



The Last Halloween

By David Lubar

"Aren't you going out for trick or treat?" Jennifer's mom asked two weeks before Halloween. "If you want me to make a costume, we'd better get started."

"I'm getting kind of old for that," Jennifer said. "Maybe I'll skip it this year."

Her mom seemed surprised. "Are you sure? I thought you loved to go out?"

Jennifer nodded. "I'm pretty sure." She'd been thinking about it ever since last year -- ever since those older kids had stolen her candy and chased her down the street. As much as she loved Halloween, it just wasn't worth the risk. Monster terror was fun. Real terror wasn't.

"There's still time for me to make a costume," her mom said a week before Halloween.

"Thanks," Jennifer told her, "but I think I'll just stay home and hand out candy." That might even be nice, she thought. She liked the little kids in their cute costumes. Her enthusiasm faded as she realized the older kids would come to her door, too -- the ones who didn't even bother with real costumes. The ones who were just out to get as much candy as they could.

"Last chance," Jennifer's mom said the day before Halloween. "I can still put something together."

Jennifer shook her head. She looked out the window at the leaf-strewn streets that would soon be awash with costumed kids. "No thanks," Jennifer said.

But on Halloween, as the day fell dark and the smallest trick-or-treaters emerged from their houses like ants spilling from a hill, Jennifer knew she had to join them. Costume, she thought, rummaging through her closet. Nothing. Sure, she could throw together a hippy look by tying a rag on as a headband, or do some sort of clown thing with makeup, but that wasn't good enough.

She tried the basement. Upstairs, she heard the doorbell ring. The first trick or treaters had arrived. As she scanned the piles of boxes stacked along a wall, a flash of a gold latch caught her eye. Her great grandmother's old trunk was in a corner, beneath boxes of baby toys and a stack of canning jars. Jennifer vaguely remembered looking in the trunk when they'd first moved to the house. She uncovered the trunk and opened it. A dusty smell of ancient cloth tickled her nose. She sorted through the contents. Just old dresses. Nice enough, but not the sort of costume she wanted. There was a hat with a veil. That might work in an emergency, but she had hoped to find something better. Jennifer found nothing else. But, as she started to close the lid, she realized that something was wrong. The outside of the trunk seemed deeper than the inside. She emptied the trunk and knocked her fist against the bottom. It sounded hollow. She pushed and pressed until she stumbled across the right spot. The false bottom slipped up. Jennifer held her breath as she lifted the wood panel, wondering what treasures she might find. Gloves. That was all. Elegant black gloves. They seemed to be made of some sort of leather. A slip of paper next to them said, "Special gloves for a special night."

The doorbell rang again. Jennifer heard a chorus of young voices shouting "Trick or Treat!" as her mother answered the door. Halloween was slipping past her like hourglass sand. Jennifer grabbed the hat. Not a great costume, but it would have to do. On a whim, she grabbed the gloves, too. After all, it was a special night, even if she didn't have a special costume. She slipped the gloves over her hands. They fit like a second skin. She put on the hat. The veil cut her

off from the world, letting through small glimpses. Jennifer ran upstairs and grabbed her Halloween bag.

"I'm going out," she called to her mom. She dashed into the crisp air of the last night in October. As she got her first piece of candy, from Mrs. Gilesby next door, Jennifer knew she hadn't missed Halloween. She crossed the familiar streets, following a pattern she'd worked out several years ago. At most houses, she heard the same familiar question. "What an interesting costume. What are you?"

"Just a veiled lady," Jennifer told them.

She reached Pritchard street. A dead end. The best path was down one side and up the other. She went to the first house, and then the second. And then she heard the footsteps behind her. Footsteps and whispers. A crowd, taller kids, bigger kids. She skipped the next house and crossed the street. They followed. Going to each house right after her. Playing with her the way a cat plays with a mouse. They had time. She was trapped. Jennifer crossed the street again. They crossed, too. And again. Jennifer gripped her bag with her right hand, feeling the handle bite against her palm through the thin leather of the gloves. I'm just going to walk back to the corner, she told herself. She'd go past them, and everything would be fine. She looked straight ahead. She took a step toward them.

A crude laugh bubbled from the cluster of kids. "Trick or treat," the boy in front said. His only costume was football shirt. Behind him, another boy, the tallest of the group, wore a motorcycle jacket.

"Gonna share?" the boy in front asked. Jennifer avoided his eyes. He stepped closer and reached toward her bag. Jennifer put her left hand out. She froze as the oddest sound punctured the night. Thwick...thwick...thwick...thwick...thwick. Claws, black as hard coal and sharp as needles, sprouted from her fingertips.

"Just give me the bag," the boy said. Jennifer gave him the claw instead. He screamed and clutched at his ripped shirt. The others took a step toward her. Jennifer flicked her arm out and slashed ribbons from the tall boy's leather jacket. She slashed a bit of flesh, too, but only enough to warn him off, only enough to make him think twice the next time he considered stalking a victim. Even in the dark, the others saw enough to know what she had done. They turned and fled. But not before Jennifer had flicked her wrist a final time, gutting their bags and spilling candy on the street. The claws retracted. Jennifer left the spilled candy alone for the little ones to find. She'd already received her reward. She finished her path along the street, making sure not to miss the house she'd skipped earlier.

"My, my, that's a lovely costume. What are you?"

"Justice," Jennifer whispered.

"What?" the woman asked.

"Just a veiled lady," Jennifer said, smiling slightly. Her bag was nearly full. Normally, that was when she'd return home. But there were other kids out there like her, alone and vulnerable. And there were other gangs like the one she'd met. Jennifer stayed on the streets until the last porch light went dark. Finally, she headed home.

"Did you have a good time?" her mother asked.

Jennifer nodded. She removed the hat and gloves. "Yeah. I think this was the best Halloween ever. I can't wait until next year."

"Well, just let me know ahead of time if you want a costume," her mother told her.

"I think I'll stick with this one," Jennifer said. "It's kind of fun. And it fits me really well."

Name: _____

What do you think Jennifer's last words, "it fits me really well" means? Use information from the text and your own ideas to answer the question.

Success Criteria

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I have restated the question and I have a gist

I have evidence from the text that relates to my gist answer

I have 2 connections that tell why my evidence is important

I have a conclusion

I have not included information that is irrelevant to my answer