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It's A Kind of Magic

by Ali Giles

The shop was called Fantasia and the boy wanted to go in.

“I want a mask,” he whined as they entered, “to really scare the little kids at school.”

“You won’t scare them with these,” his father said, stopping at a rack of rubber masks.

“They’re shit.”

“They’re handmade, sir,” the shopkeeper pointed out politely.

“They’re still shit.”

The boy’s father was called Jonny, and after his last comment he looked boldly across at the shopkeeper; a thin and languorous man with incredibly pale skin.

“What are you looking for exactly, sir?”

“Devil masks. *Really* scary ones,” said the boy, picking his nose. His nasal breathing was torturously loud in the shop.

The shopkeeper watched the child finger the costumes with a sticky hand. “Oh no, young man. Didn’t you know? The Devil’s gone right out of fashion. But we do a *very* nice line in Hungry Ghosts.”

“Ghosts?” Jonny frowned, “bit lame.”

But the boy’s eyes lit up greedily, “I want one, dad. I want a Hungry Ghost.”

“These are made by a specialist little Chinese company called ‘Anthromorphic Magic’ and they’re *very* fun.”

He had barely put the box down before the boy was digging impatiently through it, but within seconds the boy pushed it away again with a cross little huff. “They’re boring! They’re all the same colour and they’re *boring!*”

“£10?” his father added, incredulous, “for a bit of rubber with eye holes? Are you kidding me?”

“This particular range is called ‘Karma’,” the shopkeeper said with a smile, “and if you dare to try, they take on the shape and colour of your soul...”

Jonny snatched up a cellophane packet, frowning down at it. “That’s not what it says here.”

“Read it to me, dad,” the boy demanded and so Jonny did, haltingly: “WARNING. Not for use on the mean spirited; ego – tis – *egot* – ”

“Egotistical,” supplied the shopkeeper, smiling faintly, “the Chinese and their spelling, eh.”

He took back the packet, slipped the fine rubber from its packaging and proffered it to Jonny, opening another for the boy. “Care to try? You’ll be most surprised.”

“I’m already surprised at the bloody price of them,” Jonny grumbled, “can’t you do them any cheaper?”

The shopkeeper looked at the discontented, ratty little man and his vacuous son.

“Certainly sir. Please. Have them on the house.”

The boy snatched his with a piggish squeal, and Jonny took his own as if doing the shopkeeper a huge favour. Once the masks were on, they stood staring at each other for a time; two smooth and empty moon-white faces, with wretched pits for eyes and the merest pinprick for a mouth.

“I can’t breathe,” the boy’s adenoidal breathing had become greatly muffled, “and nothing’s happening.”

The shopkeeper looked regretful, “ah. Unfortunately for you two, it already *has* happened.”

Jonny turned his big empty moon face towards the shopkeeper. “What’s already happened?”

“Well you *did* read the warning yourself, sir...”

“How do you get these fucking things off?” Jonny shouted then, clawing frantically at his face.

“You don’t, sir,” the shopkeeper said.