

## THE CORN MAZE

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Based on a role play with Ms Tiger 2 you

The car rattles along the road, loose stones peppering the frame. The Harvest Moon slowly rises into a sky going increasingly dark. Headlights stab through the dusk. A sign appears in the pools of light, the wood cracked, the painted letters bright red, running a little, a crude arrow pointing down an even less maintained side road.

"Oooh, such a perfect moon! It's so... Paul, wait!" brakes squeal, her hand gripping his arm, "Please stop the car. Isn't that a corn maze overhead?"

"They have corn mazes outside of Scooby Doo cartoons?"

"They roo, they roo."

He sighs softly, pulling onto the track, "If you start saying 'Jinkies', I'm leaving you in there." He mutters mostly under his breath as he guides the car towards the rows of parked cars.

"We're not the only ones here." She shrugs, her long brown curls bouncing as her shoulders move, "No matter. The maze is almost certainly big enough for all of us. And a corn maze under a full moon would be ever so spooky."

"Yes. A corn maze under moonlight." He yawns, as he puts the car into park, "How scary."

"Oh ye of little faith and less imagination." She replies, climbing out of the car and onto the dusty ground.

"Ardelle, it's just a maze with some actors made up as zombies or Leatherface. It's not that scary."

"Fine, fine, fine. A few drops of fake blood, a few squeals and we're done. Okay?"

"Fine by me." He digs into his pocket, handing over some crumpled bills to the gatekeeper who waves them through lazily.

"Thank you kind sir." The teller grunt, scratching at one of his bloody false scars as she slides into the maze. Paul rolls his eyes as he follows her into the maze, the corn whispering in the gentle breeze, the long shadows lengthening as the sun passes towards the horizon. "Wow. I'm glad the Moon is rising and not setting. It's a bit dark in here. Spooky!" Paul doesn't respond, scanning the corn for the hiding places of the actors. "I don't see anybody in here. I can't hear anybody, either. If I didn't know better, I'd say we were alone in here. Spooky..." she shivers slightly.

"You have way too much imagination. It's just a corn maze."

"But it's a corn maze by moonlight. And Halloween is near."

"It's still just a corn maze. It's..." he jumps with a distinctly unmasculine cry as they round the corner, a Jack O'Lantern sitting on a wooden scarecrow at the edge of the maze, candlelight shining out of its eyes and mouth.

"Paul? Please don't tell me you're afraid of that." She turns around to help him up but finds only a thick, rustling wall of corn behind her, the moon shining high overhead in the black velvet sky. "Paul? Where are you?"

"I'm afraid Paul isn't here right now." A soft, sepulchral voice whispers. She whirls to see the scarecrow tilting its pumpkin head from side to side, as if working out the kinks.

Her yelp of surprise quickly turns to annoyance. "Then where is he?"

"He's in the maze. The far more interesting question you should be asking it: where are you?"

It jumps from the pole, the gnarled, gangly wooden body flowing towards her. The long, stick fingers twitch like the legs of a demented spider. Firelight dances off the corn stalks as it spills from the jagged mouth and triangular eyes.

She backpedals quickly, "What do you mean where am I? I'm right here, am I?"

"A very true statement. Of course, that doesn't mean here is where you thought it was, now, does it?"

"Ah. I found myself a joker. Or is it a riddler? Certainly not a scarecrow."

"Oh, I'm not a scarecrow. I'm Jack O'Lantern, Spirit of Halloween. They let me out early, you see, what with all your stores starting the celebration in September, and yet I still lose out to Christmas. I ask you: is that fair?"

"No, it's not fair at all. I almost feel sorry for you. Almost."

"And I almost feel sorry for you. Almost."

"And why would a scarecrow feel sorry for me, may I ask?" she asks, glaring up into the luminous eyes defiantly, hands firmly on her hips.

"Less sorry now that you've called me a scarecrow. Because you mortals really don't react well to being part of the competition."

"Competition? Oh, don't tell me. You're competing with the crow for the spookiest costume award?"

"No, I'm competing in the Human Carving Competition. And I need a human to carve. Or, at least, I did before you arrived."

"The...what?? You can't be serious! And you can't carve humans!" she turns for a quick exit, but trips over a hay bale that seems to move under her feet.

"Why not? You don't think twice about carving a poor pumpkin to pieces for your entertainment, do you? Won't someone think of the pumpkins."

She scrambles to her feet, brushing away the dirt and straw as she gets ready to run once more. "Oh, I think of the pumpkins, especially when it's time for pie."

"Oh, you're right, human pie. Haven't had any of that in aaaaaaages."

She tries to run, but again the hay bale moves deliberately into her path to send her sprawling.

"Humans don't do pie. They make pie, that's it."

"They do indeed make the most delicious pie...filling."

"Nope, nope, mope, not this kid!" she starts to panic, her heart hammering as he approaches, visions of every horror film going racing for attention in her mind. And once again, the hay bale manoeuvres into her scrambled path, "Damnit!" The long, woody fingers close on her shoulders, "Ow!! Let go!! What do you think I am, a ripe tomato or something?" she tries to squirm away, but the woody fingers hold her fast.

Of course not. Whoever heard of a tomato carving contest?"

"So, you think I'm a ripe human? Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm still half-grown." She feels the hay bale move behind her and wishes she had some matches.

"Grown enough. Wouldn't want you to get overripe. Now, where should we start?" The point of one finger pushes against her t-shirt.

She stares down at the finger, not liking the feeling of the sharp woody point at all, "Hello?"

"Hello?! Can anybody hear me?!" there's a rustle in the cornstalks but no other sound. At all.

"No. They can't." The finger pushes harder, the point stabbing into her chest.

"Yow! That hurt, you jack..." the hay bale calls in friends, crowding around her, pressing in, holding her closer, pumpkin vines coiling out around her. The finger pushes deeper, pulling downwards and to the left, dragging through her skin. "Hey, hey, hey, owwww! Stop that!"

The hay bales shiver as if tittering. The moon has risen high, bathing the small clearing in pale white light. The shadows were almost preferable. The finger is pulled across and back up to the start, a triangle of black cloth drifting down to the trampled corn stalks. "Now look what you've done. You've ruined my favourite Siegfried and Roy t-shirt. I hope you're satisfied. And I do expect you to replace it." The long finger pulls back, a triangle of pale pink flesh dangling from the end. "Ewwwww! That's disgusting! Put it back!" She's so angry at the Jack that she scarcely wonders why there's no blood or pain as the piece of her torso is

removed. The Jack doesn't reply, triangular eyes narrowing as it pushes its finger into the other side of her chest, carving out another triangular slice. "Oh, come on already!!" The hay bales crowd in closer, the vines twining and twisting around her body as she struggles and the long finger pulls out another fleshy triangle. "You have a thing for triangles, eh? Go carve some triangles in a zucchini, damn it, and leave me alone!!" he carves a smaller triangle at the centre of her ribcage, pulling the flesh free. "One-shape mind. It figures. Am I to assume the triangles are pie slices? Or can't you think of anything better to do?"

"You really are shrill, aren't you?" He places the finger point on her stomach.

"Yecch. Do that again and I'll hurl. Hey, maybe that's what you deserve." She gags, leaning forward. The finger pushes deep into her.

"Do stop being tiresome." Jack sighs.

"Do stop removing pieces of me!" she looks down at her body, realising how much has been removed as the finger starts on a jagged line across her stomach. "I'd laugh, but this isn't funny anymore. Paul! Where in the bloody blazing hells are you?!?" but only silence answers her rising, panicked screams.

"I did tell you. He's not anywhere near you now. Do pay attention." The finger draws downwards.

"Pay attention? What is this, school?" she shivers as the edges of her skin begin to tingle, Jack carving his finger back on a crooked line. She tries to twist out of the fingers way, but the hay bales and vines cluster and cling, holding her in place, "Oooh, just wait until I throw that fat orange head of yours into the road at rush hour..." He ignores her, tracing his finger back to the start, removing the jagged strip of cloth and flesh. "Wha-what have you done to me?" she stares down at her body, not quite believing what she's seeing.

"Human carving competition. I know I mentioned it. Almost done."

"And where are the other competitors, dare I ask? I doubt if these annoying puffs of hay are carving anything."

"They're catching their own humans, silly." The long finger slides into the jagged mouth, emerging with a flickering flame on the tip. "Now, open wiiiiide."

"Like Hell. You know what you can do with that, and I don't mean bake pies. Paul, where in hell..." her voice chokes as the burning finger pushes down her throat, a warmth filling her stomach, firelight glowing through the holes in her shirt. "Oh, you didn't. You did!" she stares down at the flickering firelight, breaking out in a hot sweat.

"I did. I'm so glad you finally understand. All that shouting and screaming was most tedious."

"All that poking and gouging wasn't?"

"Now, to get you..." a low, ghostly wail howls through the maze.

"Wha-what's that?"

"Honestly, always at the most inconvenient moments." He pulls something out that looks bizarrely like a smart phone, pressing it to his head, "Jack. Yes. No. What do you mean I have to put it back? Because I didn't say 'Trick or treat'? But it's not even properly Halloween yet!"

She fails to stifle a snort, "Your boss? Your contest manager?"

"Excuse me one moment." He puts a hand over the phone, the flames flaring brightly in his head, "I have to put you back, mammal! They didn't say I had to be nice about it!"

"Mammal? How dare you?!" she cringes back.

"Yes, fine. I'll put it back where I found it." He pauses, "Unharmd." The latter word sounds like it's being forced through gritted teeth, a soft hiss of flame behind it as he closes the call.

"Back? Unharmd? I gather you're not happy about this. Frankly, neither am I."

Jack mutters, snuffing out the flame in her torso, shoving the pieces back. She gags. Having hunks of yourself stuffed back into your body does not feel nice at all. The Jack moves back to its post, the bales and vines scuttling backwards. “Yo, Jack! It was real, it was fun, but real fun? I...Paul, where in hell have you been?”

“What do you mean where’ve I been? I tripped, got up and find you shouting at the scarecrow.”

“I never, ever yell at scarecrows.” She leans over, snatching up the pieces of her t-shirt, “Let’s find our way out of here and head for home. Enough is enough. And. Don’t. Ask.” Paul looks exceptionally confused as she stalks past him, almost kicking a pumpkin on the way out, but thinking better off it.