

### *See You When You Get There*

The light drizzle of cricket chirping and a rhythmic drone of frog bellows brought in the humid gusts of fog laden swamp air. The leaves dance jerks and curls weighed down by water from the rain that came earlier that day. I have been sitting here watching this fool, Douglas, dangle and suck up spit through his Grape Ape mask for the better part of ten minutes. I'm pretty sure he is trying to drown fire ants. The boy needs Jesus. Mama says he is a typical little boy but I see him more as a typical front loading washing machine with the window open. Danke and obnoxious, it is easy to push his buttons. He is always leaking. His pockets perpetually yield stashes of change, rocks that look like faces or butts, half a pickle, a quarter of a dime, a third of a shoelace, ALL of his chewed gum from the past two days along with other mysterious forms of earthwhile flotsam. He was not my favorite human being right now, and I feel sorry for that one over used pocket, but I have known him since he was born. Keke was chillin' on the ground, next to me, making sure Skelator had an adequate bunker. She sat there, lending soundtrack to the only muscular skeleton in existence with formidable and thunderous mouth stomping. With his feet in the dirt and a four year old to guide him, Skeletor was prepared for the adventure ahead. Skeletor knew, all too well, that the adventure he gets will not always be the adventure he wants. For him it would be a terrifying night of dangling from the hip of a giant version of himself, over tiny light-up shoes, and alongside a cartoonish pumpkin bucket filled with plastic and sugar.

Amazingly, Douglas got tired of carrying out God's work and decided to focus on the only other thing he was good at: complaining my last good nerve away.

"Maayne!" He started, "Where Sammy at, Shonda? He probably aint even coming this year. He wudnt' at school Monday OR yesterday. Ain't nobody at his house answerin' doors, neither."

You know damn well this kid is asking out of, like, 2 percent concern. "Boy none of that stuff matters. Mama said I'm incharge of you nigglets, and SHE promised Sammy's mama that we would take him trick or treating too."

"Yeah ok, Shonda. Ok...Sho' you right. When?!" He crossed his arms to emphasize his facetiousness.

Not only could I tell this kid learned sarcasm a week ago, but I think this kid thinks I am lying or that somehow knowing WHEN my mama told me to do anything had a damn thing to do with whether or not it would change this conversation. Plus, getting an attitude from skinny purple gorillas when I got a paper to finish will not become commonplace tonight, no sir. I wanted to smack his teeth into next month.

"Dougie, you know I am not afraid to embarrass yo ass out here in public. Like, two weeks ago. Now shut up, be patient, and Sammy will be here. You lettin all your stupid out."

Doug had a point, though. Where the hell was this kid? I didn't just want to wait because mom promised their mothers' that I would take them tonight, I always take the little ones out on Halloween. This would be the ninth Halloween I've spent with Dougie and Sammy, and the fourth one where I was in charge. I heard mama talking to Aunty Charleen about Sammy's parents. They were having problems, his daddy can't keep a job. Everybody knows he beats the

hell out of both Sammy and his mama. Mama says Miss Shay has wanted to leave for years but too was afraid of what would happen to Sammy. This was not Doug's business. Really, it wasn't even mine. Damnt, I just wanna take this kid out so he can be a kid for the night.

It was getting dark. The air was getting cooler and that made the fog rise a little from knee height to just about the chest. The air had a humid earthy aroma of the newly emerged river banks and ditches after a few weeks of flooding brought on by the fall rainy season. I hated the poopy smell of muddy ditches but I was glad that the water subsided enough to not have to cancel Halloween. This usually pays out pretty good for me by the end of the night. My moms friends are thankful they don't have to drag pint sized bat heros and squirmy little princesses around so they all slip me a little something when I bring them home. No, it was getting late, but I decided that I did not mind waiting a bit longer. You can definitely tell these kids have been WAITING for Halloween. The neighborhood never seems this lively. The fall rains bring infamous hurricanes to the American southeast but all that means for us, is roughly seven weeks of rains and floods. It just, sorta works out that Halloween is like the first holiday after the rains. Grown ups get football, teenagers get homecoming, and the belly button and under club gets candy. The fog was growing thick while skeletons in reeboks and ghosts with mohawks ran through the fog swirling like the cream in mama's coffee.

Just then the swirl delivered a slightly squishy little mummy that walked up to us out of the fog like a subtle breath. I am pretty sure this child is supposed to be a mummy or something, but the wrappings were weird. Like when wet clothes get left outside for a few weeks. Like they were made out of clothes instead of the normal white torn fabric you are used to seeing. Last

year this kid just had to be the green power ranger. Work with what you got, I guess. This kid was head to toe dirty laundry.

“Sammeee!?”

Keke jumped up and ran to Sammy delivering a springy clingy little person love hug. He didn't say anything but nodded his head in response to my question and hugged Keke as hard as she would let him. I suppose he looked like he could ruin a Skeletor costume with some well placed affection..

“Bout time!” Doug said as he walked up with a huff.

I watched as the boys did their customary handshake, so it's definitely Sammy, but...

Why... the fff...

“Sammy?! Why are you so quiet tonight?! Doug take Keke's hand and walk with her down the street, please.”

“Why?! She's YOUR sister!”

“Boy suck those teeth at me again and you're going to spend the rest of the night looking for them!”

Sammy did not skip a beat. He walked right up to me and hugged me. No words, just...an unusual thing for an eight year old laundry mummy to do. Especially this little one. I could tell that he looked up at me before hugging again and running off to catch back up with Doug. I had this feeling that if he wanted to let me know that he was ok. The boys walked a little ahead of me and Keke was now at my side running and jumping and swinging from my arm suspended in the air for all but 2 seconds. Doug was yapping on and on about candy and himself. Sammy just

voicelessly stared at him and walked from house to house with the rest of us; gettin our trick or treat on.

Folks seemed to be in a giving mood this year. A couple older ladies saw Keke and loved her spunky looking costume. One of the ladies bent over to tell Keke something as she gave Keke an entire Almond Joy, *Scare 'm good, lil mama*. A few folks from the nicer neighborhoods come down and just pass out candy, every year, as they walk around. I think it's nice of them but mama says it's because no one in their neighborhood will go to their house much less bring the kids to their door. I didn't care. I'm going to graduate in a couple years and I'm going to go to Algiers and become a writer and leave this swampy out house behind me. Until then, I got to tend to the rainbow of vomit now covering Keke's shoes like awful cake icing. Keke spent as much time sneaking candy out of her bucket as getting candy put in it. I am pretty sure I saw Sammy give his candy to Doug a couple of times but I also watched him give it away to kids passing by. Sammy was already sweet, but quiet Sammy was a damn Deacon!

We get up to the sharp turn up on Kodak Street. The street immediately banks to the left but there is a path that goes straight into a small patch of woods that lead to this end of the Gouchier River. The water in the river has been at least 4 feet above its rest point for what seems like a month. The banks ride all the way up to the back yards of every house on the street we just turned on to. The frogs were out tonight in full force so I didn't see a problem with it. They were a good sign that there wasn't anything in the water, well, nothing more important than mating. The trees aren't so thick that we are away from civilization; a civilization that is currently running around hopped up on sugar and booze while chucking eggs and toilet paper all over the place. Sammy walks up to the straight, turns around and stands there insinuating that he wants to

go take a breather by the water. Sammy does this until Doug turns around and looks at me like he's hoping I say no. I looked dead at Doug and said, "Good job, Sammy. Girls like a guy who is not afraid of a little adventure!"

Doug scoffed and ran to join him. As we walked to the small forest we could already make out the deepening orange and pink sky wobbling off the bayou water through the trees. A swampy choir of various amphibians croaked into the air like broken harmonicas being played in boats. Locusts buzz in harmony with the crickets. The air is actually cool. I took Keke's mask off so she could get some air while the boys walked to the water.

"Shonda, Sammy says he has to go home. He also says that he will see us when we get there."

Keke said, as a matter of fact.

"I know baby girl, everybody is going to get home tonight." I sighed, while fixing her costume.

"Nooo right now!" She responded.

I looked at her with a bit of shock. "When did he tell you that, baby?" Doug started going crazy. The boy was screaming and carrying on about who knows what.

"Shonda! Somebody in the water! Sammy just gone!" He howled. Sometimes people do stupid things when their stret becomes a river and unfortunately, water subsidation brings out a few floaters a year. Usually the gators get to them first, but it's not unheard of for bodies to get discovered by kids going to or from school.

My heart sank."Oh Jesus no! Don't let these babies see that stuff, Lord!"

I blew past Doug and Sammy to see if I could make out what I was seriously hoping to be a gator or a floating log. It wasn't. There was definitely a hand and a shoe. I had a flashlight in my purse that I forgot to pull out when we got off the road. I was able to make out another one,

but this one bloated and wearing what used to be pink sweats. Doug freaks the hell out and bolts back out of the trees toward the road. I got Kekes face buried in my thigh now as I move the flashlight toward another body. This one is...

“Where is Sammy?!” I screamed. I frantically spin in quarter circles with the flashlight. After failing to see him, I grabbed little Keke up and ran back to the road to meet up Doug and Sammy. When I got there, I didn't see Sammy and grabbed a frantic Doug.

“Baby, where is Sammy? Douglas!! Where is Sammy?” I screamed.

“Rashonda, he took a couple steps onto the water and vanished...He...he gone.” Doug robotically spoke these words in an uncharacteristically hushed tone with eyes wide like paper plates.

Forty five minutes later, Keke and Doug and I were under a blanket while our parents were talking to the cops. I hate this. The cop cars just kept coming. Lights and stripes and sirens. Pulling up fast, then walking slow upon exit. In the distant huddle of parents and police, mama fell out screaming and all I could do was hold the kids tighter. The parents slowly came back. Doug walked up to his mom and my mom took Keke away. Dad gave me a hand up and hugged me.

“I'm so sorry, baby, but ...” he hesitated, “you found Sammy and his family. Looks like Sammy's dad wasn't well. They don't know a lot yet, but I think he hurt them, and used the floods to keep his family together. The cops say that according to how the mom looks, they would make a guess that they've been out there for more than a week.”