

## Little Monsters

Dracula lunged at the Wolf-Man, his mouth open, fangs dripping saliva and ready to strike. I could see the hunger in his eyes, that need to drag his foe to the ground in a final, humiliating defeat. Wolf-Man somehow, despite his obvious fatigue, managed to leap out of the way, and Dracula crashed into a table, upsetting old Mr. Woodstetton's drink. The pensioner managed to save most of it, but that still didn't stop him casting a furious glance at Dracula.

"Okay, Tom," I said, "that's enough now, let's calm down."

Tom is seven years old, still young enough to find impersonating Dracula ridiculously entertaining, but old enough to obey his father when he tells him that he's getting a little over excited.

"Okay Dad," he said, huffing a little, and a fierce light burning in his eyes that said *I would have got him if you hadn't stopped me*. Out of the corner of my eyes I could see Wolf-Man preparing for a stealth attack on his eternal foe, taking advantage of the distraction afforded by me. But then his dad, Martin Brennan, wrapped his arms around him from behind and lifted him in the air, saying, "Oh no you don't Toby, enough's enough now."

"Look at my drink," Mr. Woodstetton said, a trembling hand pointing at a small puddle of beer on the dark tabletop. It didn't seem to me that Tom had spilt much of the drink but still, we were new in the village and I didn't want to go upsetting the locals.

"I'm sorry about that," I said. "Let me get you another one."

I looked at Frank but he was already drawing another pint from the pump. He winked at me, a conspiratorial smile playing across his ruddy face. "Already on it Pete, don't you worry."

A hand caressed my bottom and then slipped into my jeans' back pocket, giving my buttock a gentle squeeze.

"You could work for the United Nations with your diplomacy skills," Gayle said.

"Oh, I don't know," I said, "I don't think Kofi Anan needs to worry about his job too much just yet."

"How about we get Tom home? It's way past his bedtime." Gayle gave my buttock another quick squeeze. "And talking of bedtime..."

"Tom!" I shouted, perhaps a little too excitedly. "It's time to go home."

Gayle, Tom and I had moved into Kinver village a little over two months ago. For the previous eleven years we had worked and lived in city centre Birmingham. We had tried for a baby for many unsuccessful years, and so when Tom finally arrived we were keen to give him the best life we could. After a number of years living the city center lifestyle we decided to relocate to a quieter area. Kinver, set in the beautiful Worcestershire countryside and overlooked by the church sitting on top of Kinver Edge, had seemed the perfect location; peaceful but near enough to the city for me to be able to commute to work.

Very soon after moving into the village we met Martin and his wife Deb, who were the same age as Gayle and I. They had two children, Toby and Lizzie. Our two families had clicked straight away, and I hoped we would be good friends for a long time to come.

Martin and I had decided to take our kids out together on Halloween night so that we could let them have their fun and supervise them at the same time. They were too young to go out by themselves, but I also wanted to protect the elderly citizens of Kinver from our children's zealous approach to trick or treating. Martin and his

family hadn't moved into the village much before we had, and we all wanted to make a good impression. After touring the village's High Street and a few of the side roads we met up with Gayle and Deb in The Ninth Lock, so called because it sat by the ninth lock of the Worcester to Wolverhampton canal. A couple of drinks later and I was convinced that we should celebrate Halloween in similar style every year.

Not anymore though.

Not when I think of what happened later.

I offered to pay Frank for the pint he had given Mr. Woodstetton, but he refused.

"No, that one's on me. That old man would bleed you dry for drinks if he could, but you never see him slipping his hand in his pocket for a round."

Frank was in his mid fifties, a large, jolly looking man who had been the landlord at The Nine Locks for twenty years now. I marveled that he was still alive as he seemed to drink and smoke non-stop. He was an amateur historian, a goldmine of stories and information about the village and the surrounding areas. I was looking forward to spending many a night in The Ninth Lock in years to come listening to his anecdotes.

We chatted for a moment or two until I was distracted by a sudden disturbance behind me. Dracula and the Wolf-Man had started fighting again.

Dracula, his cape flapping behind him, barreled into the Wolf-man, and they both rolled and skidded behind the bar and into a private room at the back.

I ran after them and pulled up short in dismay.

Toby had hold of a power drill, pointed at Tom.

"Don't move, Dracula!" he snarled. "Or I'll stake you through the heart with this!"

Before I had a chance to say anything the cordless drill suddenly roared into life. Toby dropped it, his face a picture of surprise and shock, and the drill died down.

Frank and Martin charged through the doorway, looking almost comical as they both tried to squeeze through at the same time. Toby had started crying and Martin picked him up.

"What happened here?" he said.

"It's okay," I said, cuddling Tom who had begun to cry a little too. "It was just a bit of fun that went too far."

"Are they both okay?" Frank asked. "I was putting shelves up earlier, I didn't think about clearing away, nobody ever comes back here apart from me and the missus."

I picked Tom up. "Don't worry about it, it's not your fault, they shouldn't have been back here, anyway."

We walked back to the public area of the pub and Gayle helped me put Tom's jacket on. It had been a relatively mild night whilst we had been out trick or treating, but I remembered noticing the temperature dropping as we walked to The Nine Locks. Tom had his arms wrapped around my neck and his head nuzzled into my shoulder, which made it difficult to put his jacket on him, but at least he had stopped crying now.

"Pete," Martin said, his face pale and drawn, "when I think of what might have happened back there..."

"Well don't think about it, it's not worth it," I said. "Both of them are alright and that's what matters."

As I pulled my jacket on I noticed old Mr. Woodstetton looking at us over the top of his beer glass. I shrugged off the uneasy feeling he gave me; I was obviously still shaken up by the close call my son had just had with a power drill. I'd just told Martin not to think about the 'what ifs', and that was a piece of advice I needed to take to heart too.

Gayle and I stepped outside, and the cold slapped our faces like a witch's hand on a freezing winter's night.

"I can't believe how cold it is," Gayle said, plumes of white drifting from her mouth. The ground sparkled lightly and all the car windows had been etched with an intricate spider's web of frost. Our feet made soft crunching noises on the frosty ground and Gayle slipped once or twice in her designer shoes.

"You should have worn sensible footwear, those things really aren't designed for walking," I said, teasing her a little.

"If I'd known I was going to have to make my way home through Arctic conditions then I would have put my crampons on, okay smart-ass?"

We walked down the High Street, shivering in our thin jackets. We had parked at the other end of the village when we had begun our Halloween festivities, and I had not thought about moving the car onto The Nine Locks car park. I held Tom still, who had begun to drift off to sleep. The thought of arriving home, shutting out the cold and slipping naked beneath a thick, winter duvet with my wife beside me spurred me on to walk a little faster.

"Hey! What's your hurry?"

"Do you really need to ask?" I said, giving her my best leery 'come to bed' look.

"Okay, okay, I get the picture," she laughed.

Gayle slipped an arm through mine and we walked on in companionable silence.

"Trick or treat!"

The two children had leapt out of the shadows in front of us so suddenly I almost tripped over them. I assumed they were children because of their height, both only a little taller than Tom. They wore matching shiny red raincoats with the hood pulled up, dark trousers and shoes and gloves. They were identical, and could only be differentiated by the cheap, plastic fright masks they wore, Freddie Krueger and Leatherface.

"Trick or treat!"

I could not tell which child had spoken, but his or her voice had an unsettling, grating quality to it, which set my teeth on edge. They stood still, waiting for my response, dark eyes blinking solemnly through the eyeholes in their masks. These two seemed to be taking Halloween very seriously, but I had no compunction about disappointing them.

"I'm sorry, but it's late and we're on our way home now. Shouldn't you two be at home as well?"

They continued staring at me in silence, not moving an inch out of our way.

"C'mon you two!" Gayle said, waving her hands at them as though shooing away a stray cat. "It's way past your bed time now, go on home to bed!"

*Yeah, that's right, because that's where we're headed, and you're delaying us, so get a move on you little bastards,* I thought, the need for my wife growing ever more intense.

The two children looked at each other, heads rotating slowly and smoothly like oiled machine parts, and then back again at me. Leatherface reached a gloved hand up to his mask and began tugging at it. I had a sudden, overwhelming dread of seeing what lay behind that mask. I can't describe what I thought I might see, but I knew that madness lived there, darkness of the deepest night where things crawled and slithered and foul, demented beings howled in misery and pain. A powerful shiver coursed through my body and I reached out a trembling hand to stop him removing that mask.

Leatherface dropped his hand and then they both pushed between Gayle and I, and ran down the street, giggling. We turned and watched them go. They pushed old Dot Taylor who stumbled, slipped, and then regained her balance.

“Are you alright?” I shouted.

Dot waved a hand at me and smiled.

“Little monsters,” Gayle said.

I shuddered, but the horror and fear I had felt a moment ago had already begun slipping away, like a dream on waking. Gayle did not seem to have been affected at all so I decided to say nothing, and we continued walking down the High Street.

We entered the public car park set back a little from the main road and in the shadow of Kinver Edge. I could see the church now, on top of the hill, silhouetted against a cloudless, purple night sky of glittering stars. I wished I had a camera, or an ounce of artistic ability, and I could have tried capturing that scene forever. I took a deep breath of cold air; this felt good, it felt like we had made the right decision to move. It felt like home.

“Trick or treat!”

“Oh no, not again,” I groaned.

“Hi Pete, how are you?” Mike Taylor said, offering me his hand, a big goofy grin plastered over his face.

“I’m very well, thank you Mike,” I said, taking his hand and shaking it. “How are you?”

“I’m very well too, thanks. From your reaction just then it sounds like you’ve been trick or treated once too many times tonight.”

“You could say that.” I told him about Leatherface and Freddie Krueger. “They ran down the street without looking where they were going and almost sent your mother flying.”

“Is she okay?”

“She’s fine, they ran into her, but she was okay.”

“Good, good.” He leaned into his car and hauled a television out, kicking his door shut. “Mum’s T.V. finally packed up yesterday and I promised I would get her a new one. I’ve been nagging her for years now to get a new one, but like all old people she couldn’t really see that there was anything wrong with it, despite the fact the sound levels kept going up and down while you were trying to watch the damn thing. I was glad when it finally gave up the ghost, watching anything on it was a nightmare. Anyway, you guys must come on over to ours for a meal one evening, we’d love to see you.”

“That’d be nice,” said Gayle. “Give our love to Pippa, won’t you?”

Mike said he would and began walking across the frosty car park. I winced a couple of times as he slipped on patches of ice, but he made it out onto the street and out of my sight without mishap.

I strapped Tom into the car. He looked sleepy now, and his plastic set of fangs, which he had so far refused to relinquish, had slipped out from under his lips a little. I pulled them out, a string of saliva slapping against my fingers.

“Dad!” he moaned, reaching a cold hand out for the fangs.

“No, no you don’t,” I said. “You’ve had these things in all night, I’m surprised your gums aren’t bleeding. Halloween’s over now, and it’s time you were in bed.”

I climbed into the driver’s seat and shut the door. Gayle had shifted in her seat and looked at Tom, a half smile on her beautiful lips.

“I can’t believe it,” she whispered.

I turned to look too. Tom's eyes had closed and his head lolled forward, his chin almost touching his chest.

"That is one tired little boy," I said.

"And how's my big boy doing?" Gayle said. "Not too tired just yet, I hope?"

I leaned across and kissed her, a long, gentle, lingering kiss. "What do *you* think?"

"Hmm, not sure I got the message really, I think you need to repeat it."

I kissed her again, this time not quite so gently.

"Okay, I think I got the message that time," she said afterwards, a little breathlessly. "When do you think was the last time we kissed in the car?"

"Definitely before we were married. Probably sitting in my Mini Metro outside your mum and dad's house, hoping your dad wouldn't come out to find out why you were taking so long to come in."

"That car was a rust bucket, I hated it."

"Yeah, well that rust bucket provided us with plenty of opportunities to kiss each other stupid *and* it got us from A to B."

"Not so sure about that last part, but I do remember all the kissing. We never had sex in that car though, did we?"

"There wasn't enough room to have sex in the Metro. There was barely enough room to kiss."

"We should do it more often, it was nice."

"Yeah right, we could put Tom to bed every evening and then go and sit in the car on our drive and snog. I'm sure we wouldn't look totally stupid to the rest of the neighbourhood."

"Look, it's those two kids again." Gayle pointed to the opposite side of the car park.

Leatherface and Freddie Krueger were jumping and running over the parked cars, looking like a couple of mischievous monkeys. Leatherface hopped onto the roof of a new BMW and began some ridiculous foot-stamping dance, really pounding hard on the bodywork.

"Hey," I said, "they can't do that."

I reached for the door handle but Gayle put her hand on my arm.

"Don't go out there," she said. "Please stay with us, I don't like them."

I hesitated, torn between two distinct urges. On the one hand I hated seeing vandalism, especially when I could see the vandals in action and had a chance to put a stop to their mindless thuggery. On the other hand I wanted to respect my wife's wishes, even though I knew I could easily deal with two snot nosed kids in stupid fright masks.

I finally decided it was more important to listen to Gayle. And besides, I needed to get Tom home and to bed, and if I got involved now who knew how long it would take for me to get away.

I started the car engine and flicked on the headlights.

Leatherface and Freddie Krueger stopped prancing up and down, their heads whipping round to look straight at us. An instant later and they were sprinting across the frozen car park, seemingly unhindered by the icy surface.

"Lock the doors," Gayle said.

"What? They're just stupid kids..."

Gayle pushed her door handle in and all four doors locked with that familiar electronic buzz.

"Trick or treat!"

"Trick or treat!"

The two little monsters leapt up and down, like two malignant imps, their gloved hands slapping at the windows, and screamed their exhortation over and over again.

“Daddy let’s go,” Tom wailed, suddenly awake and close to tears. “I don’t like them, Daddy, let’s go now.”

I put my hand on the horn and held it there.

“Go on, clear off!” I shouted.

Leatherface leapt on the car bonnet and squatted down, gloved hands pressed up against the windscreen. He looked like a giant spider getting ready to pounce. Dark red eyes blinked at me through the holes in the mask.

And then he threw up.

A torrent of red, steaming bile spewed across the windscreen and splattered on the ground, the ice sizzling at its touch. Our view had been completely obscured through the front and so I flicked on the wipers. Through the streaks of red vomit I saw the little monster somersaulting off the bonnet and running away with its companion.

Gayle had screamed when it threw up and Tom was now hysterical.

“It’s okay, it’s okay, they’re going,” I said, watching Leatherface and Freddie Krueger disappear in the shadows at the edge of the car park.

Gayle calmed down and began reassuring Tom that everything was all right and that we were going home now. I climbed out of the car, shaking a little I admit, and inspected the mess on the car bonnet.

The paintwork had blistered pretty bad, and some of it still hissed and popped. The stench of sulphuric acid stung my nose. Right then I’m not sure I took it all in, didn’t actually realize how bad things were. They were still a couple of kids to me; nasty, brutal, thuggish kids all right, but nothing more. Well, the night wasn’t much older before I corrected that sorry misconception.

I got back in the car and gripped the steering wheel. I didn’t want Gayle to see my shaking hands.

“Have you got your mobile?” I said.

“It’s in my bag. Are you phoning the police?”

“I sure am, those two are a menace.”

Gayle gave me her phone. I looked at the illuminated screen.

“There’s no signal.”

“There’s always a signal.” Gayle took the phone back and had a look for herself.

“Not tonight there isn’t,” I said. “Let’s get home and we’ll phone the police from there.”

I drove carefully out of the car park, peering carefully through the vomit streaked windscreen. The wipers were useless now as the rubber blades had burnt completely away.

I looked out for the two little monsters as I drove. I half expected to see them jumping up and down on a dead body in the middle of the road, but the High Street was deserted. My view through the ruined windscreen was atrocious so I stuck to 20 mph. As we drove past Dot Taylor’s cottage Gayle asked me to stop.

“Mike’s left the T.V. on the pavement, look.”

“Yeah, and the front door wide open.”

Something else bothered me too, something about the light inside the house, but I couldn’t quite put my finger on it.

“Do you think he’s okay?” Gayle said.

The orange glow in the back of house grew in intensity and I realized what was wrong; the house was on fire. I got outside fast and slipped on a patch of ice, knocking my head on the side of the car. For a second there it felt like a sharp knife

had been thrust into the back of my skull, but then the pain settled down to a dull throb. I climbed to my feet, carefully this time, and ran into the house. Smoke billowed into the hall and I could hear the crackling of the flames in the back.

“Mike! Mike!” I shouted.

The lights flickered and went out with a dull pop. I opened the living room door and stepped inside. The curtains had not been drawn and I could see quite clearly by the light of the street lamp that the room was empty.

Except for the feet protruding from behind the settee.

I knew already, had known before I set foot behind the settee and turned the body over. Mike’s skull had burst open like a ripe watermelon, spraying blood and brain tissue across the carpet and up the walls. By the look of the mess on the carpet I guessed he had been hit on the head when he was already on the floor. Like maybe somebody small had attacked him, somebody who needed to drag him down to their level before they could hit him with enough force to do that kind of damage.

Mike stared at me, eyes open in a kind of disbelief, his pupils so dilated I could no longer see the colour of the irises. I felt all the strength drain from my body and the bile rise in the back of my throat. I closed my eyes, trying to get my breathing under control. The last thing I wanted now was to spew up over poor Mike’s body, one last humiliation for him in death.

“Michael?”

I turned in the direction of the querulous voice, the need for action suddenly snapping me back into focus. Dot stood in the open doorway of the living room, shivering in her nightie, looking frail and every day of her eighty-two years.

I turned her round, talking softly and led her out of her front door. The fire out the back had attracted a few people now and one of Dot’s neighbours took her from me.

“Has anyone phoned for a fire engine?” I said.

“We’ve tried, but the phones are out,” Fred Williamson said. “Jim’s driving over to his sister’s, try phoning from there.”

I rubbed my hands over my face, suddenly feeling very tired.

Someone screamed, a child.

“Oh God, that came from in the house,” someone said.

“Help me, please somebody help me,” the child screamed, definitely inside the house.

I looked around me at the frail bodies and lined faces lit by the orange glow of the fire.

*Why the hell had we moved into a village full of old people? Why did I have to play at being the hero all the time?*

I ran back into Dot’s house. I could hear the child in the back, sobbing. Smoke poured between the door and the frame, and the wood had begun to blacken in patches.

I took off my jacket and pulled it over my head. Crouching down low I opened the door and crawled into the dense cloud of smoke. I started coughing and retching and dropped down even lower onto my front, wriggling over the carpet like a snake.

“Oh, it burns, someone help me please!”

I followed the line of the skirting board, trying to keep my bearings for when I needed to get out. Suddenly the smoke cleared and I could see the flames licking at the walls, consuming the kitchen cabinets and the table.

And there, in the middle of the kitchen, stood Freddie Krueger.

“Help me please,” it said in the child’s voice. “Help me it burns!”

It started giggling, a low, malicious giggle twisting through my mind like a slick, poisonous snake. Eyes flashed hungrily at me from beneath the plastic fright mask, now melting in the intense heat.

“Trick or treat,” it said, and held its arms out, inviting me into its dreadful embrace.

The hairs on my arms and legs had begun to singe and my lungs felt as though they were two burning lumps of coal in my chest. I pulled my knees up beneath me, never taking my eyes off that obscene, giggling thing as it approached me. My hand, searching blindly, found a chair leg. I took hold of it and swung the chair, smashing it into the little monster, sending it flying. I flipped myself over and started scrambling back the way I had come. I heard a tearing, ripping noise above us, and the kitchen ceiling collapsed, burying Freddie Krueger in a mass of smoldering plaster and burning wood.

*Hopefully forever*, I thought.

Desperate to get outside I dragged myself to my feet and stumbled through the black clouds. I ran into a wall, turned and followed it until I staggered through the front door and outside into the freezing night air.

I fell onto my hands and knees, coughing uncontrollably. Gayle threw her arms around me, weeping, and I was dimly aware of others crowding around us. Everything went dim and then the world disappeared completely.

I came to lying on my back on a leather couch with the smell of stale beer filling my nostrils.

Gayle placed a hand on my forehead and said, “Hey, it’s okay, you’re okay now.”

With Gayle’s help I sat up and Tom threw his arms around me, hugging me for a long time.

“Are we in the pub?” I asked, looking at The Ninth Lock’s familiar, homely surroundings.

“Yeah, Frank thought you might need a stiff drink when you woke up.”

Frank waved at me from the bar, wiping glasses with a dishcloth. “There’s a brandy sitting beside you when you want it.”

The pub was deserted apart from the four of us. In the silence I could hear the ticking of the Grandfather clock in the corner, a sound I had never heard before in there.

“How long have I been out?”

“Just a few minutes, that’s all. And the phones are working now, fire, police, ambulance, I think they’re all on their way over.”

“Thank God for that,” I said, relief washing over me.

Frank dropped a glass behind the bar, the loud shatter making me jump.

“Sorry,” he said, and disappeared behind the bar with a brush and pan.

I took a deep breath, trying to calm my nerves. I could still see Mike’s dead eyes staring up at me, and that thing in the kitchen, arms outstretched, plastic fright mask melting and changing into something even more terrifying.

“That was a brave thing you did, Mr. Harrison, going in there to rescue that child,” Gayle said. “Please don’t blame yourself for not managing to get to him, nobody could have done more than you did.”

“There was no child,” I said.

“What?”

“It was one of those little monsters. That’s what you called them, isn’t it? Little monsters. Yeah well, that’s what they are all right, proper little monsters.”

I told Gayle what had happened, quietly so as not to alarm Tom.

“Do you think that thing is dead now?” Gayle whispered.

“I bloody hope so.”

Frank dropped another glass.

“What’s wrong with you, Frank?” I said, turning to look at him standing behind the bar. He held the dishcloth in one hand still, the other hand empty. His face had the slack, stunned expression of someone who has been given some terrible, shocking news. He pitched forward, his chest and head hitting the bar with a solid *thwump*, a carving knife sticking from his back.

The little monster jumped on to his back, crouching monkey like over him, and hissed, “Trick or treat!”

Gayle and Tom both screamed. I stood up and Leatherface jumped back down behind the bar. A second later and it started lobbing bottles, exploding shards of glass and alcohol over us as they smashed against the wall. I lifted the table up, slamming it onto its side as a barrier and pulled Gayle and Tom down beside me.

The fusillade of missiles stopped as suddenly as it had started.

“Stay here and look after Tom,” I whispered.

Gayle put a hand on my arm, her eyes round with fear. A thin line of blood trickled from her hairline and down her forehead.

“Just stay here and look after Tom,” I whispered.

I peered around the table. Like all pubs the lighting was set fairly low, but I was pretty sure Leatherface was still behind the bar. Creeping past my improvised barrier I grabbed a chair and smashed it against the tiled floor. I picked up a couple of broken legs, the ends looking nicely jagged and pointed.

I leapt over the bar, skidding across broken glass, and landed softly on the other side.

Nerve ends jangling like fire alarms I looked both ways, but Leatherface was nowhere to be seen. Hardly having time to process that thought I stumbled, smashing into the bottles of spirits lining the wall, as Leatherface leapt on my shoulders. It wrapped its arms around my head and sank its teeth into my cheek. I screamed and began hitting it with the broken chair legs, smashing them so hard into its body one of them snapped in half.

Still the thing hung on, its foul teeth burrowing deeper into my cheek, grating against the bone. Using the shorter chair leg like a knife I stabbed Leatherface in the side of the head. Letting out a howl it dropped to the floor and scurried away.

*Good*, I thought, wiping the blood out of my eyes, *at least I know now I can hurt it.*

I held the chair leg up and examined the bloody, jagged tip. Smoke curled from the end and it sizzled quietly.

*What the hell are these things, that have acid for vomit and blood? And why the hell are they after me?*

I began walking around the tables and chairs, holding my improvised weapons at the ready, and searching the pub’s shadowed corners.

It came rushing at me from behind, screaming, “Trick or treat! Trick or treat!”

I spun round and kicked it in the chest, sending it crashing to the floor. Following it down I stuck my knee in its throat, leaning my full weight on top of it, and pinning it down.

“Okay, you evil little bastard,” I said, “let’s see who’s under that mask.”

I dropped one of the chair legs and took hold of an edge of the mask. A stream of maggots began pouring through the eye and mouth holes. I snatched my hand away and leapt to my feet. The little monster giggled as more maggots spilled from beneath its mask, falling on the floor and forming tiny wriggling mounds of horror.

The broken chair leg felt good and solid in my hand. Maybe I could just whack it in the head a few times until it was dead. I lifted it up but Leatherface rolled on his side and sank his teeth into my ankle.

I screamed and kicked it in the head, but still it kept its teeth clamped on my leg. The pain spread through my calf muscles and up towards my knee.

“Daddy, Daddy!” Tom screamed, running towards me.

“Tom, get back!” I shouted, but too late.

The little monster let go of my leg and looked at Tom, a disgusting chuckle bubbling beneath the mask. Tom stopped running. He suddenly realized the awful mistake he had made.

Leatherface hurtled for him, spitting gobbets of blood and maggots as it ran. Tom dived under a table as I threw myself into its back and we both rolled across the floor, plunging through tables and chairs. We crashed against a wall, my skull hitting it with a nasty whack. I lay on my back, shaking my head to try and clear it.

Leatherface sat on my chest, giggling. Its mask had slipped a little and one of its gloves had come off, revealing red, gnarled skin and crooked, pointed claws.

It pulled the mask off and I snapped my eyes shut. I had caught a glimpse of foul, crooked teeth and a pink tongue flicking out in hungry anticipation. But I dared not look anymore, for fear that I would go mad. Death and lunacy lived in that face; a gibbering, choking madness ready to swallow me up in its nightmare world and leave me a shadow of myself. I had a glimpse of my future, sitting in a nursing home dribbling pureed food into a bib and gazing slackly at my family when they came to visit.

I could feel the little monster’s hot saliva on my face, scorching my skin. My hands scabbled out by my sides, searching blindly for something, *anything*, to defend myself with.

My fingers closed around the power drill and I swung it up, opening my eyes for a split second as I rammed the drill into the little monster’s face. Again I caught a glimpse of red, cracked skin, of cat like eyes gleaming with evil, before I was blinded in a shower of blood and bone. I kept forcing that drill through the thing’s skull, flipping us over so that I could lean my full weight behind the power tool. As its skull exploded with a dull pop I felt its blood burning my hands, eating through my flesh, but I couldn’t stop. I kept on forcing that drill down until it hit the concrete and jammed, smoke rising from the motor.

Only then did I let go, falling on my side and screaming hysterically.

Gayle told me later I was shrieking with laughter.

Later that year we sold the house and moved back into the city. Just kind of seemed safer somehow.

Every Halloween night we lock ourselves in the house, turn on all the lights and go to bed.

And we never, *ever* answer the door to trick or treaters.