

CC, JJ and the Pumpkin Dogs

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CC and JJ were sitting on the gate waiting for their dad. They'd been there since getting home from school.

"Do you think he'll bring a big one?" asked JJ.

"He better," said CC. "I told him to bring the biggest he could find."

"How much do they cost?" asked JJ.

"Lots, I suppose," said CC. "They sell them by the pound."

Dust rose from the dirt road in the distance. They couldn't see who it was but CC and JJ stood up and craned their necks. Finally a red car came into sight. It wasn't their dad.

"I wish he'd hurry up," said CC. "We still have to carve it and it's getting dark."

JJ nodded in agreement. He and his twin sister pretty much agreed about everything. They'd been together since the get-go.

"Twins, why are you sitting on the gate so long?" called their mother from the house.

"Waiting for Dad," they replied. "He's bringing a pumpkin, for sure."

Mom shrugged the tiniest bit. "Don't set your hearts on it," she said. "Things are tight."

CC and JJ knew that things were tight. Often they only had bread for supper. That and a bit of cheese if they were lucky. When that happened Dad usually said he wasn't hungry and gave them his bread. But this was Halloween night and the twins had their heart set on a pumpkin.

A small cloud of dust appeared. They knew it wasn't their dad. His pickup sent up a huge cloud of dust. Still, the twins stood to see who it was. It was Jake who worked the small farm at the end of the road. Jake waved as he drove by, his old jalopy rattling and shaking loudly. After that nothing appeared on the road. The whole landscape was still. No one was to be seen in any direction. But if the twins had looked carefully, they would have seen a tree elf sitting on the gate post. She listened to everything they said with the greatest of interest.

At last a huge cloud of dust billowed upwards. It was their dad. The twins waved as soon as he was in sight and scrambled to the ground when he turned in at the gate. The truck stopped. JJ leaped onto the tailgate and CC jumped onto the running board and peered into the cab. They looked at each other and knew instantly there was no pumpkin. Still, they tried to appear happy to see their dad. They gave him a hug and held his hands as he walked to the rickety house. They said nothing about a pumpkin.

The tree elf flew away down the road toward the farm. Already the sun was low in the sky. She knew she didn't have much time. Twenty minutes later she appeared with two dogs. They were as alike as Tweedledee and Tweedledum. In each dog's mouth was a pumpkin stem. Attached to the stem was the biggest pumpkin they could carry. The elf led them in the gate and onto the porch of the house.

"Woof! Woof!" barked the dogs at the elf's command. "Woof! Woof!"

CC and JJ opened the house door.

"What are you two doing here?" they exclaimed, coming out and petting the dogs. The dogs belonged to Jake down at the farm and they knew them well. One was called Fiver because he had five white spots, and the other, if you looked carefully, had six white spots and was called Sixer. Otherwise they were alike, with shiny coats and feathery tails.

"What did you guys bring?" asked the twins.

The dogs wagged their tails, pleased with themselves.

"Looks like a pair of pumpkins," said their mom coming out the door.

"That's odd," said their dad, joining them. "They must have brought them from Jake's kitchen garden. I'll have to bring them back."

He was about to take them when Jake's old jalopy rolled into the yard. In the back seat was a big pumpkin. It was huge.

"Well, ain't this the strangest," said Jake, getting out of the car. "I saw the dogs rush into my garden and run off with those two pumpkins. Then a voice said into my ear, clear as day: 'Fetch that big pumpkin of yours and follow the dogs. And bring the pumpkin pie and harvest stew Widow Kelly gave you—there's far too much for you to eat alone.'"

CC, JJ and their parents stared at Jake. They agreed. It was a little weird.

"Well, come on kids," said Jake. "Don't just stand there. Help me get this here food and pumpkin out of the car." Suddenly everyone was helping and trying not to trip over the dogs who were trying to help too.

Widow Kelly's harvest stew was too much—there were leftovers for the next day. But her pumpkin pie was all eaten up. Then CC and JJ, with the help of the grownups, carved those three pumpkins and put them on the front porch. Late that night, as the candles flickered and burned while the children slept, a whole forest of tree elves danced around the glowing pumpkins with glee. And so they did for many a year after that, for Jake and Widow Kelly brought a huge feast every Halloween and they all tucked in and made merry.