

## The Pumpkin That Watched Me

Every Halloween, our neighborhood has this big pumpkin carving contest. People go all out giant pumpkins, crazy designs, even ones that light up and play music. I never won before, but this year, I was determined.

So, two nights before Halloween, I biked to the old Johnson Farm at the edge of town. Nobody really goes there anymore. It's been abandoned for years, but rumor says the pumpkins there grow faster and brighter than anywhere else.

The vines were huge and tangled, curling across the ground like snakes. The air smelled weird, sweet but rotten at the same time. Then I saw it.

A single pumpkin sitting in the middle of the field. Perfectly round. Bright orange. Almost glowing.

It felt warm when I touched it.

I dragged it home in my wagon, feeling proud, even though the vines seemed to move a little as I left like they didn't want to let go.

That night, I carved it carefully: sharp eyes, jagged grin, tiny fangs for fun. I wanted it to look spooky but not too spooky. When I lit the candle inside, the flame flickered strangely, like it was breathing.

I grinned at my work. "You're gonna win for sure," I whispered.

Then the pumpkin blinked.

I jumped back. The flame inside wavered, and I laughed nervously. But the pumpkin's eyes moved. Just slightly, like it was looking right at me.

The next morning, I found the pumpkin sitting in a different spot. I figured my little brother was messing with me. I moved it back to the porch, but later that night it had moved again. Closer to the steps.

By the time Halloween arrived, the pumpkin was right under my window. Its grin looked wider than before.

When I went outside to check, the candle inside flickered on by itself.

And then it spoke.

"Nice carving," it said in a low, raspy voice.

I stumbled back, heart pounding. "Who are you?"

The pumpkin chuckled a sound like dry leaves rustling. “You gave me eyes, so I could see. You gave me a mouth, so I could speak. Now it’s my turn to make something.”

I turned to run, but the vines from the yard thick and black shot out from the ground and wrapped around my legs. The pumpkin’s grin glowed brighter.

“Don’t worry,” it said. “I’ll make you perfect.”

The next thing I remember was waking up the next morning on the porch. Everything seemed... normal. My pumpkin was gone, though.

That night, my parents called me outside. “Look at this!” my mom said.

On the porch was a huge new pumpkin, with a face carved exactly like mine. My messy hair. My crooked smile. Even my freckles.

Everyone said it was the most realistic carving they’d ever seen.

I tried to laugh it off, but when I got closer, I saw something that froze me in place. Inside the pumpkin’s eyes behind the carved holes I saw something move. Something small and glowing.

And when no one else was looking, it blinked.