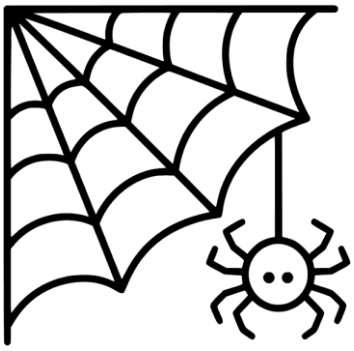


Halloween

The doorbell rang but the delivery man had disappeared long before Tom opened the door, leaving a parcel lying on the step. Tom grumbled as he picked it up and called out to his wife: "Dor, it's for you, your invisible amazon man has dropped you off a present -dropped being the operative word. It must be costing you a fortune in postage the amount of stuff you buy from that bloody company, I don't know why he can't just….."

"It doesn't cost me anything I'm on Amazon Prime so delivery is free," responded his wife, Doree, examining the parcel.

"Presumably you have to pay for the contents of the parcel and last time I looked at our bank account Amazon Prime was costing me £10 a month. That's £120 a year before you've even bought anything," he continued looking over her shoulder as she tore the wrapping from the parcel.

"It's a **joint** bank account in case you hadn't noticed – my pension goes into it too you know. And I don't hear you complaining when you're watching those endless detective programmes on Amazon Prime" she continued.

"What on earth is *that*," he demanded as she pulled a cellophane wrapped black hairy thing and a spider headband from the wrappings.

"It's my Halloween costume" she said, putting the band on her head and pulling a large black hairy spider legs outfit from the bag.

"What do you want a Halloween costume for, it's not as if we're going to see the grandchildren."

"I know that, but it's still Halloween and the local children will be coming round knocking on the door and…."

"Not if we turn the lights out and don't answer the door they won't," he retorted.

"Well, I've bought a pumpkin and I'm going to carve it tomorrow like we used to when David and Jane were little. We'd decorate the house and play spooky music, and I'd cook pasta in tomato sauce that looked like worms covered in blood, we'd have a wonderful time dressing up and trick-or-treating around the square. They always loved Halloween" she sighed.

"And so did you", he snapped back. "Making an exhibition of yourself cavorting about dressed as a witch or a ghost. There was no such thing in my day."

"Well all I can say is that your day must have been pretty miserable, just like you. Lighten up Tom, the children love it. I've got a big box of sweets in and I'm going to put out my pumpkin so that they know they will be welcome here," she said. Tom left the room muttering to himself as the memories came flooding back to her about the wonderful times she'd had with the children when they were young and the joy it had brought her when, almost exactly two years after their joint weddings, both her son and daughter had presented her with beautiful grandchildren. How she wished she could

spend Halloween with them, but her daughter was visiting her in-laws and her son lived too far away for a fleeting visit. Never mind, she would share as much joy as possible with the local children, many of whom she knew from her voluntary job hearing readers at the local primary school.
Tom had never exactly been a happy-go-lucky sort, and sometimes she wondered why she had married him, but since his redundancy fifteen years ago, he had grown systematically more pessimistic and joyless. Now he no longer even pretended to show any enthusiasm when visiting friends or relatives and seemed to become more morose by the day. *Oh well never mind,* thought Doreen, *I'll enjoy it and so will the children*. Since Tom was so grouchy, Doreen went to bed early, but not before trying on her hairy spiderleg wings and spider hairband and selecting a black outfit to accompany it.

Once in bed she immediately fell into a deep sleep and had a very odd dream about a Kafka play she had once seen while studying for her Drama 'A' level. It was called Metamorphosis and was about a man who woke up one morning and found that he had turned into a beetle. As a result, her night was quite restless and when she awoke she was not surprised to find that Tom was no longer in bed. *Perhaps he's making a cup of tea* she thought and reached over the bedclothes to stretch her arms. But.....but these were not her arms, they more closely resembled large hairy spider legs and instead of hands, had three claws at the ends. She pushed the bedclothes down further and struggled out from beneath them only to find that her body had changed dramatically and that she now possessed eight hairy legs. As she turned, she caught sight of what she assumed was herself, in the mirror, and almost screamed in horror – except that only a hissing sound came out. Four pairs of beady eyes stared back at her, and as she opened her mouth to scream a large pair of fangs came into view. Stunned and appalled by her appearance, Doreen jumped on to the floor and scuttled downstairs into the kitchen. There on the linoleum lay Tom's pyjamas and seaping from them a glutinous red liquid – the decomposing shape of his body. His face was unrecognisable but there, on the remaining skin of his neck, were a pair of bloody holes which resembled the fang marks she had sometimes seen in Vampire films.

Oh my God, thought Doreen, her mind in a turmoil, *I think I've killed him*. She stood over him until the chaos in her head subsided. *I suppose I'd better clean up this mess, but how am I.....Oh well, I guess I might as well eat him.*



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