

'I wouldn't get too excited if I were you,' said Sam as they set off for the Safestore site. 'You know how much stuff we've had to dispose of already. It will only be more junk that Aunt Agatha couldn't find room for in her house.'

'I expect you're right,' said Helen.

'If you ask me,' said Sam, 'She was never the same person after Uncle Jack went missing.'

'Well that's hardly surprising is it? Her husband disappears without trace for no good reason and all and sundry casting aspersions. Poor woman. I wonder what did happen to him?'

'Well, if Aunt Agatha knew, she took the secret to her grave,' said Sam.

At the Safestore site Sam explained to Hayley, the receptionist, that his aunt had died and in clearing her house he'd discovered a key and a contract for a storage space at their facility. He had no idea what she'd stored there but would like to take a look.

'No problem,' said Hayley, once she'd checked the contract. 'That key is for one of our 16 square foot storage units.'

'That's a relief,' he said. 'I was imagining something much bigger. It means there can't be too much in there.'

'If you'd both like to follow me,' and she led the way through a maze of corridors until they reached the one containing Aunt Agatha's storage unit.

'Here you are,' said Hayley.

'Is it always this cold?' asked Helen.

'I'm afraid so.' We've had both the aircon and the heating checked but no one can explain why this corridor is always freezing compared to the others. I'll be in reception if you have any questions.'

'Oh well, here goes,' said Sam as he turned the key in the padlock and opened the door.

Before they had a chance to see inside, the corridor lights flickered and went out and the aircon fell silent.

'Great time for a power cut,' he said and took out his smart phone and turned on the flashlight.

He held it up in front of the telephone box sized unit and Helen let out a little shriek.

'Whatever's the matter?' he asked, but before she could reply the power was restored and they could eventually see the contents.

There was only one item and it was covered by a white dust sheet.

'I thought ... I thought it was a ghost,' she said.

'A ghost,' said Sam dismissively. 'There's no such things as ghosts' and he pulled off the dust sheet to reveal a life-size suit of medieval armour.

'Wow,' he said. 'Who'd have thought it? What a magnificent piece of craftsmanship.'

Helen was less enthusiastic.

'Now that you've satisfied your curiosity let's get out of here before I freeze to death.'

'I can't believe you thought it was a ghost', he said, adding some suitably haunting sound effects.

'No, neither can I, *now*, but in the semi-darkness that dust sheet did look sort of spectre-like.'

'I wonder how old it is. Of course it might only be a replica. Anyway, I think we should give it a home. I'm sure it'll fit in the estate.'

'*Give it a home,*' said Helen. 'But wherever would we put it? It belongs in a castle or a museum not a 3-bedroom semi. Not even Aunt Agatha wanted it in her home.'

'Humour me love. Think what a great talking point it will be at our Halloween party next week. We've had some great parties over the years and it's not easy finding new and inventive ways to surprise our guests.'

Helen had relented on condition that a new home was found for it as soon as the party was over. Sam had reluctantly agreed. They'd got it home without too much difficulty and now it stood, imposing and incongruous in their lounge. It gave her the creeps. As much as she tried not to look at it she felt drawn to. She experienced the same chill she'd felt at the storage unit and yet the heating was on. After two days she told Sam her best friend Sarah was visiting and persuaded him to hide it in the broom cupboard so she wouldn't get to see it before the party. It was a lie but at least she didn't have to look at it anymore. Out of sight but not out of mind.

It was now Saturday, the day of the party and Helen was feeling out of sorts. She had prepared a fine spread of homemade ghoulish nibbles and made her very popular witches' blood punch. The lounge lights were dimmed and straw witches on broomsticks hung from the ceiling. Intricately carved pumpkins, lit with tea lights, were on the steps outside their front door and fake cobwebs and spiders adorned the porch. Her costume was one of the best she'd ever made, but instead of looking forward to the evening ahead, she felt only an inexplicable sense of dread.

'Now all I need to do is to get into the suit,' said Sam.

'What suit?' asked Helen.

'The suit of armour of course.'

'You're not serious? I thought you just wanted it on display.'

'I did but then I thought how much more fun it would be if I was actually wearing it. It could have been made for me. I'd keep very still so no one would suspect there was anyone inside and then when all of our guests have arrived I'd come to life and scare the living daylights out of them. Of course I'd need your help to put it on.' He smiled entreatingly, before adding, 'Every knight had his squire to assist him.'

'Give me strength,' said Helen. 'You won't be surprised to discover I know nothing about dressing a medieval knight for battle.'

'Don't worry, I found a very funny and informative video on *YouTube*. Evidently, you start at the bottom and work up. So if you could pass me the sabatons.'

'The what?'

'The pointy shoe things.'

'If you want to be ready *before* the first guest arrives I suggest you just describe which bit you want,' Helen growled and set begrudgingly to work.

It took much longer than Sam had anticipated to get him ready.

When the doorbell rang, signalling the arrival of their first guests, he still had the helmet to put on. Helen quickly placed it on his head, closed the visor and went to open the door.

Half an hour later all the guests had arrived. Sam had positioned himself in the lounge. Helen had doubted he'd be able to keep completely still, but each time she checked there was no sign of movement whatsoever. He was right about it being a talking point. Every guest asked about it and she was becoming increasingly bored of explaining to each new arrival how they'd acquired it. She was even more tired of making excuses for Sam's absence. When she was asked for a fifth time, she was standing next to him. In a voice loud enough for him to hear as well, she said,

'I've no doubt he'll appear *shortly*.'

She expected him to take this as his cue, but nothing happened. Annoyed at his failure to react and at the risk of appearing odd, she repeated herself with an even greater emphasis on the word 'shortly'. She tapped on the suit of armour as an added prompt. It fell spectacularly to the floor, an empty, tangled heap of metal parts and leather straps. The helmet, like a decapitated head, came to a rest at her feet in a seemingly mocking gesture. All the guests stopped dead in their tracks and turned to the source of the noise. Ultimately all eyes were on Helen. Thinking it must be Sam's idea of a joke, she smiled expectantly and waited for him to bound into the room in a more typical Halloween costume and shout, 'Surprise'. Instead, the long silence was broken by a loud unworldly scream, a scream she eventually realised was her own. The mystery of Uncle Jack's disappearance was a mystery no more.

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