Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

A Halloween story

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Babette and Anton were the children of a poor lumberjack. They lived in a small house in the mountains, near the forest. Babette and Anton were happy children and never thought about their poverty. Their father and mother, however, worried a lot.

"Don't be afraid, mother," Anton would say. "Soon I will go to school. And the vegetable garden yields a lot. When I become a great scholar, you will no longer be poor. Father will get a team of oxen and you a satin dress. And Babette will get a beautiful collection of dolls."

Mother said, "I think you'd be better off becoming a toy maker! You're so good at it, my child."

Anton made boats from pieces of wood that were just as beautiful as the boats in the store. He also carved a doll's cradle from pine wood. He made the doll from a turnip which he painted so beautifully that it looked like the face of a beautiful girl. He made her hair from golden corn threads and her dress, made from young cabbage leaves, was beautifully green.

When this doll began to wither, Anton made a new doll that was always more beautiful than the previous one according to his sister. Babette had never been to the village and knew nothing of real dolls.

Now it happened, one evening during Halloween time, that Anton was carving Jack-o'-Lanterns from pumpkins. He wanted to sell them in the village. Babette sat with him. Because she was only six years old, she knew nothing about Halloween fun. She listened with great eyes of amazement to Anton who knew everything about Jack-o'-Lanterns. When she heard that boys and girls, dressed as witches and goblins, went through the streets, she decided she wanted to do that too.

"It must be so beautiful!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Halloween must be just like Christmas!"



"Not as beautiful as Christmas, but Halloween is a really fun holiday," said Anton.

When the Jack-o'-Lanterns were ready, Anton piled them into his cart to sell at the market.

"Let's go into town, Anton," cried Babette. "Mother can make gnome dresses for us, and there is still a big pumpkin in the garden for a Jack-o'-Lantern. Oh, what fun we'll have!"

"Babette!" exclaimed Anton in surprise. "Mother doesn't have time to make gnome dresses for us, and even if she wanted to, she doesn't have any fabric. Besides, how will we find our way home in the dark through the forest?"

"You know the way through the forest, don't you, Anton?" Babette insisted. "And if mother can't make gnome dresses for us, we can go without them. It will be dark and our Jack-o'-Lantern will be just as beautiful as all the others. Come on, let's go, please," she begged, "I've never been to a Halloween party."

Babette was used to getting her way and began to cry even harder. When she didn't stop crying, he exclaimed, "If you stop crying right now, I'll arrange a small Halloween party for you and me."

Babette wiped her tears and promised that she really wanted a Halloween party, whether it was at home or in the village. The next day, she helped Anton with the vegetables for the market and watched as he picked the last pumpkin from the garden. When the Jack-o'-lantern was ready, Anton lit the candle briefly. Babette clapped her hands with joy, but Anton told her that the Halloween party had to remain a secret. After dinner, the children put on their nightgowns over their jackets instead of getting undressed.

"Our nightgowns are like ghost dresses," whispered Anton. When everything was quiet, they quietly crept outside.

"Look, the pumpkin is smiling at us," laughed Babette. She was very happy because the Halloween adventure was about to begin. Anton struck a match to light the candle, but there was no candle in the Jack-o'-lantern.

"I'm sure I put a candle in it," he said in surprise. They searched in the dark and found the remains of his precious candle under the couch.

"Oh, Babette!" he exclaimed. "A mean rat stole our candle, and I even paid a penny for it!"

"Oh, those wretched rats!" cried Babette, bursting into tears. She stamped her foot and let Jack-o'-lantern roll off the couch. The pumpkin fell with a thud on the ground and its nose was slightly dented.

"Babette, look what you've done!" exclaimed Anton. He bent down to pick up the pumpkin, but the pumpkin was too fast for him.

"You won't be able to catch me," laughed the pumpkin. "Babette gave me a dent in my nose, but it doesn't matter on a Halloween party. Goodbye, you two!" he called lightly and quickly rolled down the hill.

"Come here, you're my pumpkin," called Anton, and he chased after the runaway pumpkin. Babette followed.

"Oh, my Halloween party! Oh, my Halloween party!" mourned Babette. "Now we don't have Jack-o'-lantern or a candle."

"Just wait until he rolls into the vegetable garden," shouted Anton as he continued to chase the pumpkin. "He'll stop at the hedge." And sure enough, when the pumpkin reached the hedge, he made a big jump and landed directly in the vegetable garden.

"Come on, hurry! Come on, carrots, come along!" shouted the pumpkin as he rolled along. At his words, the carrots and turnips broke loose from the soil and came screaming after him.

"Come on, come on!" cried the pumpkin, now to the parsnips and beets, and they too followed the carrots and turnips.

"Look how Anton is trying to catch us," cried the pumpkin, and all the other vegetables turned around and laughed mockingly.

"On ordinary evenings, you may be the boss, Anton," they shouted, "but not on Halloween. This is our night."

"Well, wait until I catch you, and we'll see if you're still laughing," shouted Anton angrily. When he saw his vegetable garden being destroyed, he became very angry.

"You'll have to catch us first before you can punish us, right Anton?" they retorted mockingly.

"Hooray, it's Halloween, hooray, it's Halloween," sang the pumpkin as he spun around. The other vegetables did cartwheels as they ran after him. Anton almost cried when he thought about his loss, but he wasn't a boy to give up easily.

"Catch me if you can!" sang the pumpkin as he led them to a door that led to an underground forest. The turnips and carrots wriggled inside. When Anton and his sister reached the door, a rough potato tried to hit him in the face. But Anton

was faster and they climbed, with much pain and effort, through the door and into the underground forest. They continued the pursuit but the ground here was very bouncy and elastic.

"We'll catch up to them," said Anton. Then a potato bumped his toe and Babette caught him. He wriggled to get free but Babette held him tightly.

"Help, help," shouted the potato, "wait for me, pumpkin." He cried loudly. At his cries, the pumpkin turned around and all the other vegetables followed him.

"Listen," spoke the pumpkin convincingly. "Give us one evening off, Halloween is our night after all." The pumpkin wiggled happily back and forth and laughed with a broad grin. Anton was inclined to let his captive go but then he thought again of his ruined vegetable garden and became angry again.

"It's nice that you're suddenly so polite and begging for your friend's life," said Anton. "But that friend just tried to hit me in the face a few seconds ago."

"That was wrong," yelled the potato. "But that was a few seconds ago, not now."

"Be quiet now," yelled the pumpkin, "you won't get anywhere that way, potato. Let him go for me, Anton," he continued in an appealing tone. "You'd be tired of lying in bed all the time and never being able to go out, wouldn't you?"

"But pumpkin," replied Anton, "think of my vegetable garden, it's been destroyed. I was saving all my vegetable money to go to school, and now I can never go. Besides, how could I know that you're tired of lying in a vegetable bed all the time. You've never spoken to me before."

"I'm talking to you now," replied the pumpkin, "and as for your vegetable garden, we'll make it all right, won't we guys?"

"We certainly will," cried the vegetables in unison and the potato screamed the loudest of all.

"See, we mean no harm, it's Halloween party," explained the pumpkin, "so let the potato go."

At the magic words "Halloween party," Babette let go of the potato. She was now going to have fun and the vegetables seemed to be having a merry time. So peace was made and the children walked in the procession among the onions and turnips. Suddenly, a dozen or more cabbage joined the procession.

"You are a nice bunch," panted the cabbage. "We were waiting all the time in storage and saw you running down the hill like crazy."

"Good grief," said a very sturdy cabbage, who was terribly out of breath. "I will have to remove my outer leaves before I take another step. I feel like I've already been cooked."

The procession continued as they sang cheerful songs. Suddenly, large black cats emerged from behind the trees. Each cat was then accompanied by its mistress who was nothing but a real witch with a high hat and a broomstick. The cabbage introduced Anton and Babette to the witches and the witches enjoyed meeting the children.

"They don't seem to be bad witches, do they, Anton?" whispered Babette.

"Oh, dear girl," said a witch who heard her. "On Halloween, we are not bad. Any other night, I would probably harm you. That's just my nature." She took a peppermint out of her bag and gave it to Babette who ate it right away.

"Do not do that, dear girl," scolded the witch. "It is rare for witches to give peppermints, and when they do, you must keep them safe. Here is another one to keep." Babette made such a beautiful bow of gratitude that the witch took her for a ride on her broomstick.

It was the happiest company imaginable. Each vegetable sang its own Halloween song. Babette flew, her white nightgown flapping in the wind, on the witch's broomstick and sang just as loud as the rest. Then they came to the dance floor illuminated by millions of fireflies. An orchestra of ten thousand frogs sang cheerful tunes. The pumpkin grabbed a handful of fireflies and stuffed them, like lights, into his head, and exclaimed, "Ready for the dance?"

Instead of looking for a dance partner, the vegetables happily jumped around. Anton laughed a lot. The witches danced their own witch dance, and Babette danced so hard that her hair flew wildly around her head.

"Come dance, Anton," Babette shouted as she jumped past her brother, but he shook his head and laughed.

"I'm too old for this nonsense," he said. "I'm ten, you know."

"What nonsense, ten is the right age to have fun," shouted a witch flying by. And before Anton knew it, he was also on the dance floor. His pumpkin was the most beautiful of them all, and he was very proud.

"Let's play blind man's buff," Anton shouted. "I'll show you how it's done." He tied a handkerchief over his eyes. The vegetables liked it so much that they only wanted to play this game, but then the crowing of a rooster suddenly sounded.

"Goodness gracious," a witch exclaimed. "All the fireflies are out. It's almost morning. Anyone who needs to return to the vegetable garden had better leave now."

"Not me!" exclaimed Pumpkin. "I'm done with that vegetable bed forever."

"Neither do we," the cabbages shouted. "We'll become wild cabbages." And all

the vegetables immediately began to raise their voices and declare that they would not go back to the vegetable garden.

"Oh, be quiet, all of you!" the witch shouted. "Stay in the forest for the rest of your lives if you want. I don't care, but Anton and Babette do have to go. They have to go home."

"Well, madam," the pumpkin replied with a bow, "we thought you would be so kind as to take them home on your broomstick."

"But pumpkin!" Anton exclaimed in shock, "you promised to make it up to me if I let the potato go. So I think you all have to come with me. I won't have any vegetables if you all stay in the forest."

"Don't worry about that, Anton," the pumpkin solemnly said. "Here is a bag of gold for each of you."

"We're not going back to the farm," the cabbages shouted again, and they quickly began to dig holes in the ground. Before Anton and Babette were on the broomstick, all the carrots, cabbages, turnips, and even the pumpkin were tucked away in the sandy soil.

"This was the most beautiful Halloween parade ever," Babette said before falling asleep against Anton.

The broomstick flew quickly through the air. The stars went out as they passed. The black cat sitting in front seemed to know the way to the woodcutter's cottage. Just before dawn broke, the broomstick glided past Babette's window, and they were home.

"This broomstick is so wild that I can't stop it, so I'm leaving the cat behind," the witch shouted from the clouds. "Take good care of my cat until the next Halloween."

Anton put Babette to bed and made a comfortable bed for the black cat in the kitchen. Then he went to sleep and dreamed of the Halloween party until he was awakened by his mother.

"Come, Anton," she called. "I have good news. There is a big black cat at the window. Such a cat that comes to us on Halloween will surely bring us a lot of luck. Get up, it's time to go to the market with your vegetables."

"My vegetables have run wild in the forest," muttered Anton. "But that doesn't matter because here's a bag of gold. The cat belongs to the witch who brought us home. Let me sleep, mother. I'm tired from the Halloween party."

His mother looked in the bag and exclaimed, "Where have you been to accumulate so much wealth?" He told her the whole story.

The woodcutter and Babette came running to see what had happened, and upon seeing the second bag of gold, the poor woman calmed down. Babette showed the peppermint that the witch had given her, and the mother no longer doubted.

"Receiving a peppermint from a witch is a great favor," she said, laughing through her tears. "I thought I was dreaming or that Anton had a fever. I've never seen so much gold."

"And isn't it as I said?" the woman exclaimed. "A black cat that comes on Halloween would bring us a lot of luck, and here is the luck already!"

At that moment, there was no happier family than that of the woodcutter. When the people in the village heard that the woodcutter was looking for oxen, they laughed at him. He was too poor. But when it became known that the woodcutter's wife had bought a new dress and a gold ring, they began to wonder if the family had received an inheritance. Anton told the story of their wealth. Immediately, the children threw their pumpkins in the air, but the pumpkins broke when they hit the ground. It was no longer Halloween, after all. The people in the village talked about the woodcutter's family and looked at them suspiciously, but it was a fact that there were two leather bags of gold. The greatest miracle was that, even though they bought things, the bags always remained full of gold.

Anton bought skates and a lot of books. Babette did not want dolls from the toy store. They were too ugly, she declared. Their cheeks were not as beautifully pink as the dolls Anton made.

The woodcutter and his wife were never poor again. Anton went to school, and Babette got a beautiful embroidered dress. Mother rode with father on the ox cart through the village. Sometimes she even drank tea with the mayor's wife. Visitors from far and wide came to the famous spot where Anton's vegetables ran away on Halloween. To this day, no one has been able to grow anything there. But in a place in the nearby forest, cabbages, pumpkins, and many other vegetables grow wild.

And every year, when it was Halloween, Anton and Babette climbed onto the witch's broomstick and went to the Halloween party. There they saw the pumpkin that grew fatter every year. They always rode back home when dawn broke. The black cat was so fond of Babette that he stayed with her. He brought the family much luck forever.

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