

# A Halloween Happening

By MultiMapper  
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"You need a drink, Jim?" Marlon, the somewhat shaggy and slightly inebriated host, asked cheerfully.

"No. I'm fine. And my name's John."

"C'mon, Jim. Halloween only comes once a year! Let's party!" Marlon said with a level of enthusiasm that no sober person could attain.

"It's a great party, but I think I'll stick with the snacks." John said, then realized that Marlon had already wandered away to speak to another of his guests.

John had been surprised when Marlon stopped him in the hallway at school and invited him to the

Halloween party at his house. If it had been anyone else, John might have been suspicious, worried that he was being set up for some kind of cruel prank.

Even though he didn't know Marlon personally, by everything he had heard around school, Marlon was a genuinely nice guy. Marlon wasn't a big brain and he certainly wasn't a jock. But just about everyone knew who he was. And everyone who knew him, liked him.

John had just turned fifteen, so everyone else at the party was a year or so older than he was. It was sort of an honor to be invited, but John felt a little bit out of his league.

Looking around, he realized that the music was good and for the most part, the other guests were friendly. So, although he felt a little bit out of place, he found that he really was having a good time.

"Here you go Jim, Marlon said that you needed a drink." Kara, Marlon's girlfriend, said as she offered him a plastic cup of something fizzy and orange.

"I'm not used to drinking." John admitted shyly.

"Well, you don't have to get hammered or anything like that. But sometimes a drink can loosen you up a little and make a good time even better." She said cheerily.

John considered her words as he accepted the drink, then cautiously asked, "What is it?"

"I'm not sure. Orange pop and... tequila? Or whiskey. Maybe both. Does it matter?" She asked with a perky flip of her hair, before bouncing away.

John sniffed the drink, then walked to the table of snacks and discretely sat it beside an unopened bucket of fried chicken.

He paused for a moment. Finally, his curiosity got the better of him and he popped open the paper top of the bucket and was delighted to see an entire bucket of hot wings.

After reaching across the table to grab a paper plate, John carefully picked up three of the hot wings and a few paper napkins.

He took his first bite and reveled in the sensation. The vinegary bite of the hot sauce was absolutely perfect. His taste buds danced with joy.

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"I KNOW when I've had too much to drink!" Nathan McClure exclaimed from beside John, his slur giving lie to his words.

"I'm just saying that maybe you should slow down for a little bit, so you can enjoy the whole party." Marlon said reasonably.

"Hey! Look! Another orange whiskquila!" Nathan said joyously as he reached for John's abandoned drink.

John noticed, and turned away, to avoid being drawn into their conversation. Putting it out of his mind, John devoted his full attention to the next hot wing.

"Think, Nathan. You don't want to pass out before we even start having fun, do you?" Marlon pleaded as he reached for the drink.

"Hey man! Not cool!" Nathan screamed as he jerked his drink away from Marlon's grasp.

His drunken reflexes weren't up to the task and he went off balance, plowing right into the person just behind him.

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John wasn't prepared for the impact, and very nearly went sprawling on the floor as Nathan's full weight collided with him.

All the air was knocked out of him in a whoosh and it took a moment for him to realize that something was wrong, seriously wrong.

One moment in time seemed to stretch into eternity as John realized his situation.

"You okay, Jim?" Marlon asked with concern.

John started pointing at his throat while at the same time he tried with all his might to dislodge the chicken bone that he had apparently tried to inhale.

"Hey man, that isn't funny." Marlon said slowly.

John could feel himself getting lightheaded as his knees started to give way.

"Stop fucking around, man, that isn't cool."  
Nathan said as he finally managed to more or less find his balance.

Darkness started to intrude on the periphery of John's vision and the sounds of voices around him became muffled.

*"Take my hand."* A voice whispered, then John saw the hand, reaching out to him.

As he took the offered hand and used it to pull himself to standing, he suddenly felt a wave of relief wash through him.

He wasn't choking anymore, and his vision became clear.

"Thanks, that was kind of scary for a minute."  
John said with relief, then looked closely at the figure before him. "Great grim reaper costume, where's your scythe?"

*"We use combine thrashers now. It's much more efficient."* The hooded figure said in a dry tone.

"I bet." John said with a grin, then turned at the sounds behind him.

"Come on, Jim. You're scaring the shit out of me here." Marlon said in a voice that conveyed his escalating panic.

John was about to answer him, but froze when he saw Marlon slapping the face of the still figure on the floor.

"Hey! That's..." John trailed off as Marlon moved and allowed John to see the wide vacant eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling.

*"Yes. It's you."* The hooded figure said in his whispery voice.

John looked at his companion, then down at the floor again.

Finally John whispered, "I'm dead?"

*"Probably."* The hooded figure said carefully.

John looked at him, hoping he would continue the thought.

*"If one of these people has the presence of mind to clear your airway and administer CPR, then it's possible that you could revive."* The hooded figure said quietly.

John looked around at everyone staring dumbly at what was happening on the kitchen floor.

*"I wouldn't get my hopes up."* The hooded figure added reluctantly.

"Someone needs to call for an ambulance!" Kara said in a trembling voice.

"Ya think?" John said indignantly as he noticed the pronounced blue color tinting the skin of his body on the floor.

"No. The cops will come. We need to ditch the body!" Nathan said urgently.

"Hey! What did I ever do to you?" John asked plaintively.

"We're calling for an ambulance. Everyone, take off before the cops get here." Marlon said decisively, then turned to his girlfriend and said, "Kara, baby, would you hand me the phone?"

"Seriously Marlon, my dad has a wood chipper, no one would ever know." Nathan said imploringly.

"Thanks Nate. Go on, before the cops come and you get in trouble." Marlon said as he dialed the phone. "Kara, would you see that Nate gets home safe? He's not good to drive."

"Are you sure you don't want me to stay?" She asked quietly.

"There's no reason for you to get in trouble too. Go on, and be safe." Marlon said with a weak smile, then turned his attention to the phone. "I need an ambulance right away."

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*"How are you feeling?"*

"Well, even though I should probably be freaking out, I'm actually feeling fine." John said thoughtfully.

*"Without adrenaline or any of the other physiological fear responses, you're able to think clearly. I just want to be sure that you're not depressed about what's happened."*

"Well, I'm not exactly happy about being dead, but... I think I'm okay." John said honestly.

*"Good. I'll do whatever I can to help you through this."*

"What's going to happen now?" John asked as he turned his full attention to his companion.

*"You have some decisions to make."*

"Like what?" John asked cautiously.

*"You just need to figure out what's going to make you happy, and we'll do our best to get that for you... and then you'll have it forever."*

"Forever?" John asked in a whisper.

*"You'll have plenty of time to worry about that later. But now I think we should go to your house."*

"It's kind of far away. I was planning to call for a ride home." John said uncertainly.

*"Just close your eyes and think about your home and we'll be there."* John's companion said as he placed a hand on his shoulder.

As John was about to close his eyes, he saw Marlon sitting beside his still body on the kitchen floor.

Marlon reached out a hand and gently closed John's dead, sightless eyes as he whispered, "I'm sorry, Jim."

John reluctantly smiled and nodded, then closed his eyes and concentrated on his home.

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*"It may be a while before your parents are notified. So we should have time to talk about a few things."*

"I wonder where they are?" John said as he glanced around.

*"From what I'm hearing upstairs, it sounds like they may be a few minutes."*

"Oh." John said as he looked at the stairway, then added, "Ewww."

*"When a spirit passes, he has some decisions to make."*

"Like?" John asked, then gestured toward the sofa in the living room, offering his companion a seat.

*"If there is someone in the world of the living that you're worried about, you can choose to stay with them and watch over them. You know, like a guardian angel."*

"So all that stuff they say about 'your grandma is watching over you' is really true?" John asked with surprise.

*"Sometimes. Quite often, the recently deceased feel that they left things unfinished and want to remain, for a time, to see them through."*

"I don't think I have anything like that." John said slowly.

*"Well, one of the reasons I wanted to bring you here is in case you would want to watch over your parents."*

"Do a lot of people choose to do that?" John asked curiously.

*"Some do. I wouldn't say a lot."*

"Okay, but let's just say for the sake of argument that I don't have anyone alive that I want to watch over. What would I do then?" John asked seriously.

*"Well, that depends on if there's someone waiting to take you to the other side."*

"Isn't that what you're here to do?" John asked curiously.

*"Oh no. I'm just here to get you past the initial fear and then answer your questions. What you need is a loved one who has passed on to take you over. When they do, you'll be with them forever."*

"What if, again, for the sake of argument, I don't have a loved one waiting for me?" John asked cautiously.

*"Well, in that case, you'd stay here, in limbo."*

"Limbo? You mean between life and death?" John asked cautiously.

*"Not exactly. You \*are\* dead. Limbo is the plane of existence between the living world and the afterlife."*

"So... what? Am I waiting to be judged? Or do I need to do a good deed or something to earn my way in?" John asked slowly.

*"Oh no. Nothing like that. In the afterlife, I suppose you could call it heaven, no one is alone. You're with your loved ones forever. But if you don't have a loved one, or they haven't passed on yet, then you stay here."*

"Well, if I end up being stuck here, what would I do?" John asked as his mind raced over the people he had known in his life.

*"Whatever you like. If you have a favorite place, you could go there and enjoy it. You can follow your friends or family around, or you might even find a complete stranger that you would want to watch over."*

"Forever." John said darkly.

*"Of course, if you're interested, you could become a guide like me. It's hard work and it can be heartbreaking at times but, I don't know, you're there when people are hurting and needing answers, and you can really help them."*

"Put a robe on! John could be home any time."

John and his companion turned to see John's mother walking slowly down the stairs.

"That's my mom, her name is Janelle." John said with a grand gesture toward the stairway.

"He's out at a party. I bet he's dead drunk by now."

"Well, he's half right." John said dryly, then added, "That's my step-dad. Howard."

"And I bet you never even thought about doing \*anything\* naughty at his age." Janelle said with a grin at her husband.

"Do you want to see how naughty I can be?" Howard asked with a leer.

"If they start making out in here, I'm gonna puke." John said with a cringe at the scene unfolding before him.

*"You're dead. You can't puke."* His companion said quietly.

"If they get naked, trust me, I'll find a way." John said with a queasy look.

The phone ringing drew everyone's attention.

"That's probably John wanting a ride home." Janelle said as she rushed past her husband toward the phone.

"Or the police, telling us to come and get him from the drunk tank." Howard said frankly.

"Hello."

John watched carefully for his mother's reaction.

"Yes, that's my son. Johnathan David Cutter." She said in a trembling voice.

"What happened? How is he?" She asked in panic.

"Yes. Yes. I've got that. We'll be right there." She said as she forced herself to calm.

"What's wrong, Janey?" Howard asked with concern.

"That was the police, John's on his way to the hospital." She said in a shaky voice.

"Which one?" Howard asked seriously.

"Um, General."

"I'm sure he'll be fine. He probably just had too much to drink. Let's get dressed and get going." Howard said as he started walking toward the stairs.

"What is it with him and thinking that I'm drunk? I've NEVER said or done ANYTHING to deserve that." John said indignantly.

*"He's probably just thinking about how it was when he was your age and assumes that you're doing what he did."*

"As if!" John huffed, then thought to ask, "So are we going with them, or what?"

*"We can go directly to the hospital if you like. I know the way."*

"Oh, yeah. Sounds good. It'll beat having to listen to Howard telling my mom about how much of a drunk I am." John said with a roll of his eyes.

The hooded figure held out a hand.

When John accepted it, the world faded out around them.

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Just as suddenly as the world had faded, it reformed to be the waiting area of the emergency room.

*"Your body probably isn't here yet."*

"What's taking so long?" John asked curiously.

*"They were probably trying to resuscitate you at the scene for a while before giving up and bringing you here."*

"Are you sure they didn't succeed in reviving me?" John asked cautiously.

*"No. You're here. That means your body is dead. And after this long, there's no chance of going back."*

"I have a question." John said thoughtfully.

*"Go ahead and ask. That's what I'm here for."*

"I always heard that if you were good, you'd go to heaven and if you were bad, you'd go to hell." John said slowly.

*"That's about right."* His companion said seriously.

"Tell me about it. I mean, am I going to be taken in front of a great huge throne and judged for everything I did in my life?" John asked cautiously.

*"I don't know all the details, but from what I understand, the moment you died, you were judged. If you were destined for... the bad place, you'd be there right now."*

"So there is a hell?" John asked cautiously.

*"I don't know from personal experience, but from what I've heard, yes. And it's a never-ending horror beyond imagining. Those who are hopelessly corrupt go straight to the pit. But since you're here, you've obviously avoided that fate."*

"But what about heaven?" John asked cautiously.

*"Again, I don't know from personal experience, but the afterlife that waits for us beyond limbo is said to be the ultimate fulfillment; absolute peace. And if you had a guardian spirit waiting for you, then you would have crossed over with them by now."*

"But you can't go there alone." John said slowly.

*"No. I think that, if you were alone, it wouldn't be heaven."*

"My mom's on her third husband, which one would she go to heaven with?" John asked curiously.

*"Well, assuming she makes it, I'd guess none of them, but I suppose it's just as likely that it could be all of them. The bond of marriage ends at death... you know, 'till death do us part', but if they're still friends and lovers in their hearts, they could continue on for eternity together."*

"Wow. I guess I can see why they call it heaven." John said in wonder.

"Is that the Cutter kid?" a nurse asked as she rushed to the men wheeling a gurney into the emergency room.

"Yeah. But there's no rush. We just need to get a doctor to call it." One of the paramedics said sadly.

"Overdose?" The nurse asked cautiously.

"Yeah. An overdose of hot wings." The Paramedic said with weak humor, then motioned for his partner to help him shift the covered body to a waiting bed.

At the nurse's curious look, he continued. "The kid had a chicken bone stuck in his throat. It was wedged in there solid."

"What a waste." She said as she looked at the shrouded figure.

"Yeah, he was only fifteen." The paramedic said sadly, then in a more serious voice, continued, "Will you get the doc to make it official? We need to get back out there, it's Halloween and I have a feeling that things will be jumping tonight."

"Yeah. It's already started picking up here." She said sadly.

"Shouldn't my mom be here by now?" John asked as he walked over to the body covered by a sheet.

*"Be patient. You have all the time in the universe."*

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"I'm Janelle Sutherland, I'm here for my son, John Cutter." Janelle said as she rushed into the emergency room.

"Oh. My. God!" John said as he looked at his parents.

*"What's wrong?"* His companion asked curiously.

"Howard's carrying a McDonald's cup of coffee. They stopped for coffee on the way to the hospital!" John said in amazement.

There was a shriek from John's mother, then she ran to her husband, crying hysterically.

"Tell me again, why are we here?" John asked curiously.

*"There are certain things that you need to witness to make it easier to accept your new situation."*

"Okay. Well, if I've seen what I need to, can we go?" John asked uncomfortably.

*"There's just one other thing. It's good to hear their first words after they've calmed down. Sometimes it helps you find peace."*

"Okay." John said reluctantly, then moved beside his mother and her husband so that he could hear.

"How could he do this to me?" Janelle whimpered into her husband's chest.

"You can stay and watch if you want. But I'm done." John said as he turned to walk away.

His companion put a hand on his shoulder and said, *"I understand. Do just like before, but this time take us to your father."*

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"This is my father's office. He's always working, so he's probably here." John said as he glanced around the darkened reception area.

"Just put the candy bowl out so they can get it themselves! I need you to help me get our stories straight before the board sees the quarterly figures tomorrow."

"That would be my dad, John Cutter Senior." John said as he gestured toward the only doorway with light spilling out.

*"What do you think his reaction will be?"*

"Who knows? I doubt that he'll laugh or dance a jig or anything like that, but I can't imagine him being all that upset about it. He's seen me a total of about thirty minutes in the past five years." John said frankly.

*"You can't automatically assume that he doesn't care just because he isn't around."*

"I guess we'll see in a few minutes. I don't think mom would miss an opportunity to send some bad news my dad's way." John said bitterly.

*"If you'd rather not do this, we could go."*

"No. We're here, we may as well stay and watch. I doubt that there'll be much to it." John said in a resigned voice.

"Hold on Scott, I've got another call, I'll be right back." John Sr. said before putting the line on hold, then clicking another, "John Cutter."

"Hold on Janelle, John did what?"

"Dead? You mean... dead?"

"No. No. You don't need to worry about anything. You know that I'm responsible for all his medical and insurance costs, so it'll be best if I handle this. I'll take care of all the arrangements and get back with you about the details."

"Just take care of yourself and leave the rest to me."

"Goodbye."

*"Well, that didn't sound so bad."* The hooded figure said in his whispery voice.

John Sr. then clicked the blinking button on his phone and said, "Scott? Oh, no. It was nothing. Now, line item forty seven..."

"I have a half brother who absolutely hates me, are we off to see him next?" John asked bitterly as he walked out of the office.

*"I'm sorry, John."* The hooded figure said as he hurried to follow.

John stopped at the feeling of a hand on his shoulder.

Before he knew what had happened, a pair of arms were drawing him into a hug.

*"I'm really sorry. Seeing your loved ones receiving the news and accepting it usually helps you to let go of your former life. I just wanted to make your passing as painless as possible."*

John enjoyed the hug for a moment, then said, "You are making it easier. But I think it's safe to say that I'm not planning to devote my afterlife to watching out for either one of those two."

*"Yes. I think that's a wise decision."* his companion said as he released John from the hug.

"How long do we have? I mean, am I taking up your time when you're supposed to be helping someone else?" John asked curiously.

*"No. I'm here just for you. We can take as long as we want. Once you're settled into your afterlife and I know that you're happy, I'll go back and get another assignment."*

"Good. Because if we've got time, there's someone that I'd like to check on." John said seriously.

*"Just imagine their home and we'll be there."*

"You see, that's the thing. He's dead." John said reluctantly.

*"Well, that can be a little more challenging, but I should still be able to help you."*

"Okay, how do we do it?" John asked hopefully.

*"Just tell me about him so maybe I'll get a sense of where to start looking."*

"Well, there was this guy at school. He was a grade behind me, so I never really got to talk to him

that much. But he really seemed nice. I always kind of thought that someday we'd get a chance to talk and get to know each other." John said distantly. "But last summer he drowned. So I was wondering if you could help me find him so I can find out what happened to him."

John paused for a moment to see if his companion had any questions. When it was apparent that he didn't, John continued, "I guess I'd just like to know if he went up... or down. And maybe, if he's here in between like I am, we'd finally get to know each other. Even though I never got to know him that well, I always had the feeling that, if we got the chance, we'd be really good friends."

"*What was his name?*" The hooded figure asked slowly.

"Billy. Billy Hobson." John said hopefully.

John watched his companion and waited for him to say or do something.

Without being able to see his face, there were none of the usual visual cues that he was accustomed to reading.

Finally his companion brought his hands up to the sides of his hood, then slowly pulled it back.

John froze at the sight before him and finally asked, "Billy? Is that really you?"

"Yeah. And I always thought we could be friends too. That's why, when I saw that you were going to have a close call with death, today, I volunteered to help you." Billy said quietly. "Sometimes, if we can see the danger coming, we can intervene and give you another chance at life."

"Um, thanks. I guess it didn't work out that way, this time. Huh?" John asked weakly.

"No. I'm sorry. I had all my attention on that drink. I thought for sure that it was going to be the instrument of your death. I never even imagined that you'd choke to death on a chicken wing." Billy said with a pained smile.

John looked at Billy curiously, then finally realized what seemed off about him. "You're bigger than you were."

"Yeah. Your body here is formed by your self-image. I always wanted to be taller, so now I am." Billy said timidly.

"It looks good." John said with a sincere smile, then shyly asked, "So. What do you say? We're both here now. Do you think that we'll have time to get to know each other?"

"Is forever enough time?"

"Maybe. I'd like to find out." John said with a smile, then asked, "So what do I do now? Should I become a grim reaper so we can spend time together?"

"Well, we could do that if you wanted to." Billy said shyly, then quietly added, "Or maybe we could cross over."

"But I thought you said I couldn't cross over unless I had someone... you'd go with me?"

"My life didn't hold much more for me than yours did for you. When I arrived here, I thought that I'd be here forever, watching people, one after another, moving on to something that I could never have."

"How do we do it?" John asked cautiously.

"Are you sure you want to try?" Billy asked slowly.

"Yeah. I think I am. There's nothing for me here, so I'm ready to go." John said with a level of certainty that surprised even him.

Billy looked at John appraisingly for a moment, then offered his hand.

"But I thought you said that you have to go with a loved one." John whispered, with doubt beginning to infiltrate his expression.

Billy nodded, still holding his hand out.

John looked at the hand for a moment longer, then grinned as he realized what Billy was really saying.

The last of his misgivings fled as he said, "Yeah. I think, me too."

Billy shyly smiled as he felt John's fingers entwine with his.

"What now?" John asked curiously.

"I don't know. Let's find out." Billy said as a brilliant tunnel of light formed before them.

The pair wore matching expressions of awe and excitement as they walked hand in hand into the infinite light.

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"What's got you so down?" Kara asked as she sat beside her boyfriend.

"I was just thinking about that kid, Jim." Marlon said as he stared at the floor.

"You didn't do anything wrong. Even the cops said so. It was just an accident." Kara soothed.

"I know, I just feel like... because of me, he's dead. If I hadn't invited him to the party, he'd still be alive." Marlon said despondently.

"You can't know that for sure. Maybe some things are meant to happen. I think you should try to accept that. Because things like this are still going to happen whether you accept it or not." Kara said seriously.

Marlon thought about it for a moment, then smiled as he said, "You're pretty smart. Don't let anyone ever tell you different."

Kara snuggled against Marlon, feeling completely at peace with the man she knew was her soul mate.

**The End**