

Trick or Trick  
By Lesley L. Smith

"Grr!" Rag-clad Michael grunted and flexed as we stood in the front hallway.

I was putting miniature candy-bars in a big black caldron. "Ooh, scary," I said appreciatively. "Are you some kind of monster wrestler?"

"Tho. Em a ombie-ampire," he said, reaching into the caldron.

"No, Michael. Those are for the trick-or-treaters. What did you say? I'm sorry but I couldn't understand you." I surveyed our decorating handiwork. We'd artfully hung spidersilk all over the place; there were bats hanging from the ceiling, rats on the floor, and spiders on the furniture.

Michael spit his vampire-fangs into his hand. "I said, I'm a zombie-vampire, of course. And call me Hael."

"Of course," I winced, "Hael."

"When's Dad getting home to take me trick-or-treating?"

"Anytime, now," I said.

My cell phone rang. It was 'Hael' senior. Good. I needed to remind him to get the dry ice on his way home. Unfortunately, both Hael junior and I were to be denied.

"Sorry, Buddy," I said, hanging up. "Your Dad's caught at work. He can't take you trick-or-treating."

Michael kicked a rat. "That's so unfair!"

"Yes, it is unfair," I said. "I know you're upset, but please don't kick the decorations. Don't worry, I'll take you trick-or-treating."

"Geez, Mom!" Hael stomped his foot. "It's not the same! Dad was going to dress up as Frankenstein with green makeup and everything! What if my friends see me with you?"

"That would be scary!" I couldn't help grinning. "You poor thing--out in public with ...your Mom! How horrible!" I reached into the caldron. "Here, have a candy bar."

A little later, Hael and I had covered our side of the block when he rushed right by the big old house on the corner. "Hey, Hael, you missed this one."

"Ee al-ays iss it," he lisped.

"But look," I pointed. "It's all decorated. They did an even better job than we did. We have to hit it." I started up the brick walkway.

Hael sighed loudly and spat "Fine."

The front stoop was covered with candle-filled jack-o-lanterns, and smelled like scorched pumpkin. "Neat," I said, taking it in.

Hael just stood there.

"Would you like me to knock?" I asked.

"Ess." He shifted uneasily from one foot to another, holding his garish orange jack-o-lantern loot-bag with both hands.

I took a step forward and knocked the big brass acorn against the wooden door.

The door creaked open, and an elderly woman wearing a black pointed hat, black cloak, and bulbous green plastic nose was revealed in the dim light.

Hael took a step back.

I looked at him in bemusement. He seemed scared. "Don't you have something to say, Hael?"

"Hael," the woman croaked. "What kind of name is that?"

I smiled at her and then smiled and nodded at Hael. "Go ahead, Buddy."

"Ick or Eat," he whispered.

"What's that? What'd you say, Sonny?" The woman put a gnarled hand up to her ear.

I nodded at Hael again.  
"I aid, ick or eat!" he said.  
The woman frowned. "You don't talk very good, do you? What do you got something wrong with you?"  
"I think it might be the fangs," I said, smiling.  
"What the heck are you supposed to be, anyway?" the woman said. "All raggedy. Can't talk right. You're kind of pathetic."  
"Aye!" Hael said.  
"Excuse me, ma'am," I said with an edge to my voice. "You must have misspoke."  
She turned to me. "No, I didn't. This kid's all raggedy and he can't even talk. What's wrong with you?"  
Hael muttered, "old itch."  
I forced a smile. "There's nothing wrong with us. It's Halloween, as you know. My wonderful son is wearing a costume." I didn't want to lose my temper at a senior citizen.  
"Pa-thet-ic," the woman said, sounding out each syllable.  
The old bird was really starting to get my goat.  
"Look, lady, are you gonna' give us some candy or not?" Hael had spit out his fangs.  
She fixed him in her beady eyes. "Greedy."  
What a witch!  
Hael stuck out his tongue at her--a move I hadn't seen him make in years. I tried not to laugh.  
"You better watch out, Sonny, or your face is going to get stuck all like that."  
What a lovely idea. I cast a tiny spell.  
Hael started laughing. "Good one, Mom."  
I allowed myself a small smile. "I guess we'll be going, ma'am. Thank you for your kind holiday generosity."  
We turned around and started down the stairs.  
She slammed the door behind us.  
From inside, we heard a loud scream, and then "My face! My face! What's wrong with my face?"  
"Wow, Mom," Hael said, "Dad would've never done a spell like that."  
"It'll wear off tomorrow," I said.  
"You might be even more fun than Dad," Hael said.  
I chuckled as we walked down the sidewalk to the next house.