



THE HALLOWEEN ROSE

For My Wife, Rhonda



The Halloween Rose

My wife was fascinated by this story when I related it to her and asked that it be written down lest it be forgotten. So I will tell this tale as it was told to me leaving nothing out, but provide caution that tragedy and despair must be a part of the telling. I warn the casual reader that although nothing is proven, nothing yet is shown false. The roses still appear each Halloween.

The children still end each Halloween at the old farmhouse down the rutted dirt road. The road is just to the left off the paved highway as you head towards town. The farm and house have been there well before the highway was paved and remains as a sentinel against the passage of time. The house itself is unremarkable. It is a long two story building with a porch that stretches from one end of the house to the other. The porch has a white railing along its length with square columns interspersed at strategic points to ensure the stability of the structure. The porch swing, and there must be a porch swing, sways back and forth at the very end of the porch just in front of a couple of white framed windows. A balcony was placed atop the front porch some years after the house was first built and its placement above the crowds that gather has made it prominent in the yearly drama.

The big grassy yard at the foot of the porch, surrounded by old and towering oak trees make a wonderful vision in the autumn sun, but serve to offer a scarier scene at Halloween. Upon this lawn and in the trees at every Halloween lie ghosts, goblins, graveyards and every imaginable contraption and device man can create to draw out a scream, shudder or laugh from kids of every age who happen by. Overseeing this annual rite is an old farmer that rocks back and forth upon an ancient rocker stationed just at the top of the stairs leading to the porch and the entrance to the old farmhouse. His family and friends stop by to help, but by and large it is the old man that caters to this happy party of scary ghouls, goblins, fairy princesses, gallant knights, and the occasional sheet covered ghost. When you make it past all the creepiness and crawlies and get to the laughing old man, you are given the best of candy and invited into the farmhouse for cider and a feast.

But it isn't the feast, the cider, the lights and scary scenes that brings young and old out well past their bedtimes on Halloween. It is the ghost. Or a ghost as best anyone can tell. She appears just at 7 every Halloween evening. At her appearance, rains stop, clouds vanish and the moon burns bright against the darkened tree limbs. She is a vision of beauty to the little children making them laugh and dance. The older children know to be cautious because she will sneak up on you and scream a blood curdling scream that makes you consider clothing changes. She moves past like a strong breeze after each of these greetings. Then you hear her beautiful laugh that falls upon you as a comfort for the momentary scare. Its light musical tones give relief and the recent scare turns into a shared laugh which adds to the merriment that fills the home. No one knows how the beautiful woman does what she does and the old timers say she hasn't changed her looks in years.

As nine o'clock comes the yard begins to fill up from trick or treaters coming fresh off their rounds. Well past the usual time for the young ones to be abed, even the smallest is given a pass to witness the finale at the last stroke of midnight. The closer to midnight, the greater the laughter, the more the dancing and the more the mysterious woman dances, scares and laughs with friends and neighbors. The party is complete then the old bell in the town hall chimes the three quarter hour. More and more everyone crowds close to the porch and peers up to the old balcony. The old farmer comes out the double doors that broach the balcony as the final minutes approach. He is dressed in his best, a black tuxedo, and the shiniest of shoes.

As anticipation mounts and the final hour draws near the wonderful beautiful lady appears from the farthest edges of the front yard and flies back and forth over the crowd. Her screams of agony fill the night causing momentary sadness until she sees the old man standing ever so quietly on the balcony waiting her arrival. The screams turn to laughter, then squeals of pleasure. She alights on the balcony next to the old farmer just as the old bell tower clock strikes the first peal of midnight. Suddenly she is as real as anyone, you or me, her form is as us and she is dressed in the white of a wedding gown. Her hair is golden and she is young and vital. Old timers tell that if you are close enough and have the moment, you will see her eyes are as blue as the bluest sea. They sparkle the kindest sparkle in the night sky.

You must be close to tell, because she has no thoughts or looks for any in the audience. Her gaze is only fixed on the old farmer. The farmer pulls a single rose from behind his back and hands it to her. She looks at it as if it is the most precious gift ever given. On a cue no one knows but her she leans in and kisses the old farmer just as the last strokes of the old bell chime. He returns her kiss and as the last chime rings out, the beautiful lady disappears and the old man stands alone atop the balcony. A moment passes and invariably a small child says, "Where's the lady?" The old man turns to face the crowd, a sad smile on his lips. Those old timers in the know begin to applaud to allow their friend a moment without comment. Others quickly follow and soon the crowd erupts in jubilation and begins to filter away. The old man waves them goodbye from his perch on the balcony until the last final guest has moved on.

Every year for the first forty years of my life it was the same. I had to know who this wonderful woman that danced, laughed and scared the bejevers out of me over all these years was. So I asked my best friend, the son of the old farmer and a good friend in his own right. At first he was hesitant. But persistence and my healthy respect for what couldn't be explained paid off.

The day after the last Halloween, All Saints Day itself, I met my friend at the graveyard. It was where the story ended and began he said so it was appropriate that he tell the tale here. I agreed to meet him at 9 in the morning, coffee and donuts in hand. As this All Saints Day was a Saturday, there was plenty of time to hear the tale and learn the identity. The gates to this cemetery are always locked so Jim, my friend, had arranged to meet the keeper and gain access to the graveyard. The keeper unlocked the gates when I arrived, gave Jim a concerned look, and headed on to his duties such as they were. Jim took one of the coffees and a donut and led the way into the cemetery.

Jim related that the woman seen every Halloween is his mother. This caused pause in the walking as well as the conversation. Jim is my best and oldest friend. I have known him since he was five and knew his mother to be dead. Jim asked patience as he told his story and perched upon a headstone in the middle of the cemetery to tell his tale. I found a suitable perch atop a man named Smith and waited for the narrative.

His father was a young boy in New England. He was a farmer's son. He was poor, little educated and with fewer prospects. But he loved a girl with all his heart. The girl was the daughter of a wicked old miser of a man. He was domineering and ran a strict household. His wife was meek and dour and feared her husband. The only bright light in this life was the beautiful daughter his wife bore him. The daughter captured his heart, but his love for her and her beauty made him mad and he imprisoned this jewel in his home to keep her for himself and himself alone. On rare occasions, when delivering eggs and produce, his father had met this daughter. Over time they had become fast friends and he had fallen in love with her and she with him.

They knew her father would never allow her to marry, let alone marry him, so they hatched a plan to escape and elope. They would move far away to another state and town and build their lives together.

They set the plan in motion for Halloween night. Her father hated Halloween as he did every holiday. But on Halloween he allowed her to dress up and give candy to the kids that came to the door. That Halloween, she told Jim's father what her costume would be and he had a duplicate made up. He talked a friend into helping him and got ready to put their plan in action.

On Halloween night, just like every Halloween, the girl was giving out candy and commenting on each costume. She would call into the house and ask her father to come and see the little kids. He just harrumped, jostled his paper and refused to budge from his chair in the parlor. Finally about 8 at night just when it was getting its darkest another knock came to the door. She opened it and saw a form that looked exactly like her. She smiled and called out to her father to come to the door once more. He just grunted one more time. She stepped out on the porch, took the bag of candy from her double, and the double stepped inside the house and took her place. She picked up another bag she had hidden on the porch filled with her personal effects and preceded down the porch steps as the door to her prison closed behind her. The girl whispered concern for the safety of her twin, but the farm boy assured her arrangement's had been made. With such assurances in hand she walked excitedly into her future with the young farm boy from New England.

The farm boy, true to his word, had worked out all the details to their escape. They took a couple of horses to the next town, and then grabbed a couple of cheap tickets on a rickety old train to a small town far from her father and his prison. When they got there they met a preacher at an old church. The preacher saw love in their eyes and passion in their souls and married them just before midnight on Halloween night. They thanked the preacher and began walking down the road to a future no one knew. They shared their love on a blanket in an old apple orchard they passed on the road as they began their life together.

Eventually they came to a smaller town they had never heard of in a state they had never been and he found a job working on a farm. He worked hard and she contributed. Soon they had a two story farmhouse with a couple acres of their own and my friend Jim became their first son. A few years later Sarah his sister was born and they had added a few more acres to the old farmhouse at the end of a dirt road.

Halloween became their time, their holiday. It was their anniversary, but also the day of her freedom. They always celebrated, inviting close friends to a large party at their house. There was laughter and singing, dancing, tricks and treats. Ghouls and goblins decorated the outside and a big pail with bobbing apples dominated the inside. The evening always ended the same way. His father always gave a single rose to his mother. She would kiss him deeply and it seemed to make everything right in the world. Then they would turn out the lights at the final stroke of midnight and go to bed. It was this way every year until my friends fifth year.

That year the last of the guests had left. It was late about 11 pm when a knock came at the door. It was a heavy knock a forceful knock, a knock of death. My friend recalled that it woke him from a happy slumber on the front parlor sofa. His father had laughed, he had his mother's rose gift in his hand and was about to give it to her. He moved to open the front door instead and said it must be a neighbor going for one last trick. His mother laughed and headed for the front window to look out. The next thing my friend understood was the blood curdling scream his mother let out as the drape fell back to cover the window. She had leapt in front of his father as the door opened and a loud deafening explosion ripped through the house. His mother fell on the floor mortally wounded, her father dressed in black with a smoking shotgun stood in the doorway. He screamed the scream of the damned when he saw who he had shot.

His daughter lying in a pool of blood on the floor from a gunshot he inflicted himself enraged the man even more. He raised the stock of the gun to strike a blow that would kill Jim's father who was looking in horror over his beloved wife trying to stem the tide of blood. At this instant Jim's child like cry rang out and the man with the gun, Jim's grandfather turned to look at the children of his daughter for the first time. Jim and his sister, awakened at the blast, stood in tears as their mother lay on the floor dying. A man they didn't know dressed in black, towered over their father as if to kill him. Their mother's father, their grandfather, at that instant saw what he had become and who he was in his grandchildren's eyes. The grief and sorrow overwhelmed him he dropped the gun, his shoulders sagged, then he shook violently. Suddenly he grabbed his chest and twisted in agony. A heart attack killed the man with no heart.

Jim's father carried her to their bed. Jim carried the flower his father had dropped. Jim's father put pressure on the wound and hoped it would stem the tide of blood but it was not to be. Shortly before the end of Halloween, Jim's mother died in her bed from a gunshot wound inflicted by her father. Her last words were of her love for Jim's father and how she loved Jim and Sarah. She asked her father be forgiven and then she asked for no more. Jim's father placed the rose upon her chest and sank into tears. This is what the police found when they came.

Jim, his sister and their father were obviously distressed beyond belief. What was a happy wonderful day turned into a horrible nightmare. Their father, unable to cope himself, asked, for the first time ever known, his family for help. Secrecy was no longer required as his love's father, the evil in their short life together, laid dead in the graveyard. Jim told me it was the first time he had ever seen his father's mother, his grandmother. What could have been a wonderful meeting was muted by the despair of his father.

Jim remembered little more about the year that followed except the ever present grief of his father. He felt guilty sometimes at the joy he felt with his grandmother and finding he had so many other relatives. Sarah the younger of the two relished in her new status as grandma's favorite, but she too missed her mother so much. Then one day in early October his father came down the stairs from his room and a twinkle was in his eye. A smile crossed his lips. The despair was lifted like a weight from his shoulders. Jim said for a long time he didn't know what had happened. He saw his father happy and he felt he could be happy again also. Laughter seemed to re-enter their lives.

Shortly after that moment grandma went home saying her job was done here. She promised to return for more visits. Jim and Sarah hugged her goodbye and watched her leave. When they turned around their dad was getting the house ready for Halloween and smiling about it. Jim didn't understand. He had been worried for a year about Halloween and his dad was here whistling and getting ready for the anniversary of that horrible night.

I broke into the narrative and asked Jim if he ever found out what changed his father. He related that he had some five years later, when he learned to read. His mother had kept a diary, a diary that his father knew little about. It sat at her side of the bed. Jim remembered that on the night of her death, the single rose sat on top diary. He didn't know why he knew that, but it was a scene burned into his memory. He also remembered that as his mother lay dying the last act was to reach for that rose.

Later when he was older as he went by his father's bedroom he saw the diary open and pressed into its pages was the rose from that night. His father had gone out so he tiptoed in and read what was there to be seen. His mother had placed an entry the night before Halloween and expressed her love of the night and the parties. She said how she was so thrilled to be married on that night of nights. That her love of his father and children was so strong, that she would always look forward to Halloween. That no

matter where she was, she would always come to celebrate Halloween. Jim repeated that last line, “that she would always come to celebrate Halloween.”

My dad had read that that October when he came down those steps with a twinkle in his eye Jim related, as he went on with the narrative. I don’t know if he really believed, but the words she placed in that diary carried him through the following days. He was determined to keep their special day special.

Anyway, Halloween came and neighbors and friends came as they had the year before. A lot of them came out of sympathy for my dad and the kids, others came out of curiosity. But as night grew and daylight vanished, a simple warm wind wafted over the front yard. Dad smiled a knowing smile and took his cider and sat on the rocker on the front porch. Us kids went out into the yard to play with the props and try to spook each other. The grownups were chatting and laughing when a loud blood curdling scream came from the direction of the cemetery. Dad grinned a big grin as the kids froze in place. Suddenly the ghost started diving from the treetops and spooking the adults. Then just as suddenly it stopped, saw Sarah and her friends, moved quickly to their side and began dancing. The kids thought it a great trick and began dancing as well. Soon a full party was in full swing. Cider was passed around to those that needed it and dancing, scaring and general chaos erupted in the yard and the house.

It all lasted until about 11 and then the party died out. The friends and neighbors went home happy, with no mention of last year’s tragedy. Time has passed and so did our sadness. We went into the house and saw our dad go upstairs. We followed as he went into his bedroom. The door was open and we looked in. I saw our mom floating just above carpet. She was more of whisper than a real person. We were frightened, but Dad looked over at us and smiled and said it would be alright. Just wait a few more moments. We heard the bell in the old clock tower chime and suddenly mom was right there with us. We ran over and hugged as hard as we could. She hugged us back and told us she loved us. Then the clock tower struck again and she looked up to dad. He had a red rose in his hand. She took it, leaned in and gave him a kiss, then at the last stroke of the old bell she vanished.

Dad swooped down and picked us up in his arms and kissed us both. We were almost crying again because we lost our mom again, but dad placed a finger on our lips and told us to be quiet and listen to his story. So right there, that night, we sat and listened to how our dad and mom loved each other so much that they ran off together and had us kids. He told us that their love was so strong that even death couldn’t keep them apart. As long as he was there in that house, every Halloween, mom would come back and spend some happy time with us. He said that for one minute, at the stroke of midnight, she would come alive for one last kiss and hug.

We were so happy we fell asleep in Dad’s arms right there on his bed. In the morning we wanted to know if it really happened so he took us to the cemetery just like I’m taking you right now. With those words Jim stood up and began to move to the back of the cemetery to the plots that had been buried years ago. He stopped at one old grave that had obviously been well tended over the years. On the stone was his mother’s name, on the ground, at the base of the stone, was a single red rose.

You can look he said, but I can guarantee you it is the exact same one my father gave the woman the night before. Just like it happened so long ago when Dad took us here and showed us the rose he gave mom the first time. I looked down at the rose and up to Jim’s face. There was no farce in this show. Jim was sincere. His mother and fathers love lived past the grave.

Now that would have been a good enough story and explanation on its own, but as the following year passed it got better.

Jim's father's farm and house was in an ideal location, ideal for Halloween and ideal if you wanted to develop the land for a new subdivision. Builders, land speculators, and all sorts of serious folks and opportunists eventually made their way to his father's farm to try to buy the land. Offers of various sorts and sizes were made. As the years had passed and the housing market heated up the offers got more and more generous. All were spurned, in a gentleman fashion, by Jim's dad. There was just no amount of money that could come between his dad and his mother's love.

Most of the suitors took the rejections as a part of business and chose to wait the old farmer out. They believed at some point the price would just be too good, or the potential loss too great, and his steadfast refusals would turn to need. Then they would get the land on their terms. All were certain cold hard cash would win his heart, but they didn't know his heart had already been stolen years ago by a beautiful bride. So they continued their assaults. There were a few of the suitors not so settled as to wait out one reluctant old farmer and tried more than one despicable tactic. But Yankee conviction, a well aimed shotgun, and stubbornness born of years of experience in the ways of men always routed these scoundrels as well.

The year following Jim's narration to me one scoundrel descended upon the farmer that was unlike all the others. Greed covered his thoughts, followed closely by greed's close companion, desperation. This man had bet his future on getting the land from the old farmer where no one else could. What little he owned and even his life he bargained with those of the most disreputable reputation in order to make a deal that would finally make his fortune. His name was Ben. He was a local with dreams of grandeur beyond the simple burg he grew up in and a reputation as a slick wheeler dealer spiced with a bit of the bully. Early in April he descended on the old farmhouse.

Ben's actions were relentless. He called everyday sometimes three or four times a day. When he was run off the farm at the point of a shotgun, he filed charges of assault. When the charges were thrown out, he sued for civil damages. He continued making calls, continued making unannounced visits, and generally making a pain of himself. He was confronted by Jim, the friends of the old farmer and he just laughed and threatened each and every one in turn.

The old farmer had a restraining order placed against Ben, but he just ignored it. He hired others to call him and visit his farm. At night he would have the old farmer's car tires slashed and trash thrown on his porch. Jim moved back to the farm to help. Ben continued to file complaints and motions in all the various county departments and enforcement agencies alleging one violation after another. Jim's father had to defend against all of these and it wore and tore on the old man. Finally one warm summer evening in late August, the farmer and his son were sitting quietly on the porch. The crickets were chirping and lightning bugs were beginning to zip across the yard. The sweet smell of cut grass pervaded the night air. That stillness just before night fall was settling on the farm and the whole county. The only real sound to be heard was the occasional sip of the cold drink perched in Jim's hand.

The old farmer noticed it first. An orangish glow was dancing on the side of one of the out buildings. Then they smelled it. Fire! Jim jumped up to call the fire department and his father rushed to the out buildings. A pile of straw was ablaze right next to the old barn. Jim's dad grabbed a pitchfork and pulled hard at the loose straw trying to move it away from the structure. Jim raced out to join his dad and started spraying the straw with a small garden hose. Fire engines could be heard coming up the dirt road as his father worked and worked to save the barn. Suddenly a hard spray of water hit the straw as the fire department went into gear. Jim stood back, saw the fire under control and the old barn still standing, but he couldn't see his dad. He shouted out once, twice and then ran searching for his father. He found him clutching his heart, leaning over an old fence rail.

Jim picked him up and carried his father to his house. His father was in incredible pain and his face was twisted agony. Something, someone told him to take his dad to his bedroom. Jim ran up the stairs with his father's small body firmly held in his arms. He placed his dad in his bed and moved to pick up the phone when everything went quiet. The room became still and the noise outside ceased to exist. A warm glow filled the room and his mother stood before him. She grabbed Jim's arm and turned him to her. She placed both hands on his head and looked him in the eye. She then spoke and told Jim everything is fine. He is OK. He will be with me soon and she would look after him. Jim quieted and looked down at his father. His pain was replaced by serenity. He was smiling up at his beloved wife.

She looked down, took his hand, then leaned over and kissed him deeply. Jim's father's last breath on this earth was in the kiss of the one he loved. Jim felt the room grow empty and he sat and cried. He cried for his loss and he cried because his father was finally with his mom. When he composed himself he reached over and picked up the phone. He called his sister and told her the news. She came the next morning to help bury their dad.

The barn and farm was saved. In late September the estate, as large as it was, was settled quickly. The old farmer had made arrangements well in advance and the land and farm passed quickly to his two heirs to do as they wished. Jim and Sarah sat at the window looking out on the front yard. Neither wanted to sell, and both had lives elsewhere with ones they loved. Jim swore he would burn in hell before he would ever sell to Ben as he believed it was Ben that started the fire in the farmyard. Sarah was just as adamant, but they still didn't know what to do with the old farm.

Jim and Sarah started to walk through the old house to relive some warm memories when Sarah spotted her mother's old witches hat. The leaves were falling, the harvest was in and in a few weeks Halloween would be there. Sarah wondered if mom would come without dad there. Jim said there was only one way to find out and both began to laugh. Jim found the storage key and went to the shed to bring out the boxes that stored Halloween. It wasn't too long before a plan had hatched to have the best Halloween ever. Family was called and all agreed to come.

But this still wasn't the end of the story. Ben, as corrupt as he was, wasn't a quitter. He couldn't be. He owed too many disreputable men. Besides he was angry. He wanted to scare the old man out when he started that fire, not kill him. His death was inconvenient and troublesome to his needs. He had to put everything on hold and wait for the investigation to die down before he could make another move. To top it all, the old geezer had thought ahead and made arrangements to pass the land to his kids free and clear. Now he had two idiots to convince to sell and sell only to him.

Being a local, Ben knew about Halloween at the farm house. He had been there himself more than once and thought the special effects; especially that ghost woman was pretty cool. He was scared himself more than once by that little woman. An evil plan had formed in his mind. If he could destroy Halloween at the farm and blame the kids for any resulting injuries to the guests, they would have to sell to protect themselves and pay for damages. He would make sure he was the only offer and get the whole thing for a sweet deal. He would then be on his way. A wicked grin worthy of any goblin crossed his face.

Being Jim's best friend I was at that Halloween and I saw what happened. I will still swear to the events of the evening to this day. Being all invested in getting the best Halloween ever, no thought was given to Ben or his helpers. Ben himself helped the matter because after the settling of the estate he never called the house again.

It was by far the best Halloween setup I had ever seen. And I have to admit to a serious attack of butterflies. I also wanted to know if Jim's mom would be there, and as well, I had a special place as the

head ghoul. I was the first character to try to scare whoever came. It was a high honor, and I had never had it before. Heck I had never been one of the ghouls before, ever. So I was nervous on many fronts.

The night began well and the first visitor gave a suitable jump as I suddenly reached from my prearranged hiding place. Getting my first scare under my belt gave me enthusiasm for the next and I played my part admirably for the remainder of the night. As seven o'clock began to arrive I felt a pit in my stomach. What if she didn't appear? What if she did? I jumped out and got another one and grinned at my prowess when I heard the distance town bell chime its first chime of seven bells.

It all grew quiet as those in the yard and the ghouls all around became still, each wondering if the beautiful woman would appear to scare and dance. The second of the chimes chimed, then the third, and a fourth, yet no one appeared. Then as the fifth chime died and just before the sixth a loud blood curdling scream came. Not from the direction of the graveyard, but from the barnyard where Jim's father had died. Then just as suddenly another scream came in answer from the graveyard! There were two! Two different sounding blood curdling screams from two sources. I almost peed my pants. Not only from the screams, they bore to your core, but because Jim's parents were coming for Halloween. It was a bit too much.

I looked up just in time to see the ghostly apparition from the graveyard pass over me and then caught a glimpse of the apparition from the barnyard. I abandoned my post and ran to observe the spectacle. There they were, two wisps whirling around the yard dipping and spinning as if a dance of specters. The crowd roared its approval. Suddenly one of the wisps saw a little girl and swooped down to dance. The woman, Jim's mother, shrieked a laugh and began dancing with the crowd. Soon her partner could be seen dancing as well and they made their way closer and closer to the center of the crowd. Jim's father reached out and took his mother by the hand and began dancing with her. They laughed, shrieked and danced with each other and everyone else for hours. They would take off and dive down and suddenly appear and scare the bejabbers out of anyone that wasn't prepared or having fun. It was a wild ride and I was glad to be part of it.

It was close to 11 and I needed a break. So I moved back to my station to get any late comers and grab a breath from the excitement. This is when I saw a small troupe of men, dressed in black, making their way through the cornfield. Aware of what happened and in concern for Jim and Sarah I ran back to the front porch where they were sitting. Nearly out of breath I grabbed their attention and let them know something was up. Sarah looked concerned, but Jim seemed to know something we didn't. He glanced at the ghosts in the crowd and his dad's ghost looked up. A wicked smile crossed the ghost's lips. His mother's ghost also gave attention as her gaze rose from the child with which she was dancing. She looked towards the ghost of Jim's father. She smiled an evil smile and they both spirited away.

In little time a scream came from the back of the house, a human scream, one of certain fright. It howled over the top of the roof as if carried by some invisible force. Everyone looked up to see a small man dressed in black falling from the night sky a look of horror on his face. When he hit the ground with a thud, one and all thought it a great trick and yelled in excitement and appreciation. Then another man dressed in black shrieked as he ran from the thicket of trees surrounding the front yard and into the center of the crowd. He ran smack into the now rising first man which assured a slap stick like prat fall of both of them straight to the ground.

The crowd roared with laughter and waited in anticipation for another show. It wasn't too long to wait. Out from the corn field, prodded on by a pitch fork, another black clothed man made a bee line for the safety of the crowd, just as once again the first two tried to stand. Whack! All three fell back on the ground out cold. The crowd roared its approval again and new music hit the speakers as everyone began

to dance. Jim made his way out into the crowd with an officer of the county and had him show the uninvited guests the exit.

But then Jim heard a scream from the top of the steps leading to the front porch. It was Sarah and she was being held by a dark clothed figure. He motioned for Jim to come forward with the knife he held close to Sarah's neck. The crowd moved forward with Jim. It was all too real. But it was also Halloween at the farmhouse. As Jim moved up the steps, everyone stayed back and watched as in anticipation of another show.

Jim moved to Sarah's side. The dark man moved them into the house and shut the front door. They stood on the very ground where their mother was shot all those years ago and their grandfather had died his miserable death. The figure tore off his mask and confronted Sarah and Jim. It was Ben, a wild, scared, unfeeling Ben. He was at the end of his rope. He needed these two to sell this land and he wouldn't take no for an answer. He swore at Jim and held Sarah tight to his chest. Jim was terrified for Sarah, but angry at this little man who killed his father. Jim yelled no at this evil twisted man.

Ben swore he would kill them both and take the land in the estate sale anyhow. He raised his arm to drill the knife into Sarah's chest when another blood curdling scream filled the room. It was unlike any heard before. It was the scream of a thousand agonies. It was a scream of pain and loss too great to bear. Suddenly a great large ghost of a man stood in the hallway. He was all covered in black and he grabbed the knife from Ben's hands. He threw the knife aside and dragged Sarah from Ben's grasp. As Ben reached to reclaim his advantage the ghost engulfed him and in a fiery blaze disappeared with Ben screaming in his arms.

Sarah fell into Jim. People began banging on the door trying to get in. Peril had finally been realized and they were there to help. I led the way and with friends busted the door down myself. All we found was Sarah weeping in Jim's arms and two wisps of ghosts circling worriedly around them.

Sarah looked up and wiped her eyes. I heard her whisper "grandpa" to Jim. Then Jim smiled back and I heard him whisper that they should keep the farm. Sarah nodded her head in affirmation. Then the tower bell tolled a quarter till midnight. Sarah and Jim stood up. The two ghosts ushered the crowd out towards the yard. It took but little effort on their part and the party was on again.

Suddenly midnight itself fast approached and everyone looked to the balcony. Jim and Sarah were coming out of the door, Jim in a tux and Sarah in a beautiful gown. Each held a single rose in their hand. The clock tower struck the first chime of midnight and in that instant Jim's father and mother were standing next to Sarah and Jim. Jim handed his mother a single red rose. Sarah handed her father a rose as well. She kissed her dad ever so softly and then moved to her mother. Jim had handed a rose to his mother and kissed her fondly and then moved to his dad. Jim shook his father's hand and gave him a hug. Sarah tenderly shared a kiss with her mom and gave her a deep hug as well. The final chimes were chiming their last when a single ghost wrapped in black rose from the ground to hover before them on the balcony. Jim, Sarah, Jim's dad and mom reached out and pulled the dark ghost in. The final chime sounded and the three ghosts vanished, leaving Jim and Sarah quiet on the balcony.

The crowd roared its approval. Jim and Sarah quickly realized they were not alone and turned and waved to the crowd. They waved and waved until the last guest had left.

I know this to be true as Jim has told me. I know this to be true as I saw it myself. But what I really know to be true is love lasts. It lasts longer than even death.