumnal wind, Jimmy was starting to feel a little warm under his clinging Halloween mask, and he never shivered once, unlike his friend. Furthermore, he seemed to be feeling warmer by the second, beads of perspiration forming on his brow and cheeks. It was getting uncomfortable beneath that mask, very uncomfortable. Strangely, Jimmy now felt more like he was in a red-hot sauna rather than on a chilly, windswept street. He was now feeling so hot that he couldn’t help but utter a loud “Phew!” as the intense, almost burning hot sensation permeating his skin from the mask began to grow increasingly unbearable.

Rick noticed his friend’s discomfort and threw him a

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concerned look. “You okay?”

“Er . . . yeah, yeah, I’m okay.” But his tone sounded shallow, distant, uncertain. “Just a little warm, that’s all.”

“Must be that mask.” Rick instantly pounced on the first opportunity to find fault with that mask he so envied. “Bit too thick for your face, maybe. Why don’t you take it off for a bit?”

“No, I’ll be all right in a minute,” Jimmy snapped. “Don’t worry.”

Rick shrugged. “Okay, suit yourself.”

But as the minutes passed, Jimmy was finding it increasingly difficult to disregard Rick’s advice to remove the mask from his head, for the thing was just getting hotter and hotter, like some weird rubber oven, until it now seemed to be burning into his face.

And once that now furnace-like mask started to melt agonisingly against his skin, Jimmy couldn’t stand it any longer.

He shot a hand up to grip the stringy black hair of the mask, and pulled it upwards in a desperate attempt to get the thing off before it burned his whole face away. But the mask wouldn’t budge. It clung defiantly to his head like a second skin. Jimmy pulled at it again, this time more strongly. But no matter how hard he tried to get that now sweltering hot mask off his head, it still wouldn’t move. It was as if the mask had become completely stuck to his skin, as if super glued never to be removed, evoking the terrifying feeling that no amount of pulling would ever manage to rip it off, and that his whole face was about to be roasted to a complete cinder by whatever weird force had been unleashed by that monstrous mask.

The stiflingly hot sensation inside the mask was now

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beginning to suffocate Jimmy. His lungs felt heavy and strained, his brain swam dizzily, his whole head felt like a raging inferno, and he was starting to gasp for air. Blind panic and intense horror made him scream out at his friend for help.

“RICK, RICK! OH DEAR GOD HELP ME! THE MASK . . . THE MASK . . . GET IT OFF ME, PLEASE! OH PLEASE, PLEASE, GET IT OFF ME!”

As a shaking, hysterical Jimmy felt the hands of his friend instantly grab at the mask in a desperate attempt to tear it off, he now felt that his whole head had been dipped deep into the fiery bowels of hell itself. He had never experienced such untold agony before in his whole life. The mask seemed to have taken on a life of its own, seemed to have become infused with some unworldly power of blazing heat. Jimmy could almost smell the first fumes of acrid smoke as the skin of his face began to fry and melt under the mask’s burning rubber.

This couldn’t be happening, Jimmy’s shocked mind screamed. It just couldn’t. Simple Halloween masks just didn’t suddenly flare up inside and become like a red-hot oven. Impossible. It had to be a nightmare. He prayed it was just a nightmare.

“AAAGGGHHHHH!” Jimmy’s agonised screams rang through the windswept street. He fell to the ground, writhing and twisting and jerking in a paroxysm of total torture, his thrashing and kicking limbs scattering autumn leaves everywhere. His friend continued to battle determinedly against the clinging grip of the mask, a mask that seemingly not even the strongest man in the world could pull off.

Then footsteps were running towards them. A couple of passers-by, walking home after a night out and alerted by the

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screams and commotion, were rushing to help. There were three of them: a young blonde woman and two slightly older men. The trio came to a halt and stared down, open-mouthed and bemused, at the two boys.

“What’s going on?” one of the men asked, a bald and rotund individual of around forty.

Rick shot a desperate look up at the man as he continued his still ineffective pulling on the mask. “It’s the mask!” he yelled. “It’s stuck to his head!”

“What?” the blonde gasped incredulously.

“Help me get it off, please! He’s suffocating!” Rick sounded as if he was on the verge of falling into the same state of hysterics as his friend.

“Okay, okay, don’t panic, son,” the bald man urged, holding up a hand to try to steady the distressed teen. He then quickly stooped down and seized hold of Jimmy’s thrashing body tightly. “Here, I’ll hold him still while you pull.” Pinning the writhing boy firmly down on the pavement, he nodded to Rick. “Go on, keep pulling. Harder, lad, harder!”

“I am!” But Rick, try as he might, just could not loosen the mask.

Then the other man, a red-haired chap of around the same age as his mate, intervened. “Here, son, let me have a go.” He made Rick relinquish his grip on the mask and grabbed hold of it himself. Gripping the top of the grotesque rubber face as firmly as he could, he pulled with all his might. It still wouldn’t budge. He pulled again . . . and again.

Then his straining expression suddenly turned to one of hope. “Hey, it’s beginning to move!”

“Keep pulling,” the blonde urged.

“Go on, mate!” the bald man shouted. “Harder!”

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The red-haired man did pull harder. Slowly but surely, the mask was indeed starting to slide upwards. The straining man permitted himself a slight smile of relief that his timely assistance seemed to be finally paying off. He felt like a triumphant dentist who was on the verge of a successful extraction of a bad tooth. Yes, the mask was definitely moving. Another couple of pulls, and it would be completely off the boy's head.

But under the unbearably hot mask, poor Jimmy was now so close to losing consciousness that he was only faintly aware of the additional physical help that was doing its best to free him from the roasting rubber. In addition to the scorching heat, Jimmy was beginning to feel further discomfort: an acute, stretching sensation around the neck.

Finally, with a loud smacking sound, the mask came free from the lad's head. As it did so, the man who had pulled it off fell backwards and landed, with a painful bump, on the pavement.

"Oh thank God!" the blonde said. But her look of relief at the mask's removal lasted but a second, as she saw, to her utter horror, what it had left behind.

Jimmy's body no longer had a head. It had been completely ripped off with the mask. Glistening, bloody tendons sprouted around the neck area, a grisly, sickening image that looked more attributable to the work of a guillotine than to the forceful removal of a simple Halloween mask.

The shock of the severed head instantly sent a deathly silence through the gathering. Around the stunned figures and decapitated teenager, the autumnal wind howled with an almost funereal disquiet. The rain was starting to beat down again, its drops mingling with the running blood that stained

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the fallen leaves in a viscous mess. The stench of sudden death filled the air intensely. If ever there was a Halloween's night in all of history that transcended all boundaries of sheer shock and horror, then this was it.

The terrifying realisation that what he now held in his hands was not just a mask, but a severed, blood-dripping head too, the man on the ground let out a shocked gasp and flung the grisly object to one side. The head bounced and rolled along the pavement, like some strange football, before coming to rest in the gutter a few feet away, leaving a trail of blood behind it. The mask's grotesque face seemed to grin up at the shocked spectators in twisted mockery.

The red-haired man, mouth agape and face as white as a sheet, looked at his two friends incomprehendingly, unable to find the words to express his feelings on the horrific thing that had just happened. Was this some sort of sick Halloween joke perpetrated by that lad in the skull mask? No, it couldn't be. All that blood . . . And that cloying, stomach-churning stench of a freshly dead corpse. What person in their right mind could be so twisted as to stage such a sick, nightmarish scenario?

"Somebody call the police!" the blonde woman screamed, shaking with shock and panic. Then she lurched forward, convulsed, and vomited all over the pavement, the shock and stench of the ripped-off head proving too much for her.

The other man, he too as white faced as his friend on the ground, fished into his breast pocket for his mobile.

The man who had inadvertently ripped off the boy's head was now pushing himself to his feet. Trying to avert his eyes from the blood-drenched headless corpse lying on the ground, and hoping desperately that the police would not

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charge him with the manslaughter of this teenager, he turned nervously to speak to the youth in the skull mask.

“L-Look, I’m . . . I’m so sorry. . .” Then his penitent words died in his throat as he found himself speaking to thin air.

The boy in the skull mask had vanished.

The man’s mouth dropped open in disbelief. Where had he gone?

He shot a puzzled look at his two companions. “Hey, that kid. Did you see where he went?”

The other two just frowned, looked around them and up and down the street, which was now completely devoid of all trick-or-treaters, and shook their heads. “Er . . . no,” the bald man said, then turned his attention back to his mobile phone, tapping in the police number.

“Well, that’s strange,” the other man said, scratching his head in complete perplexion. “One minute he was standing there, and the next -“

His words were cut short by the sudden sound of laughter. The laughter seemed to come from nowhere, from seemingly out of thin air. The laughter sounded a little strange, hollow, distant, and seemed to echo all through the rain-lashed, windy street. It also had a slightly perturbing aspect about it.

For nearly a whole minute the laughter hung on the air, then it gradually became fainter, abated, seeming to melt into the sombre howling of the October wind.

Silence fell over the whole street, a sepulchral quiescence broken only by the heavy pattering of the rainfall and the gusting wind. The trio of adults just stood there, looking from one to the other, not knowing what to do, what to say. The general feeling among them was that they had just

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stumbled into some crazy Halloween nightmare.

Then something seemed to move over by the slumped body of the decapitated youth: a faint, misty, whitish shape that seemed to be forming into the figure of a . . . another male youth. As the eerie shape became a little more distinct, the trio saw that the wispy figure seemed to be wearing a . . . skull mask.

Then the smoke-like figure started to float upwards, until its feet were a few feet from the ground, before gliding away from the entranced spectators, gradually becoming fainter and fainter, until it faded away completely, back into whatever preternatural dimension it had sprung from. And as it went, that weird echoing voice rang out one last time: “Bye, bye, Jimmy. Now **NOBODY** can ever accuse you of being big-headed ever again!”

The echoing voice had barely died away when the sudden siren of an approaching police car could be heard from the top of the street.

Back in his darkened bedroom, Rick sat there cross-legged on his bed, in a posture similar to that of a Red Indian sitting by his campfire. The skull mask had now been removed from his face and placed before him, just a few inches away from his legs. The skull’s eye sockets, though empty, seemed to be alive and responsive, while its tablet-white teeth seemed to be fixed into a complacent, sinister grin. Rick smiled back at the skull mask, as fondly as a love-struck teenage lad might smile at his girlfriend. And the more he sat there, staring deeply and intently into those dark, hypnotic eye sockets, the more he felt as one with the mask’s omnipotent power.

That Halloween a few weeks ago had been quite an

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eventful night. And quite an amusing one too. Rick let out a giggle as he reflected on how his mate Jimmy had had his head whipped clean off by that man in the street, how the head had bounced and rolled down the road, the mask still stuck to it, like some weird football, splashing blood everywhere. God, such a funny sight! And the ironic thing about it all was that it was Jimmy's Halloween mask that everybody had thought was the best, the scariest, and the one that a few people even thought had something rather strange about it, something that really gave them the creeps. By contrast - and much to his annoyance - Rick's skull mask was regarded as nothing more than just another plain old average Halloween mask, the kind you might get from some cheap £1.00 shop. Yes, the kind of mask that they could never suspect, for one single minute, of having possible . . . well, supernatural powers.

Those powers had come to the fore so stunningly, so brilliantly, when the mask - ignited by Rick's strong feelings of jealousy towards his friend - had radiated them towards Jimmy's Halloween mask, giving it a sudden life of its own, making it stick to his head, rendering it impossible to remove. It was almost as if even the skull mask itself was jealous of its more realistic, more impressive rival mask. And when that guy in the trio of passers-by had tried to pull the mask off Jimmy's head, but had only succeeded in taking the boy's head with it as the evil power inherent in the skull mask stepped up its devilish power - well, that was just the icing on the cake in Rick's eyes! So funny, so hilariously and wickedly funny!

But that was what came of things when you bought a Halloween skull mask from an old woman who was said to be a practising witch, wasn't it? Rick couldn't suppress yet

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another fit of the giggles as he reflected on how the old crone who'd sold him the mask had said to him, with a kind of evil gleam in her eye: "I'm sure you'll have a great Halloween night with this little treasure, young man!" She even cackled like a witch as she said it. The fact that the mask was so cheap looking and ordinary did not, at first, give much credence to the old hag's words, especially when the mask was weighed up alongside Jimmy's more striking, more horrifying-looking mask. However, as it turned out on that memorable Halloween's night, you could never judge a book by its cover.

Suddenly the door to Rick's bedroom opened with a loud creak. A slightly shaking hand, a woman's hand, groped around the doorframe for the light switch, and pressed it on. Bright light instantly flooded the room, a refreshing contrast to the miserable dark winter's night outside. The clock on the wall of the teenager's bedroom said: 1.50 a.m.

The woman, shivering at the waft of cold air that hit her from within, slowly stepped into the bedroom. She frowned as she looked over at her son's bed. Her eyes were red-rimmed and drained, almost lost-looking, as if she had spent the last few weeks just crying bitterly over some great and tragic loss.

"Shirley, what's up?" shouted a man's voice from the bedroom next door. Her husband. She'd woken him up with her hasty and rough leaving of their bed. She should have been a bit more quiet.

"Oh, er, nothing, Frank," she said over her shoulder. "I just thought I'd heard a sound coming from Rick's room."

"What kind of sound?"

"Laughter. The sound of giggling. It sounded like a boy." She then turned her head back to face her son's neatly made

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bed. An empty bed. Nobody in there. Nothing. The room was as silent as a crypt.

Nothing, that is, except for a skull mask.

Shirley let out a shocked gasp as her eyes fell on the plastic white object that lay there, skeleton face grinning up at her, on the duvet. She slowly shook her head in utter disbelief. No, no, it couldn't be . . . That mask . . . How on earth had it got back in here? She thought the thing had been disposed of weeks ago, along with all of Rick's other belongings. She hated seeing that mask again, for it evoked all the horrid memories of that fateful Halloween's night.

For it was the same mask that Rick had been wearing that evening when he'd set off to meet up with his friend Jimmy . . . and had been tragically knocked over and killed by that speeding car.

The dead boy's bedroom grew colder. His still grieving mother felt a tear slide down her cheek.

And from the bed, the Halloween mask - the skull face that looked so ordinary and harmless, but was anything but - seemed to convey an eerie message that demanded to be answered: Put me on . . . Go on . . . Go on . . . Put me on!

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