

The Halloween Cliche

It was that time of the year again. Girls use the excuse to tramp up their costumes and the boys put in zero effort, because they just wanna check out girls. I am so over being a teenager. Why am I the only mature one in my class? Not to mention my best friend, Grace, who will try and drag me to that party. She was so influenceable, but the best friend a girl could ask for.

I am more interested in the origin and history of Halloween. I didn't believe in any of it, but still found it fascinating. I imagined what it would be like during the Celtic New Year's festival of Samhain. What did people wear or eat? This goes back thousands of years, so none of the conveniences of the modern era. It would have been a whole different life and I can't even begin to imagine the difficulties these people faced.

"You might as well give in, you know I'm not gonna stop," came the expected prompt from Grace. "Fine, but I am not putting on a stupid costume," I replied. "Suit yourself, but you will be the only one in normal clothes that night," she tried to persuade me. "Like I care what other people think of me," I retorted, but this was also expected, "I don't think people will even notice me in Hailey's parent's mansion anyway." When you live in a small town, everyone knows everyone else's business. Hailey's family was known for throwing extravagant parties. So if your parents gave you permission to invite the entire senior group to your house, no-one was going to care about an average nobody or how she was dressed. "Be that as it may, please think about it, it doesn't have to be a major costume, Caz. I am only looking out for my best friend," she pressed. "And I appreciate you immensely, Grace," I tried to change the topic.

I escaped to the relative silence of the quad. School was loud on a normal day, but with excitement building over the party, it was even worse. I like to be left alone to my thoughts and contemplate my existence, you know, normal teenager stuff. Grace says I think too much, but I could argue that she doesn't think deep enough. She asked me to think about a costume, so I was thinking about it, but I was still not gonna wear one.

"Why are you frowning?" came a voice to rip me back to reality. "Oh... Hey Jordan," I managed to get out. Jordan has been my neighbour since we were in Kindergarten. We were kinda friends, I suppose. It meant I had someone to hang out with over summer breaks when Grace was off with her family in some foreign country. This is unfortunate, because I have had a crush on him for the most of my teenage life. Of course, I wouldn't dare mention this to anyone, especially Grace. She would concoct some master plan to get us together and I couldn't deal with that now.

"I was just thinking about an excuse to get out of Hailey's party," that wasn't a complete lie. "Seriously, Caz? Are you gonna leave me to deal with that mass of posers alone?" he pushed jokingly. For a popular good looking guy like Jordan, I suppose it can be difficult to tell the posers who vie for your attention from genuine friends. Ugh, the problems of popular people. "I am sure you will cope without me, but no, I won't leave you alone," why did I just say that? Get out of your head Caz, don't let his charming good looks mess with your thoughts...

"I knew I could count on you," he said with that gorgeous smile. No, nope. Don't fall for it Caz! "Of course, what are friends for?" I tried to save it. Did I see a glimpse of disappointment in his face? If it was there, it wasn't there for long. "So do you want a ride? We are leaving from the same place to go to the same place. It makes sense, right?" Was the oh-so-confident Jordan nervous? "Can we pick up Grace on the way?" I was happy he asked, but I needed a shield, because it quite obviously got awkward when the two of us were alone together. "Sure. See you later, Caz!" And just like that he was gone. Probably to dissect what just happened.

The rest of the week dragged on, because the party was the only thing people talked about around here. Wasn't school supposed to be a place of learning? I know we are young and supposed to enjoy our lives before we are burdened with adulthood, but there was more than one way to do that. This party was going to be a nightmare. *Sigh*

It's worse than I anticipated. The sheer amount of people was simply overwhelming, but there was no backing out. Grace had a firm grip on my arm and she had no intention of letting go. Picture this: Grace on my one side dressed up as a less than angelic angel, myself in the middle dressed as a muggle and the dashing handsome Jordan as Prince Charming on my other side. I feel miniscule in the shadow of the mansion and insignificant amongst all my peers. Let's get the party started I guess.

We wove our way through people to find a good vantage point to scope out the surroundings. I would have liked to discuss a plan of action, but Grace was more of the spontaneous type. Hailey went all out on this event. They even hired someone as a gipsy with her crystal ball and everything. It looked authentic. I knew that Grace would jump at that the moment she saw it. She would never pass up an opportunity to hear how great her future was going to be. I on the other hand would rather avoid it, mostly because I didn't believe in those kinds of things.

"O.M.Goodness!!! A fortune teller!!! We gotta go see her," Grace shrieked in a very unnatural tone, "this is gonna be great..." Jordan just gave me one of those 'Whatever'-looks and off we went. "This is going to be just great," but my sentiment was dripping with sarcasm.

"We would like to" Grace got cut off mid sentence with an abrupt "Shhht!" by the fortune teller. We were all too shocked to say anything and stood there frozen. She closed her eyes and did some weird arm movements, like she is waving a fly out of her face, but with pzazz. This was when we all exchanged confused looks. We all jumped when she spoke suddenly. "You!" and she pointed to me, "You are in need of enlightenment." Now I was utterly confused and it took a few moments to formulate a response, "What do you mean?"

She gave me a look that I couldn't quite place, but it sent chills down my spine. She ushered us into the seats surrounding the table with the crystal ball. I'll give it to her, she was good, very convincing, but this was where it all got very freaky.

I was expecting some visual effects of some sort from the crystal ball, but what happened next was truly impressive. My face was showing in a scene from a horror movie set in a time long ago. There must have been cameras and clever editing programs in live time. Grace was fully enveloped in what was happening and Jordan was somewhat amused.

The gipsy must have sensed my apprehension and she spoke in a hushed tone;

“I will grant your wish for just one night.
This night you disbelieve.
I will send you to the time at hand
and return you from your dream.”

“Wow! That sounds so real!” came Grace’s response. My “Wow” came with a roll of the eyes. “Wait, what wish?” Jordan chimed in. The fortune teller pointed at me again and what she said next left me puzzled, “Ask the disbeliever.” Jordan and Grace both looked at me and all I could do was shrug. She abruptly stood up and waved us off. Grace was still polite about it, “Thank you and enjoy the rest of your night!” “Good luck with yours,” the gipsy replied meekly.

“What did she mean with that?” Jordan asked as we made our way over to the refreshments. “Who knows?” I replied. “She doesn’t seem all there if you ask me,” I gave my opinion without anyone asking. “Well, I think she was awesome,” Grace the ever-optimist sang her praises. All I wanted was for this night to be over, but we haven’t even been here for an hour. There was no way I could convince my friends to leave now. So the only logical question was “What do we do now?”

“Let’s go down to the basement. I hear it is really tricked out and they have a PS5 and Xbox One Series X down there,” of course this was where Jordan’s mind went. “I feel like showing off some moves on the dance floor, what do you say Caz?” Grace looked at me expectantly. “You know I love you Grace, but I am not much of a public dancer. So I will go with Jordan on this one,” I said as kindly as I could. Grace knew me very well and probably knew I would say no, but she had to ask anyway. So she gave me her popstar smile and headed off to some other girls she knew on the dance floor. Jordan pointed towards the basement door and I gave him a nod. Off we went too.

At least we could pass some time by playing games. It sounded more appealing than what else was on offer around here. So down the stairs we went. The next moment I can feel someone shaking me awake and whispering-shouting to me, “Cassandra, wake up. Wake up, Cassandra. We need to go!” The voice sounded familiar, but the urgency was frightening. I was extremely dazed and confused and my eyes weren’t completely focused when I opened them. Why did my head hurt? Why was it so cold? What was going on? So many questions and no answers. The next moment someone pulled me up and pushed me to move. I was being guided and I went willingly, but only because I wasn’t in control of myself at that moment.

It took me a while to realise that I was outside and moving swiftly while being hit in the face by branches and tripping over roots, because it was dark and I couldn't see where I was going. Obviously I was running through a forest at night, but the question was why? I was driven by adrenaline and nothing made sense, but I had an urgency within me to survive. I didn't realise the height of my fear at that moment, but that would become all too real very soon.

In the distance I could see a light and I instinctively headed for it. I could hear someone right behind me, but somehow I knew that person wasn't a threat. That person did wake me from whatever daze I was in and directed me to safety. I still didn't know what the threat was at that time. All of a sudden I heard a terrifying moan that turned my skin to ice. Never in my life have my ears interpreted a sound like that. "Faster Cassandra!" came the voice from behind me. "We can make it," he pressed. I was already exhausted and feeling lightheaded, but I really didn't want to encounter whatever made that ghastly ghostly sound.

The light was close and I could almost sense the safety. That was then when my feet decided that they couldn't be without each other and I went head over heels. As I was trying to gather myself on the ground, I was facing backwards at the way we were coming from and I almost lost my breath at the sight I was beholding. The familiar voice broke my trance, "Cassandra, move!" I haven't even seen the face, but I recognised the voice. He helped me up once again and I genuinely ran faster than I have ever done before. We ran past a table covered with food and headed inside. As the door slammed behind me, I spun around and stared at a very handsome young man, wait is that Jordan?

"What the hell is going on Jordan?" I said with a little more grimness than I planned. "Jordanian, Cassandra. You must have hit your head with more force than I first anticipated. How are you feeling?" He sounded genuinely concerned and a lot calmer than I was in that instance. "How am I feeling? HOW AM I FEELING?! Are you kidding me?" I instantly regretted my tone and could see the hurt in his eyes. "I'm sorry. I am really sorry. I just don't know what's going on. Not to mention the marathon we just ran while being chased by someone in a terrifyingly accurate ghostly costume," but now he looked confused. "Jordan, uh, Jordanian. Please tell me what is going on. How did we get here? Where is here? The last thing I remember is heading down to the basement to play games."

Jordanian's expression was soft and gentle, but laced with concern. "Cassandra, I am not sure how to tell you this, but I think you are rather seriously injured. You are confused and nothing you say makes any sense. We will have to get you to the doctor in town in the morning. Do you think you will be alright till then?" Jordan was really pressing all my buttons and this didn't seem the time for it. "Yes I am confused, but no Jordan, I am not seriously injured. This isn't funny anymore. What is going on? And why all of a sudden are you referring to me by my full name, are we characters in some play? This is getting old fast." I didn't even try to hide the agitation in my voice now.

"I am sorry if I upset you Cassandra. My true name is Jordanian. I have always known you as Cassandra. There is no play. We are in the middle of Samhain. There is no trickery or

deception. Does this clarify things?" He remained polite. "Caz, you call me Caz. And Samhain? As in the ancient Celtic festival? How did Hailey pull this off?" I was still unsure of how this all unfolded. "How exactly did we get here?" I needed more answers. "Well, we were heading home right before sunset. You could call it a lovers' stroll. You were walking backwards while talking to me and tripped over a rock. You hit your head very hard on the ground. You were out for some time and I thought I had lost you. I was frantically looking for someone to help. I couldn't find anyone. It was no surprise, given the day we are on. As darkness greeted me, I headed back to you and I could hear them coming. I knew we didn't have a lot of time and that is when I shook you until you came too, but I wasn't aware of your state. If I'd known I wouldn't have shook you so much. I might have made things worse. I didn't know what else to do. I guess in some way I did lose you," Jordanian became silent just then.

I didn't realise how this affected him. He seemed genuine and this made me regret being so harsh. A lovers' stroll? I was lost beyond comprehension. Even the way he carries himself and his choice of words were strange. Everything about his manner was different, like he was from another era. The only thing that remained the same was his concern and protection of me. I stepped closer and put my hand on his arm, "I am sorry to put you through this. I know you don't understand and neither do I. What I am going to say next might seem crazy, but I promise it is true." He gave me a curious look and I had to resist the urge to find comfort in his arms. There was an unspoken connection between us. I wasn't complaining though. "I am from the year 2022. We were at a Halloween party at Hailey's mansion. We were heading down to the basement and the last thing I remember was slipping on the steps. Does any of this ring a bell?" I waited for his response. He seemed to think long and hard about what I had just said.

"2022? That's quite a few millennia from now. Halloween? I don't even know where to begin on that one. I am sorry that you are going through this Cassan... Caz. I honestly have no knowledge of any of this," he really didn't know. I could see it in his expression. This was disheartening, how is this even possible? I time travelled? It's the only explanation. How on earth do you explain any of this otherwise? I racked my brain for anything that would make sense and then I remembered, "The fortune teller!" I yelled unexpectedly. This made Jordanian jump. "I guess here you could call her a witch..." my thoughts trailed off. "Now YOU need to clarify," came Jordanian's prompt. "At the party, she said something about a wish that she would grant about this night, Halloween, because I didn't believe any of it. Maybe this is what she meant, she transported me back to this time to make me a believer. It's a little drastic if you ask me." This all seemed too unreal and freaky to be true, yet here we were.

Jordanian frowned, "You don't believe in this in your time? What is your time like?" "I can't even begin to explain how different the future is," that was the honest truth. "What about us?" He asked. I wasn't completely sure how to answer this. Compared to what 'we' here, the future would seem dull and I cherished the thought of the 'us' in this time. "Well, we are very good friends, but I have had a secret crush on you for a very long time," there was no harm in telling Jordanian. "I am pleased though, that it has resulted in something in your time, but it must be difficult having future me instead of present me," stop mumbling on Cas, you are ruining it. Then

came that smile that made me melt on the inside. "I have found my time with you very enjoyable. There are slight differences, but mostly you are similar," and he gave me a wink.

I smiled and then started to yawn. I didn't realise how exhausted I was. From all the running and encounters with ghosts or spirits and the realisation of where I am. Jordanian saw this and showed me to the bed. "You can have the bed. I will make a bed on the floor," he said, ever the gentleman. "Thank you, Jordanian," was all I could muster as I stared into those mesmerising eyes. I made myself comfortable and let my thoughts drift. How does one even begin to comprehend the events of the night? I wouldn't even have believed it if I weren't living it myself.

I don't know when I fell asleep, but when I woke, once again I was dazed and confused. My head was aching. "Caz, Caz, are you okay?" came Jordanian's concerned voice once more. "Yes, yes, I am fine. Is it safe now?" I asked. "Safe? What do you mean? You fell down the stairs. What would I do without you keeping my life interesting?" He said. "Jordan?" I asked confused. "Yes, Jordan. Who else would it be?", he said with a giggle. "I'm back? I'm back!" and without thinking I hugged Jordan. He didn't pull away and I realised what I had done. I pulled away and gave a sheepish grin. Could I embarrass myself anymore? "I think we need a doctor or something. You must have hit your head really hard," he said smiling while helping me up. "I'm fine," I replied with a smile of my own.

Once on my feet I couldn't resist the comfort of Jordan's embrace and this time I meant to hug him. We stood there for what felt like an eternity, but the good kind of eternity. "Are you sure you are okay?", he said again. "I don't mind, but you aren't behaving like the Caz I know. You seem different." I could see a slightly confused look on his face. "You might understand when you hear what happened to me," I said teasingly. He seemed even more confused. "When what happened?"

"Come on, we need to find Grace!" I grabbed him by the hand and pulled him back to the overpowering sound of the party. We found Grace on the dance floor and I grabbed her hand too. I dragged them both outside to share my experience. Their eyes widened as I shared the tale and I could see the disbelief in their faces. I knew better now than to doubt Halloween and the mystical powers connected to it. They had so many questions. Then it dawned on us, the gipsy...

We headed back inside to speak to her, but she was nowhere to be found. No-one else knew where she went. She had vanished mysteriously. Could this night get any stranger, I dared not utter those words aloud. I had had enough of that strange adventure. One good thing to come from this was my new found confidence. I took Jordan aside, looked him in the eyes and told him how I felt. He didn't say anything and he didn't need to. We shared a magical kiss and knew that we would spend the rest of our lives together.