

## The Eye

By Kirsty Ferguson

The sound of the delighted squeals of children seemed to reverberate from every corner of the showgrounds. The noise mingled with the scents of fairy floss, hotdogs and summer. Families were everywhere, enjoying the perfect weather.

My son Justin and I had been looking forward to the show for months now. This was my weekend with him and I had planned it down to the last detail. Halloween has always been his favourite holiday of the year. Each year his mum and I worked hard on his costume and spent hours traipsing all over the neighbourhood knocking on doors, yelling trick or treat! This year, it was different. A few months ago, his mum decided that she needed to 'find herself', and to do that, she could no longer be married to me. She needed to be by herself. I recently found out through innocent chit chat with Justin that this was no longer the case. She was dating her much younger, much fitter, yoga instructor. How cliché. So long story short, this was my weekend. I was determined to make Halloween the same as it had always been for Justin. As I watched his face glowing with happiness, I knew I was off to a good start.

'Justin wait!' I ran after him for what felt like the millionth time, finally catching up with him as he skidded to a stop in front of a stall which seemed to be shoved behind a fortune teller and the world's hairiest lady. I ruffled his hair as my eyes adjusted to the dimness of the tent. It was full of old and curious looking knick knacks. It smelt weird, like old mould and rats. Justin seemed taken by it though and didn't even acknowledge my touch.

'Hey buddy, why don't we go and ride the bumper cars again, I bet I can beat you this time'. He didn't answer and I craned my neck to see what he was staring at. An old, crooked man slowly shuffled into view and smiled, revealing his yellowed, rotting teeth.

'Hello to you both, I am Nick of Nick's Curios. Welcome to my shop. May I ask what you're interested in?' He smiled at the end of his spiel, but his smile never reached his eyes. I opened my mouth to speak when Justin's whispered 'That'. He was pointing to a bundle of rags sitting on an old wicker chair. 'I want that'. His hand reached out and reverently touched the rags. A look of wonder spread across his face and I took a step forward to see exactly what it was that he was touching. I pulled at the thing on the chair and it fell to the floor with a thump. Justin immediately fell to his knees and gently uncovered it. There, lying on the floor like a dirty, broken child, was a wooden doll. It looked like one of those bug eyed ventriloquists' dummies

that you see in old movies. An unpleasant feeling clouded my mind and I struggled not to slap his hand away from the dummy.

‘What a wonderful choice young man. Many people have tried to buy this from me, but none of them have shown it the proper respect. I see that you do. I want you to have it, no charge’.

‘That’s very generous of you, but we couldn’t possibly take it without paying for it, and unfortunately I have spent all our money on rides and junk food. Sorry.’ The old man stared at me with half closed eyes, ‘It seems your son is taken with the dummy. You wouldn’t want to disappoint him, would you? Seeing as this is a special weekend, after all.’

I looked at him and demanded, ‘What do you mean about this being a special weekend?’

‘I have many talents Mr Brooks.’ I was left stunned that he knew my name and seemed to know about the significance of this weekend. ‘C’mon Justin, we’re leaving.’

‘But Dad, I want it’ Justin whined. He tried to throw off my hand when I grabbed his arm. I pulled him to his feet and started to drag him out of the tent. He dug his feet into the dirt and began to cry. I stopped, stunned that he would be crying over a dirty, creepy doll. I looked back at it, maybe I had just freaked out and there was nothing wrong with it. The old man was standing there, smiling that creepy smile, the dummy was still on the floor, but now its face was turned towards us and it was smiling the same disturbing smile. The hairs on my arms stood up and I felt a cold chill settle over my heart. That dummy was evil and I had to get my son away from it.

I pushed Justin ahead of me, right out the door and into the blazing hot summer sun. A wiped a hand across my face and was surprised to find I was sweating, even though my face felt like ice. I breathed in and looked down at Justin. His whole body was shaking and he had tears streaming down his face. Alarmed, I knelt down and hugged him tight.

‘It’s alright mate, we’ll get you something else to take home. How bout a couple of show bags?’ Justin didn’t reply. In fact, he didn’t move at all and I had to give him a little push to get him going. We walked quickly, rejoining the many other families laughing and having a great time. Somehow, the day had been ruined for us and I was still unsure of what was going on.

We drove home in silence. Justin wouldn’t look at him and didn’t answer any of my questions. I knew he was angry with me for not letting him bring the dummy home, but it also looked like he was in a trance or something. When we pulled into the driveway, Justin got out and walked slowly to the front door. I unpacked his stuff from the car and unlocked the door. He went up the stairs to his room and I sighed deeply. He was here for another two days and

tonight was trick or treating. I desperately wanted him to have a good time. To show him that even though his mother and I weren't together, his happiness was all that mattered to me. I walked into the lounge room and turned on the tv. There was an ad on for an old horror movie marathon that was showing tonight. Justin and I should be done by the time it started and he would be up in his room eating lollies and chocolate, so I thought I might watch it. I loved horror movies and watching the oldies always made me happy. I left Justin alone to cool off while I organised tea and laid his costume out for him. He was going as a zombie this year, and I think he's current attitude was perfect for the part.

'Justin, tea's ready'. Something thumped upstairs, then I heard him slowly make his way down the stairs. He walked into the kitchen and I looked down at his left foot which was dragging on the ground. 'Oh Justin.' He looked like he hadn't slept in a week, his eyes were dull and he had dark bluish smudges under his eyes. His hair hung lank around his face and he looked deathly pale. 'You did your own make up, good job kid. You sure do look like a zombie now.'

'I don't want tea, I want to leave now, and I don't want you to come anymore.' He turned away from me as he said the last part. I felt a surge of raw emotion and I had to swallow before I spoke. 'I know you're angry with me because I said no to that stupid dummy, but come on. I've been looking forward to this for months, so have you.' He stared at me and mumbled something about it not being safe for me. 'Well too bad, I'm coming.' I picked up his backpack and handed it to him. I stood defiantly holding the bag, waiting for what seemed an eternity, for him to meet me half way. 'Fine.'

With that settled, we left the house and walked across the street to begin our trick or treating. Heaps of kids were already out and about, dressed up in their scariest costumes and swinging baskets and bags full of lollies. The kids were smiling and squealing with happiness. Parents were following their kids, chatting to other parents, swapping stories on how long it took to get their kids into their costumes. Justin and I walked in silence, him a few paces ahead of me. For all I know, he could have been a zombie. He didn't make eye contact with anybody and he didn't respond to me when I spoke to him. So I trudged along behind him, feeling envious of the happy families.

Justin mounted the stairs to a house that had gone all out with the Halloween spirit. Before he could ring the doorbell, the front door was flung open and an old couple stood in the doorway, looking like murder victims, screaming their heads off. Justin stood still. Thinking about it later, he looked so unnatural. Like he was a statue, or a dead man standing on their

porch. The couple realised something was wrong, and stopped screaming. As their voices died away, I could see them staring at my son with fear in their eyes. I started to get that prickly feeling again. I walked up the stairs and clamped a hand on Justin's shoulder. He turned and snarled at me, and for a second, I could have sworn his eyes were black.

'Hey Justin, you're doing a really good job of scaring this nice couple, but it's time we were going now.' I turned him and gave him a gentle shove towards the stairs. 'I'm sorry folks, he's had a hard day. I apologise if he scared you.' The man nodded but I could see that they were truly frightened. I angrily strode down the stairs and caught up to Justin. 'Just hang on a moment. What the hell is the matter with you?' Justin looked me in the eye and I saw that he looked worse than he had before. How was that even possible? I suddenly realised that there was a roaring in my ears. I could no longer hear the sounds of the neighbourhood, although I could still see the families out of the corner of my eye. It felt like all there was in the world, was my son. His eyes bore into mine. I found it hard to breathe. As abruptly as it started, it ended. He strode away, leaving me bewildered and more than a little frightened. This was more than just teenage angst, this was something else altogether. Somehow, my son had changed, and it frightened me.

The sun was beginning to fade into dusk as the colour bled from the sky. The bats overhead screamed as they flew across the waning sky. Their screams seemed like a warning for me. Stay away from your son. I caught up with Justin as he was nearing the corner of the street. He stood still under the branches of a large tree. Waiting. I wondered if he was waiting for me. As I walked closer to him, I noticed something sticking out of the top of his back pack. As I closed the gap between us, I realised with a start, that I could see an eye. I froze, not wanting to go any closer, but forcing my feet to move forward. Justin still hadn't moved and as I inched closer, the eye suddenly rolled direction to look straight at me. I screamed. I couldn't help it. The noise seemed to snap Justin out of his zombie like state and he ran over to me as I crouched on the concrete breathing shallowly.

'Dad! What is it? What's wrong?' He grabbed my head in both his hands and forced me to look at him. I tried to turn away from what I would see but then I took a good look at him. His face was back to its normal colour and the bags under his eyes had disappeared. He seemed normal again. I sighed and whispered a half forgotten prayer. Then I remembered the eye.

'Take your bag off. Now! There's something in it.' I knew I was screaming at him because people had gathered round us and were starting to point and whisper. I didn't care. Somehow that evil thing had found its way into my son's bag. I tore the bag from Justin's

shoulders and threw it onto the ground. He was trying to calm me down I wasn't listening to what he was saying. I threw him off me as I upended his bag onto the ground. Bags of lollies and a few chocolate bars came spilling out, but no dummy.

'Where are you, you sonofabitch!' I screamed. 'Dad, there's nothing there. What's wrong with you, there's nothing there!'

'I saw it,' I sobbed. 'I saw the eye. The dummy was in your bag.'

I sat on the ground, cradling Justin's now empty bag, surrounded by his Halloween spoils. He slowly helped me to my feet, put his arm around me and helped me walk the two blocks home. I felt like my mind was beginning to crack. Had I really seen the dummy in his bag or was it a trick of the light and I simply saw what I was afraid of. How could the dummy get into his bag anyway, and why would it? These thoughts filled my mind as my son helped me up the front path. He slid the key into the lock and opened the front door. We went into the kitchen and he put the kettle on to make me a coffee.

'Justin, I saw the dummy, in your bag. I did.' I looked at him, searching for an explanation.

'You keep talking about a dummy Dad, but I have no idea what you mean. What dummy? Why would I be carrying round a dummy in my bag?'

'Don't you remember going into that curio shop at the show and seeing the dummy? You couldn't stop staring at it and you wanted me to buy it for you.'

'The last thing I remember at the show, was riding the dodgem cars with you. I beat you.' A hint of a smile played across his lips at the false memory.

'That didn't happen Justin. I don't know what is going on, but I think I might go to bed. I don't really feel well.' I got up and gave him a kiss on his forehead on the way through to the stairs. I still didn't understand what was going on, but it was possible that Justin's version of events was what really happened. I had been under a lot of stress with the separation and trying to make Justin happy. Maybe I had snapped. I opened the door to my bathroom and turned on the light. In the mirror was a bundle of rags wearing a grotesque smile. I screamed and picked up the doorstop and threw it at the mirror. The wooden dummies' face disintegrated into a hundred pieces, but I could still see his carved face grinning at me! I started crushing my boots down on the jagged pieces of mirror, grinding them to dust.

'Dad!' Justin screamed 'What's happening?' I could hear him thumping up the stairs as he took them two at a time. He skidded into my bathroom and saw what I was doing.

'Dad stop it! Leave the glass alone, there's nothing there.' He pulled on my arm and dragged me out into the bedroom. I was panting and crying at the same time. I put my hand up to my forehead and realised that it was wet. I looked at my hand and saw that I was bleeding. I hadn't even noticed that I had cut myself, I had been so intent on destroying the dummy. Justin went into the other bathroom and got some antiseptic and bandaids to fix my face up. It stung a little, but at least I knew that was real. Justin helped me into bed and gently pulled the covers up around my chin. He stared at me for a minute before saying goodnight and turning out the light.

I had weird dreams when I did finally get to sleep. The dummy was trying to make Justin kill me. It was whispering all sorts of things in his ear and I could see the love Justin had for me, draining by the second. It was almost like watching a movie in slow motion as I saw Justin pull the long bladed knife from the back of the pants. His face was a mask of hatred, his mouth twisted with rage, screaming incoherently at me. I stood up and picked up the heavy based crystal cut vase that rested on the bedside table closest to me. I swung it just as Justin stepped within range. The vase connected and his head snapped sideways, blood splashing across the wall. The knife dropped out of his unfeeling fingers as he dropped to the floor. I raised the vase again. I stood there for minutes, just waiting for him to make a move. He didn't. Finally I put the vase down and the room slowly began to blur at the edges, slowly sinking into darkness.

The day dawned bright, piercing my room with random beams of light. I rolled onto my back and stretched. I felt like I had slept the sleep of the dead. As my feet hit the floor, I began thinking of the ways I would make amends to Justin. I kind of freaked out on him yesterday, and I still wasn't even sure of what had happened. All I knew was that the disturbing dream I had about us last night scared me. I stood up and shuffled to the end of the bed. I called for Justin. My foot kicked something with my left foot and I looked down to see what it was. Justin's name died on my lips and was replaced by a heart wrenching scream.

'No! No! Oh my god no! Justin, wake up!' I dropped to my knees and cradled my boy's broken and bloody face in my hands. Half of his head was caved in and his hair was matted with blood. A bright pool of blood surrounded him, smelling like old coins. I felt my stomach heave and I managed to turn away before puking my guts up. I looked back at Justin and started screaming again.

I screamed nonstop until the ambulance came to take me away. They had to forcibly separate me from my son. I kept screaming and begging Justin not to leave me. Finally, they managed to strap me down and give me a shot to calm me down. As I drifted off into a drug

induced haze, I saw something peeking out at me from inside the ambulance. It was an eye. I began screaming again.

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