

“Stick or Treat”

“The tall man, or so I call him,” said young Winnie, “is a creature of the night whom I see quite often from time to time.”

The boy was short and plump. He wore a red t-shirt that was too tight for him and his wide belly poked out from beneath it as he sat rocking in his chair and spinning a yarn to his two friends, Trevor and Wenonah. They had been best friends since middle school. Too old now, being in their mid-teens, to trick-or-treat, they sat around in Winnie’s parents’ living room sipping apple cider and answering the door to pass out candy to trick-or-treaters at random intervals while his parents were away at a Halloween party. They had given up watching the scary movies on TV, each of which they had viewed a million times, in favor of swapping scary stories.

“The first time I saw the man,” Winnie told his friends, who were hanging on his every word, “I was three. I awoke in the middle of the night to see him standing there in my closet. I jumped up and slammed the closet door and ran to my parents’ room. The next morning, we opened the closet together but there was no man there.”

“What does he look like?” asked Trevor, his voice a tremor.

“Well,” Winnie answered, “He is quite tall. 9 or 10 feet, easy. He has a very thin body, being beyond skinny, so skinny in fact, his torso and abdomen are indistinguishable, and when he stands at full height it looks like a rail. Almost like, like a-”

“A stick?” offered a skeptical-looking Wenonah, her dark black hair slung over the shoulder of her puffy, stitched, light brown sweater.

“A stick, yes! That’s a good way of putting it.” Winnie said.

“Wow...” Trevor gawked. His hands were clammy and wet where they had started to sweat.

“How did a 9 to 10-foot-tall man fit in your closet? Ceiling clearance in there’s only about 6 and a half feet.” Wenonah objected.

“He was crouching.” Winnie defended.

Wenonah rolled her eyes. Trevor’s eyes widened.

Trevor trained those deep blue eyes on his friend, who could practically see his short, buzz-cut brown hair tremble atop his scalp. He shook slightly and was on the very edge of his seat.

“The man is really tall and skinny. He’s so skinny, like a stick, in fact, that he can disappear!”

The doorbell rang.

Trevor jumped. His mug of cider fractured on the floor, sending hot cider splashing up and burning him, but not badly. He yelped.

The trio rose and greeted the skeleton, the witch, and the DreamWorks Minion standing on the front porch, and gave them a generous assortment of candy in their pails. Then they returned to their

huddled circle of chairs in the living room, after cleaning Trevor's mess and wiping up the cider from his pants.

"Wh-what do you mean, he can disappear?" stuttered an eager Trevor.

"Well, the third or fourth time I encountered this man, I was much older, 8 or 9, maybe. I woke up in the middle of the night, 3AM, I think it was, and I got myself some water. I was still pretty restless so I looked out the front window. There in the street, standing under the lamp, was the man, tall, skinny as a stick, and with his long, spindly arms reaching out with their big, long, sausage fingers dangling from his very round hands. MOM! I shouted, scared. After shouting for my mom several more times, I heard her rustle in her bed in my parents' room, and begin waking and getting up. As she walked across the dark living room toward me, I watched as the tall man outside under the pale glow of the street lamp stepped sideways, and being thin like a stick, or a drawn line, even, he became all but invisible. I tried insisting to my mom to keep vigil and watch for him to turn back around, but she wouldn't hear of it and made me go back to bed."

Trevor was completely silent. His mouth hung open.

"What does this guy's face look like?" Wenonah asked Winnie, in an ever so slightly mocking tone.

"It is pale. His skin is pale, bright white, even, like paper. He has no face at all, just a big, round head." Winnie replied.

"You mean no face, whatsoever?" a thoroughly creeped out Trevor inquired.

"That's right."

The doorbell rang again. Once again, the three of them gave trick-or-treaters, this time a cowboy, a pirate, and an evil nun a load of candy to add to their already overloaded bags. Then, they picked right up where they left off.

"So this guy is really real? You mean it?" Trevor stammered.

"Oh, yes. He's very real, I assure you. He comes stomping along on his two big, circular feet. Often times on Halloween. In fact, we might see him tonight."

"No way."

"Yeah. I can draw him for you if you want me to."

At Trevor's behest, Winnie ran and fetched a pad and paper and began drawing exactly the man he had described up to this point.

"Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God. I can't believe it. You can draw him, he's real!" Trevor muttered.

When he was finished, Winnie turned his pad to face his friends, revealing his sketch.

Trevor gasped.

Wenonah rolled her eyes.

“Dude.” Wenonah remarked. “You just drew a stick man. All that is, is a stick man!”

Winnie burst out laughing, unable to contain it any longer. He laughed until tears filled his eyes. His poking out belly shook and he kicked his feet.

“Oh man,” he said, “I really had Trevor going! Ha ha ha ha ha!!!”

Trevor looked stunned for a second, then turned red and scowled, realizing he’d been had. After a few moments passed, he smiled, then laughed, too.

“Geez, man, I can’t believe I fell for that!”

“Heh heh, I know! I literally just talked to you about a stick man the whole night!”

All three friends laughed and scoffed over this ridiculous story.

The doorbell rang.

The three friends arose and went to answer the call. Opening the door, they beheld him: a long, tall man who was skinny as a stick, had skin the color of printer paper, a large, round, 2-dimensional head, long sausage fingers that looked hastily drawn in loops, and arms as long as his torso. Before them stood the very stick man Winnie had jokingly described in his story just minutes before.

The blood drained from Trevor’s face.

Wenonah screamed.

Winnie felt the bottom drop out of his stomach.

From nowhere, for he had no mouth, neck, or signs of vocal chords, the stick man spoke in a deep, low, grumble: “trick-or-treat!”

Shrieking, the friends slammed the door, turned, and fled into the house, running up the stairs and barricading themselves in Winnie’s room, where they stayed for the remainder of that Halloween night.

On the front porch, the stick man stood, satisfied. If he had owned one, his face would have been all smile.

“Heh, heh, heh,” the figure chuckled in the same grumbling drone to himself. He stamped down the stairs of Winnie’s parents’ front porch with his large, round child’s drawing feet, and kept walking onward away from there, disappearing into the gray, foggy, cold night.