

The Pumpkin Palooza

It doesn't matter how old I, Inara Bennett, get, I still turn into a five year old on All-Hallows-Eve. I think it's due to the fun - intricate costumes, scary stories and movies, and just the plain out fun, at least for me and my family and the spookiness of it all. Over the years, I've found out that it really is my family that makes Halloween so great as well as other holidays but mainly Halloween. When I was little, Halloween started out small and simple. It had been all about the candy, trick-or-treating, and the fun costumes. Now that I'm older it's turned into a family celebration, and I have a boheimently large family. So we try and make it bigger and better every year with costume contests, fun activities for the young and old, as well the famous Pumpkin Palooza.

Now that I am older and can do a lot more, the costumes have become more elaborate and fancy. My mom and I started preparing and making our costumes in September. I feel a little ridiculous and kind of like the people who start decorating for Christmas in November or earlier and just annoy the crap out of everybody. That was my mom and I but for Halloween. This year was going to be no different from the past years. This year Pops, my grandpa, called and told my mom that there would be no holdbacks and everybody is going all out. So in September, I decided I would be... wait for it... Black Widow from the Avengers. I definitely had the red hair for the character and my Pops connections were able to get my hands on some awesome leather. My mom decided she would be Galadriel from the Lord of the Rings legends. She even died her hair blonde to transform into the character. The white gown that the character wears took my mom many hours of sewing. Dad was going to be Iggy Pop for The Stooges a punk band since the late 60's. Dad was really into the early punk scene. His books on the subject literally littered the house and the bookshelves. He found it fascinating but didn't listen to punk music that much at all. He was just a big 'ol dork. Well, we all are in this family.

My mom, dad, and I took off Friday from work and school to head up early to the family property to help Pops set everything up. Setting up was half the fun because you get to see how giddy Pops gets just for him to show you everything and maybe give you a scare - no, he will give you a scare.

We pulled into the long driveway of the property to see a gorgeous immaculate site. To the right there were standing tables made of wood, wire spools lined the driveway under gorgeous willow trees, which had unlit twinkling lights in them, a few feet away from the pond. Perched on top of each table were -now- unlit candles in mason jars. There was a box inside was what looked like white frosted plastic lily pads with fake candles on them. I assume before tomorrow night that they are going to be turned on and put into the pond, so gorgeous. To the left of the driveway, was the one acre yard that displayed a wonderful site of activities. There was half whiskey barrels set up for apple bobbing closest to the porch. On the porch, there was a table with two chairs set up were I, presumably, would be doing face-painting for all the kids and/or adults, if they wanted. There was random barrels all over the yard for the Pumpkin Palooza surprise. To the right of the house was a cheap stereo system hooked up underneath the carport.

A few yards to the right of the carport was the unlit bonfire with half cut logs surrounding the firepit for people to get warm when the sun went over the horizon. Halloween in the NorthWest was known to be cold and usually wet. A few yards in front of the bonfire was about six picnic tables in two rows of three that were dotted with big orange pumpkins waiting to be carved and/or painted.

That was where we saw Pops unloading a fuck ton more pumpkins out of Big Red, the farm truck. He looked up to see us pulling into the driveway and smiled so big it looked like it almost hurt. He unloaded the last of the pumpkins into a wheelbarrow and came over to meet us under the carport as we were getting out of the car. I immediately ran to him, and he greeted me with a huge bear-hug and kiss on my forehead like always. He greeted my mom and I the same way and greets my dad with a firm handshake/hug thing they do. A little weird but nonetheless familiar to each other. Pops helped us with our baggage as we walked inside.

As we walked inside the old farmhouse, I was enveloped in an aroma of what could only be GG's cooking. My great-grandma, hence the name GG, was one of the best cooks in the family. My mom tells me that her mom, my mothers great grandmother, cooked everything from scratch and taught her daughter, my GG. She greeted me with a smile from her chair at the great table and put her daily paper down and got up to come give all of us a hug. We all swiftly came over to her and swallowed her in a huge group bear-hug. GG laughed and said she loved and missed us. She, of course, asked us if we were hungry, as I think all grandmas do. We declined her great offer and put our bags in the spare room. As we were doing this, GG was telling us about all the food she was preparing for tomorrow and that unfortunately tonight we would be eating pizza. But who doesn't like pizza?

We met Pops back outside by the picnic tables, so we can be delegated certain jobs. Mom stayed inside to help GG with the cooking and preparations. He asked Dad to start gutting a few pumpkins so the really little kids didn't have to tomorrow, but he said it with a slight undertone of something that I couldn't grasp. He started up the trail to the top of the small mountain behind the house and grabbed my hand for me to follow. As we went up the trail, it had already been set up as a haunted trail with gizmos and electronic scaring machines set up periodically as we went a long. Pops had to show me what each and everyone of them did and was so stupidly happy that he rubbed off on me, and I couldn't stop smiling. We finally got up to the top of the mountain and there was nothing. I looked at Pops confused. He laughed and said that this was the "Big Scare," and I looked even more puzzled. Pops went on to tell me that this is where he would be running in from the east down at people dressed as Bigfoot chasing them people back down the trail. Just the thought is scary as hell. Pops is 6'6" and over 250 pounds. Pops almost looks more intimidating than Bigfoot himself, but I've never met him, so I can't tell you for sure. He was so happy about scaring people. I did ask him if the little kids would be going up this far, and he told me that there was a trail halfway up that Grandma Jean would take the kids that heads back down to the other festivities.

Pops noticed that I still looked confused. I told him that I wasn't sure what exactly he wanted me to do on the haunted trail. That when he flipped over a huge blue tarp to uncover a

couple of wheelbarrows full of fake spiders, fishing line, bags of fake spiderweb, loose hay, paint, and other decorations. My eyes widened in excitement and now I was looking like the giddy 5 year old instead of Pops. He said that he needed my artistic eye to make the haunted trail even better. Pops gave me one last hug and left me to it. Before he started down the trail, he told me that dinner would be done by 6:30 which gave me about 2-3 hours of work time.

I got started first with the loose hay to cover the gizmos and contraption bases which took about an hour. Then I grabbed the paint and started at the beginning of the trail giving the contraptions a more “realistic” look. However really one can make plastic look, I guess. That took another two hours, and by the time I was done I heard the old farm triangle ding signaling that dinner was ready. I was glad I had got the painting done so it would be dry by the time people started to head up the haunted trail tomorrow evening. Before I walked back to the house, I covered the artsy materials with the old blue tarp. As I walked back down the trail, there was automated tiki torches that turned on an eerie orange light which lit up the trail.

I didn't realise how cold it was until I walked into the warm house with the old wood stove blazing. I stood by the woodstove for a few minutes to warm up my hands and admittedly, my but, and the smell of fresh homemade pizza was on the kitchen table ready for the taking. My stomach growled so loud I felt the eyes of GG turn on me and braced myself. She, of course, went on and asked when the last time I ate was, and that I was looking a little thin. I smiled and sat down at the table next to Mom, and grabbed 3 slices of pizza and saw the nod of approval from GG. My mom smiled and gave me a wink. She knew as well as I, that GG loved to feed her grandkids and great grandkids. It was her sign of affection. Pops sat down on the other side of me with his famous taco pizza in his other hand which he sat down on the table. Dad dug in without a second thought.

Pops asked how the trail was coming along, and I told him my progress and that I only had a few more hours of work setting up the spider webs with spiders and the other creepy crawlies. Some of them were huge and very realistic, like they were actually from the Amazon. He smiled proudly and asked my dad how many pumpkins he was able to finish. Dad said about a dozen, and Pops nodded in approval. Mom chimed in telling the table about all the delicious and delectable treats that her and GG had made for tomorrow right as Grandma Jean walked in the door from work. Her face lit up as she saw all of us and came over and gave each one of us a kiss on the head and sat down to join us. GG joined in on the conversation saying that there was something for everybody. Everyone noticed the devilish look in Pop's' eye and without missing a beat GG and Grandma Jean kept eating and said, “Don't even say it.” We all knew it was directed at Pops and started laughing. We knew that he was going to be a sarcastic asshole and ask if there was going to be a “Green” products in the treats. Pops definitely had a rebellious side as well as a hippy side to him.

We ate the rest of our dinner in contentful silence. After I was done, I joined Pops on the couch, he was watching a scary movie called *American Psycho*. It looked a little dated, but it wasn't a bad movie and eventually Dad joined us. Dad loved scary movies. I was even surprised when Mom joined us, but she really like psychological thrillers and of course she did because

she had her PhD in psychology. After the movie, mom and I retired to the spare bedroom to get some good sleep before the big day. We gave Pops and Dad a kiss and left them talking about other scary movies mom nor I really cared about.

In the spare bedroom, there was two full size beds opposite each other. Everytime we visited, I thought it was comical watching my mom and dad share a full size bed. Dad was 6'4" and mom was my height at 5'10. Two slightly larger than average people sharing a bed that we all know is really only meant for just one person. Mom and I hugged each other goodnight and of course talked for a little bit until we fell asleep. That was until Dad came stumbling in the room. I looked at the clock and it was 1:30am. Dad was obviously drunk. It was sort of an unsaid challenge for Pops to try and see how fast he could get his son-in-law drunk. I just smiled at the thought. It was funny because Dad is known for his low tolerance. Over the years, he has slowly built it up but it was still pretty low. At 22 years old, I already had a higher tolerance than my father. Dad finally made his way to the bed, kissed my mom goodnight which he never ever forgot even if she was sleeping, and snuggled in to her. I smiled at their gross love and fell back asleep.

Today was the day. Today was the great and powerful All-Hallows-Eve. Okay maybe it's not powerful, but it definitely was great. I woke up to the smell of bacon and coffee. I found that my mom had already gotten up and left dad to sleep in as usual. Dad loved his sleep due to the fact he was a notorious insomniac. I got my sweatshirt and my favourite fluffy halloween socks on and left the room to join the living.

I stumbled into the kitchen being guided by my nose towards the coffee pot for some fresh java. Pops was cooking breakfast and gave me a kiss on the forehead, and Grandma Jean came in and gave me a hug and then handed me a big cup of coffee just the way I like it, black like my soul. I walked over and joined Mom on the couch. Mom was reading what looked like a boring new psychological research article. I didn't bother to read the title, boring. Mom looked up and smiled at me and then went back to reading. Mom was a massive nerd. Well, so was my father but in his own ways. It looked like GG was still sleeping until i saw her big black Chevy Suburban pull into the driveway. I looked at the time and it was 8:00 AM which was odd because GG was known for sleeping late. I looked out the window curiously and a little confused. Pops whispered to me that she got up early to invite her new flavor of the month to the party. I smiled. GG might be old, but she has a healthy outlook towards dating and having fun. She says it's what keeps her young.

I heard another car pull into the driveway, and looked to see my Great Aunt Margot in her black Chevy Colorado. Pops rushed out the door and met her half way down the driveway. Pops might be getting old, but he was still fast. Aunty Margot pulled around and headed towards the field. Oh, that's what it was. Pops was starting to have people park in the field across the street so the driveway didn't get crowded, and we wouldn't have to worry about kids being in the driveway or someone being blocked in when they are ready to leave this place. Mom noticed what was going on and got up, grabbed the keys, and went out to our car to move it. Dad came

out of the spare room as Mom was going out the door and immediately asked where Mom was. I told him and he nodded as he went off to get some coffee. Pops came in and smiled and asked if my dad didn't want some Baileys for his coffee. My dad perked up and nodded swiftly with a smile on his face. Dad asked if I wanted some and of course I declined. I can never drink in the morning or else I would just crawl right back in bed.

Grandma Jean gave the call that breakfast was ready and we all engulfed the great table ready for the other sustenance of life, besides coffee. There was bacon, of course, scrambled eggs with peppers and cheese, and deluxe french toast which was thick cut slices of french bread with crushed corn flakes fried to one side, mmmm my favourite. You know the meal is good when all you hear is the sounds of forks and knives on plates and food being chewed.

After breakfast, Mom and I went and got ready in work clothes because everyone else was already dressed for the day. We weren't going to get into our Halloween costumes just yet cause there was still quite a bit of work to do. Mom again helped GG with the appetizers and snack foods. Grandma Jean started making up the "booze" table with different drinks which was on the back porch for adults only. Dad started hauling pumpkin guts around for Pops, and I was left to finish what I started. I grabbed my jacket and headed up the trail. After three hours, I was officially done. I came back down the trail to find my Dad conversing quietly with Pops. I eyed them suspiciously before they noticed me coming up. I smiled at Pops and told him that the trail was ready for him. He loved how I placed the spider webs, that the bugs would be close to people's feet, and that I hid where he would be running out from with a black sheet and placed some tiki torches by the entrance and away from where Pops was going to come out from. Pops did a test run from where he would be "hiding" to make sure everything was secure and wouldn't fall on him. Then we walked down the trail together and that's when he asked me if I wouldn't do the face painting on the porch. I smiled and said only if I get paid in booze, and Pops grinned. Booze was guaranteed either way.

More people had arrived to help out since I had gone into no mans land. There was my older cousins Will and Micah, my Uncle Marc, Auntie Kay, and my cousins Simon and Levi. Most of my cousins were older because all of my moms siblings were 4 or more years older than her, and she waited to have me and my older brother, Oran, until she was in her 30's. My older brother was 3 years older than me and lived on his own in Costa Rica doing ecology research and conservation studies for his masters program.

My cousins Simon and Levi ran up to me and gave me a big old hug, and asked the usual question such as how I had been and how school was going. I told them I should be graduating this year and was still looking into graduate programs. They didn't care all that much for college and both of them worked in the trades. My Auntie Kay came up and gave me a hug and then ordered my cousins to help Grandma Jean set up the refreshment table and went off to join them. I tried sneaking into the house without being scene but of course that didn't happen. My Auntie Margot spotted me and ran over to give me a hug. She was one of the sweetest woman I knew besides GG. I told her I was gonna escape for a little bit into the spare room to get some ideas down on my sketch pad. She understood and went to help my mom in the kitchen. I closed the

spare bedroom door and heard my cousins Will and Micah run in asking where I had went cause they could have sworn that I had come in the house. My Auntie Margot had my back and told her own sons that she had seen me walk up the trail behind the house. Finally, I now had just a little bit of peace and quiet.

Nope, just kidding. I turned around to find my dad on his bed looking up from his ipad smirking at me. My mom, dad, Oran, and I always have had a thing about alone time and that it was something that we all needed to stay sane especially when we were around family. Dad looked back down at his ipad and asked if I was trying to get away for a bit. I nodded, and he smiled and stopped talking. I pulled out my sketch pad and a graphite pencil out from my backpack, sat down comfortably on the bed with my back to the wall facing the window, and relaxed as I made my subconscious come to life and watched the comedy show outside pass by.

Dad and I sat there for about an hour in peace. I heard more and more people show up. First it was Uncle Baylen and his new girlfriend. Then it was some family friends whom I forgot their names cause I had always just called them Uncle and Auntie since before I remember. Finally, of course my Auntie Holly and Uncle Cody showed up. They tended to be late to everything when there was work to be done. Not saying they're lazy. They just always show up late. I assumed other friends and family would show up around 5:00 pm. It was only 2:00 pm which was still pretty early. The family did like to pregame a little bit and catch up before the festivities started.

I got up and grabbed my costume out of the closet and set it daintily on the bed. Dad looked up from his ipad, looked at his wrist watch, and was amazed it was almost time to get ready. I grabbed my make-up bag from underneath the bed and set it next to my outfit. I looked over at dad and asked if he didn't want whatever cocktail Grandma Jean has concocted. I was going to need a drink before I squeeze myself into my costume. He nodded in agreement, and I went out to whatever chaoticness I was about to walk into. I was immediately intercepted by my Aunt Holly with a big 'ol hug, and Uncle Cody was just a few paces behind her waiting for his. As always, she started out with her 20 questions of how are you, how is school, how is your health, mom and dad doing alright, got a boyfriend yet, etc? With her the questions never ended until she spots someone else to jabber on to. After she walked away, I gave Uncle Cody his hug, and he smiled and said it was nice to see me at a family function and walked away. One thing I have always loved about Uncle Cody was that he does not, at any point, do small talk, thank the universe.

I walked into the kitchen, and it almost looked like a disaster area. I was NOT going to walk into that. My mom caught a glance at me grabbed a glass full of, something, and came over and handed it to me. I smiled and said thank you, but also mentioned Dad wanted one as well, and she got me another one and went back to work. I think mom always liked helping out in the kitchen so then nobody can bother her, smart gal. I knew there was a reason I loved Mom, well one of many of course. It's definitely not the fact that she had given birth to my entire existence. Unfortunately I received the "Not liking people/ crowds gene" from the both of my parents.

I walked back to the bedroom without anyone spotting me. Dad had pulled out his dorky-ass costume, which made me smile, and had set it on the bed. I handed him the drink, and he accepted it gratefully, without hesitation, and immediately took a gulp, “Mmmm, hot buttered rum,” was all he said. Now I knew what I was about to drink many of. I smiled over at Dad, who returned the smile, and said, “Transformation time.”

Dad and I emerged from our room with class, elegance, and total incoordination because we are never classy or elegant. Dad was proud of his make-up job, which I was surprised he even asked me and let me do. He was an awesome Iggy Pop and the make-up even shaved off a couple of years. My Black Widow costume was perfect all except for the fact I had long red hair instead of short, but I still looked awesome.

Of course, as soon as we exited the room, we were bombarded by the family, who were mainly interested in talking to my dad. I said a silent good luck to him and bailed. I snuck into the kitchen because I was absolutely famished. I told Mom she should probably go and get ready. She nodded at me and just kept on working like always. Ya, don't listen to your daughter and be fashionably late as per usual. I grabbed a couple slices of freshly cut caramel apples and snuck out the back door where all the alcohol was.

Thank the heavens, there was nobody on the back porch surprisingly. I poured myself a screwdriver and went off to find Pops. I knew he wasn't up on the hill because they hadn't opened the haunted trail yet. I walked around front to have my breath taken away due to how many people had showed up. It was close to 5:30 pm now. There was a bunch of kids carving pumpkins at the picnic tables and grownups at the tables talking and drinking their spirits. My dad was underneath one of the willow trees perching himself against one of the wire-spindle tables talking with my Aunt Margot. I approached and was greeted by two smiles. Pops tucked me under his arm and gave me a side hug. Aunt Margot took my outfit in and complimented me on it. I asked Pops when I should start doing face painting, and he retorted in about a half hour which would be around 6:00 pm. I nodded and asked if either one of them would like a refill. Aunt Margot declined, but Pops accepted the offer. I went and got him his usual, Bud Light and even snuck a cozy on it. By the time I was done with that, it was time to start face-painting.

As soon as I had everything set up nicely with correct lighting, I already had a line started full of excited little kiddos. First was a little girl dressed up as I'm guessing Glinda the Good Witch from *Wizard of Oz*. She wanted a big pretty butterfly all over her face. I surprised her by painting a very colorful monarch butterfly. I handed her the mirror and she squealed with delight, handed the mirror back, ran halfway down the stair from the deck, ran back, said thank you, and ran to go show her mom who was also pleased with the work and gave me a thumbs up from afar. That was a busy little kiddo for sure. Over the course of the next couple hours, I painted Iron Man, ghouls, goblins, ogres, princesses, and much more a little faces. I only had 2 adults come up wanting their face painted. One of them I turned away because he wanted something naughty, and I wasn't about to do that in front of about two dozen children. I nodded in understanding and walked away. The other adult was a female friend of my Pops and Grandma

Jean and wanted a face to match her costume which was ogre Fiona from *Shrek*. By the end of it, I was already tuckered out and desperately needed a refill which was brought to me by my Dad.

Dad handed me the drink and held out his arm for me to take and dorkily said, "Would you like to take a stroll my lady." I laughed a little at him and took his arm. We walked around the property mingling with friends and family. We strolled by the haunted trail which had already opened and closed. Pops must have been tired by now. I spotted him by the pumpkin carving tables, and he looked just as spunky as ever helping the last little tot with her carving. The little girl chose the biggest pumpkin that was there, and she couldn't cut all the way through the gourd. Dad and I landed next to the pond underneath one of the willows at the makeshift table. We weren't really talking at all but people watching which was one of our favourite things to do. We saw people gathering in the front yard in groups. You could definitely tell who enjoyed who and who didn't necessarily like others. Mom eventually joined us and she looked immaculate. Dad gave her a kiss on the cheek, and she leaned into his side looking a little tired.

Once Pops was done helping the little girl, he walked out to the middle of the front yard and did his infamous rebel yell. The family answered him back in unison with the same rebel yell which made him smile ear to ear. He announced that the Pumpkin Palooza would be starting soon and that people should take their places. We all made our way to the yard, and we placed ourselves next to one of the half whiskey barrels that was closer to the porch. We looked inside the barrel and saw a ton of pumpkin guts. This was our favourite part of Halloween. We all placed shit-eating grins on our faces. People new to the family party looked very confused.

All of a sudden, we heard pops blare some '80's hair band music which meant that the Pumpkin Palooza has commenced. We all grabbed two big handfuls of pumpkin guts and through it at the nearest group. The yard became a blur of orange. We heard laughter from every direction. Some of the new folks immediately caught on and joined in on the fun.

We didn't stop until everybody was covered in orange, slimy goo and our barrels were dry. Mom and I looked at each other and laughed cause we both had pumpkin guts sliding down our face and in our hair. Dad almost had seeds go up his nose, but wiped them away. Everyone around us were almost in a drunken haze from the fun and were still standing around the barrels like we were expecting them to magically refill themselves.

People finally started to part from the barrels and their groups. Mom, Dad, and I went to the back porch to find remnants to make a stiff drink out of. Some people started to say goodbye to my Pops and Grandma Jean and headed for their cars. The family headed towards the freshly lit bonfire to warm up. I joined them and took my seat in between GG and Aunty Margot. About a half hour went by and most of Pops and Grandma Jean's friends had left. The only people that stayed were the family, and we were all enjoying each others company by the fire. Pops started going around and handing people glasses half filled with hot toddies. When he was done, he turned to all of us and made a toast, "Here is to all of my family and friends which make this holiday what it is. Thank you from the bottom of my heart." Then he downed his drink which i'm pretty sure consisted of only Jim Beam. We all "hor-ahh'd" and sipped our drinks. I talked with GG and Aunty Margot for a little bit. Telling them of happenings at school. Aunt Margot

told me what her sons were doing. GG chimed in giving her grandmotherly advice to all of us. After about an hour, more people had left, and I was really starting to feel that hot toddy. I kissed each one of my family goodnight and retired for the evening with my parents following suit.

After I cleaned all that makeup off, got out of my skin tight costume, and took a nice long, hot shower, I sat up for a little bit on my bed drawing my memories down on my sketch pad as Dad was on his Ipad and Mom was reading on her kindle. The drawing wasn't my best but it summed everything up in one frame. It was the entire party, looking up at it from the front of the driveway, like how I saw it when we pulled in the day before but with all the lights on, the day gone passed dusk, and everybody having fun in the yard during the Pumpkin Palooza. I was satisfied with my work and slid under the covers, and let the warmth and darkness swallow me into sleep.

The next morning was quite boring and uneventful compared to the past two days. I got up before both of my parents and was greeted in the kitchen by GG with some fresh coffee. I guess Grandma Jean and Pops had some friends come over way early this morning and had almost taken everything down and cleaned up the front yard. I sat down on the couch in relief and curled my feet up next to me. I sipped on my coffee for a bit in peaceful contentment as I reminisced about the day before. For me, this is what family is and always has been. It's crazy with a lot of crazy people that you love and call family, but that is what makes it family. You accept people for who they are and love them 100 percent with no hold backs.

As I was staring out the window in La-La Land, Dad had appeared next to me on the couch. I looked over at him, and he had a smirk on his face. He knew exactly what I had been doing. I put my head on his shoulder and we said our good morning with body language. We were still really tuckered out from last night. Mom eventually joined us along with Grandma Jean and Pops. We had one last breakfast together with laughter and jokes. However, we could all feel the inevitable crouching upon us. Eventually, my Mom, Dad, and I had to leave to go back home today whether we like it or not.

We all took our sweet time packing out bags and loading the car. You could see that Pops really didn't want us to go, but he knew as well as us that we had to. The time came, and we all said our goodbyes, hugged, and kissed each other. We got in the car and headed down the driveway. I looked up the driveway to see my Pops, GG, and Grandma Jean waving to goodbye to us and already waiting for the next time that we were to come up which would probably be for christmas. I waved back. I silently said goodbye to the family property where such great memories were created and harnessed. We pulled onto the old road and headed south. With one last wave to Pops, GG, and Grandma Jean, I kissed my palm and waved goodbye. Shakespeare was right when he wrote, "Parting is such sweet sorrow, That I shall say good night till it be marrow."