

Trick or Treat

by Tanaqui

“Oh, wow!” The pile of candy spilling out across the table as Eric upended his bag more than made up for still being treated like a kid—*I’m nine now! I’ve been nine for a whole month*—this Halloween. He’d wanted to go trick-or-treating with Jake and Emily, but Jake had loftily announced that they didn’t want Eric tagging along. So Eric had to suffer the humiliation of being escorted round—with Gary and Sara from his class at school, and Em’s little brother Chris—for yet another year by Mom.

But at least they’d gotten plenty of candy, and everyone had said they really liked his skeleton costume. He’d spent hours making it: copying pictures of all the different bones onto half an old sheet; cutting them out; tacking them to a black sweatshirt and black pants in all the right places. It had been worth the effort: he’d gotten an extra piece of candy at several houses because of it.

Eric began sorting the heap into different piles: Charms, Mallo Cups, BB Bats, Pop Rocks, Gobstoppers, several kinds of gum. He kept at it as Jake banged into the house, doing his best to ignore his brother slamming the door behind him hard enough to make the glass rattle and flinging his costume—the other half of the sheet with two holes poked into it—onto the couch.

When Jake threw himself into a chair at the other end of the table and dumped out his own candy collection, Eric couldn’t resist sneaking a look. He gaped when he saw Jake’s haul: somehow, he’d gotten at least twice as much candy as Eric.

“How did you—?” he squeaked. None of the neighbors answering their doors had been half as impressed with Gary’s cowboy outfit or Sara’s witch’s costume or Chris in the pirate’s costume that Eric had worn last year as they had been with Eric’s skeleton. And all Jake had had was a crummy ghost costume made from a *sheet*.

Jake smirked at him. “That’s for me to know and you to find out when you’re older.” He grabbed a packet of Mallo Cups and ripped it open. Eric saw that he had at least half a dozen packets, and he was sure only a couple of houses had been handing them out.

Eric looked down at his own collection, which suddenly didn’t seem half so exciting. Whereas Jake’s pile.... Eric’s gaze was once more drawn back to it.

It’s not fair. Just ‘cause he’s bigger ‘n older... Eric bit his bottom lip to stop it from trembling and blinked to try and clear the tears that threatened to fall.

“Here.”

Looking up, Eric saw Jake divide his pile with a careless hand and push a quarter of the heap down the table towards him.

Jake met Eric’s gaze and gave a half shrug. “Not gonna be able to eat it all myself, and you’ll only be bugging me when yours is all gone.”

Eric knew that it was a lie. He always made his candy last longer than Jake, who usually wolfed his down in a couple of days and then annoyed Mom by pushing dinner away half-eaten. He also knew

it was a kind of peace-offering from Jake for not letting Eric join him.

“Thanks.” Eric stood, and reached forward and pulled the candy towards him, and began sorting it out.

Glancing up, he saw Jake was watching him. “Maybe you can come with me and Em next year, okay?” Jake offered with a lopsided grin, scrunching up the Mallo Cups packet.

“Really?” When Jake nodded at him, Eric grinned back. “Cool!” This time next year, he’d have just as much candy as Jake. More maybe, ‘cause he was sure his costume would be heaps better....But for now....

Following Jake’s example, Eric tore open a packet and sank his teeth into a Mallo Cup.

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