

Pumpkinhead

Malcolm and Angie had been best friends for as long as either of them could remember. They lived only a few houses apart, walked to school together every morning and spent most afternoons inventing games in the woods behind their village. Malcolm loved making people laugh, and although his jokes were usually harmless, he had a habit of being a little too silly. Angie often rolled her eyes at his antics, but secretly she thought he was the funniest person she knew.

One crisp October afternoon, the friends were helping Malcolm's grandfather prepare his garden for Halloween. The old man had grown dozens of pumpkins, ranging from tiny orange ones no bigger than tennis balls to enormous pumpkins that needed two people to carry them. Malcolm insisted that he could lift the largest pumpkin by himself, despite his grandfather warning him that it was far too heavy.

"I've got this!" Malcolm declared confidently as he wrapped both arms around the giant pumpkin. However, after only a few steps, he stumbled over a tree root and dropped it onto the path. The pumpkin rolled across the garden before crashing into a flowerpot, sending pieces of broken clay flying in every direction.

Angie burst into laughter. "Honestly, Malcolm," she giggled, "you'd probably have more luck if you actually had a pumpkin for a head!"

Malcolm laughed just as loudly.

"At least then people would know it's me coming!"

The two friends continued laughing until they noticed Malcolm's grandfather staring at them. His cheerful smile had disappeared, and his face had become strangely serious.

"Be careful what you wish for," he said quietly.

Angie smiled awkwardly, assuming he was simply trying to sound mysterious for Halloween. Within moments, the old man picked up his rake and continued sweeping the fallen leaves as though nothing had happened.

That evening, as Angie walked home, she noticed something unusual. Every house on the street seemed to have placed pumpkins outside their front doors. She was certain many of them had not been there earlier, yet what unsettled her most was the feeling that every carved pumpkin was watching her. Their hollow eyes seemed to follow her as she hurried along the pavement, and although she told herself she was imagining things, she couldn't shake the strange feeling until she reached home.

The following morning, Malcolm did not arrive at school.

Mrs Carter explained that he was feeling unwell and would probably return the next day. Angie wasn't worried. Malcolm had been known to exaggerate the smallest cough if it meant avoiding a spelling test.

The next morning, however, he walked into the classroom exactly as normal. He wore his usual blue jumper, carried his backpack and smiled at everyone he passed. Yet something was terribly wrong.

Sitting on Malcolm's shoulders was a perfectly carved pumpkin.

Its orange skin was smooth and polished, its triangular eyes glowed faintly in the classroom light, and its wide carved smile stretched from one side of his face to the other. A thick green stalk grew from the top of his head where his hair should have been.

Angie stared in horror.

Surely everyone else could see it too.

Instead, the class greeted Malcolm exactly as they always did.

"Morning, Malcolm."

"Did you finish the homework?"

"Fancy football at break?"

Mrs Carter smiled warmly.

"I'm glad you're feeling better today."

Angie slowly raised her hand.

"Miss..."

"Yes, Angie?"

"Can't... can't you see Malcolm?"

Mrs Carter looked confused.

"Of course I can."

"No... I mean his head."

The teacher frowned.

"What about it?"

Angie looked around the room. Nobody seemed frightened. Nobody looked surprised. It was as though Malcolm still looked completely normal to everyone except her.

At break time, Angie hurried after him.

"Malcolm!" she called.

He turned around.

"What?"

"Your head!"

"What about it?"

"It's a pumpkin!"

Malcolm laughed.

"I think you've been watching too many horror films."

As he chuckled, something small bounced onto the playground.

It was a pumpkin seed.

Then another.

Then another.

Malcolm simply brushed them away without noticing.

Over the next few days, stranger things began happening. Wherever Malcolm walked, crows gathered on nearby rooftops and watched him silently. Bright orange leaves drifted through the air even though there was no wind, and pumpkins began appearing all over the village. Some sat on garden walls. Others appeared outside classrooms. Nobody seemed to remember putting them there, yet nobody questioned why they had appeared.

Angie became convinced that her joke had somehow caused everything.

Finally, she returned to Malcolm's grandfather and explained exactly what had happened.

The old man listened without interrupting before walking to an old wooden cupboard. From inside, he carefully removed a faded leather book covered in dust.

"My grandfather warned me about this," he said quietly. "Long ago, people believed there was an ancient pumpkin spirit that listened during the week before Halloween. It could not always tell the difference between a joke and a real wish. If someone wished carelessly, the spirit sometimes decided to grant it."

Angie's face turned pale.

"Can we change him back?"

"There is only one way," the old man replied. "The wish must be undone by the person who made it, but the words must come from the heart."

That evening, Malcolm's grandfather led Angie to the oldest pumpkin patch in the village. The moon hung low above the fields, bathing the pumpkins in pale silver light. As they stepped into the patch, hundreds of pumpkins slowly turned towards them at exactly the same moment.

Angie felt her knees tremble.

Then a deep voice echoed across the field.

"You wished for Pumpkinhead."

"I didn't mean it," Angie called back. "It was only a joke."

The pumpkins remained silent for a long moment before the voice spoke again.

"Why should the wish be undone?"

Angie looked at Malcolm, who stood beside her smiling with his carved pumpkin face, completely unaware of what was happening.

"Because Malcolm is my best friend," she replied. "I wouldn't change anything about him. He already makes people laugh just as he is, and I was wrong to wish he were different."

The wind suddenly rushed through the pumpkin patch.

Every pumpkin closed its glowing eyes.

A loud cracking sound echoed through the field.

The pumpkin around Malcolm's head split into hundreds of tiny pieces, which drifted away like autumn leaves before disappearing into the night sky.

Malcolm blinked.

"Why are we standing in a pumpkin field?" he asked.

Angie smiled with relief.

"I'll explain on the way home."

From that day onwards, Angie never joked about changing people again. Malcolm still told terrible jokes, still tripped over his own feet and still made everyone laugh wherever he went, but Angie realised that the people we care about should be accepted exactly as they are.

Even so...

Every Halloween morning, a single carved pumpkin appeared outside Malcolm's front gate.

Nobody ever placed it there.

Nobody ever took it away.

And every year, its carved smile seemed just a little wider than before.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why were Malcolm and Angie helping Malcolm's grandfather?

- A. They were building a treehouse.
- B. They were preparing the garden for Halloween.
- C. They were planting flowers.
- D. They were clearing snow.

2. What happened when Malcolm tried to carry the largest pumpkin?

- A. He dropped it and it smashed a flowerpot.
- B. He carried it successfully.
- C. He rolled it into the house.
- D. He gave it to Angie.

3. Why did Angie say Malcolm should have a pumpkin for a head?

- A. She was angry with him.
- B. She wanted to frighten him.
- C. She said it as a joke after he dropped the pumpkin.
- D. She thought he looked like a scarecrow.

4. What was unusual about Malcolm's grandfather's reaction?

- A. He laughed louder than everyone else.
- B. He became serious and warned them to be careful what they wished for.
- C. He shouted at Malcolm.
- D. He told them to go inside immediately.

5. Why was Angie frightened when Malcolm returned to school?

- A. He refused to speak to her.
- B. He had a pumpkin for a head that nobody else seemed able to see.
- C. He was wearing a strange costume.
- D. He looked ill.

6. Which detail suggests that Malcolm's transformation was magical?

- A. He carried his backpack.
- B. He arrived early for school.
- C. He wore his school jumper.
- D. Pumpkin seeds fell whenever he laughed

7. According to Malcolm's grandfather, what caused the transformation?

- A. A science experiment.
- B. A Halloween costume.
- C. An ancient pumpkin spirit that granted careless wishes.
- D. A spell from Malcolm.

8. How was the spell finally broken?

- A. Malcolm removed the pumpkin himself.
- B. Angie apologised sincerely and accepted Malcolm as he was.
- C. The teacher helped them.
- D. The pumpkin simply disappeared at sunrise.

9. Which word best describes Angie at the end of the story?

- A. Careless
- B. Regretful
- C. Jealous
- D. Confused

10. Which statement best describes the main message of the story?

- A. Halloween decorations should be avoided.
- B. Practical jokes are always funny.
- C. We should think carefully about our words and appreciate people for who they are.
- D. Children should never visit pumpkin patches.

Answers

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. B
5. B
6. D
7. C
8. B
9. B
10. C