

Love and a Light

Flash fiction by Kate F Eaton

“Emma, let’s not try so hard this year, whaddy say?”

Emma’s rheumy eyes scanned the Halloween decorations displacing their beat-up farm truck in the shed. “They’re going to come this year, Emmett. Now help me move these out to the porch.”

He was a kind man, her Emmett, and so, even seeing disaster ahead, he complied. All that bright October morning he strung fake cobwebs and giant spiders in the pines along their drive. At five o’clock, he descended the ladder for the last time and flipped the switch to set orange lights ablaze among the gables of their century-old farmhouse.

“Oh, my. This is going to be the best year ever.” Ten fruitless years Emma had been vowing it on Halloween.

“Emmy, you know the kids don’t come this far outta town no more. They got all those big houses up where Jennsen sold his farm. Clean up on candy in just a couple blocks.”

To which Emma pursed her lips and picked up speed making hundreds of goody bags. Last year, they’d given out only three—all drunken high schoolers partying out in the woods. At sundown, she was on the front porch in her rocker with her bounty lined up in washtubs all around her. Emmett slipped away to the barn, unnoticed, and climbed the ladder to the hayloft. He swung wide the big, hinged door at the gable’s peak, then dragged his secret weapon from among the bales.

He uncovered the enormous searchlight he'd bought back when the drive-in had closed and hadn't figured out a use for until yesterday. On the wide lens he'd fastened a shape cut out of tin. He threw the switch and light streamed out into the empty sky, a perfect circle surrounding a symbol even the little ones would recognize. "Okay, bat boy. Do your thing."

Unseen by his Emma from her post beneath the porch roof, the signal swung a wide arc across the heavens. Emmett stayed on his knees beside the light, pivoting it until his arms gave out. He peered out over the twilight landscape. Not a single headlight pierced their lonely vigil.

He left the signal in the sky and went to comfort Emma. But when he'd climbed on aching legs down the ladder and shuffled his work boots through the barnyard, he found a porch filled with awestruck children. A line of cars was parked for a mile along the shallow ditches beyond the drive. Emma was at her best, standing at the center as she had years ago as a teacher. She smiled at their claims of a "bat signal", never once looking up for the beacon that had drawn them.

"Must have been a rumor started, Emmett. The youngsters think we've got a bat cave out here."

She turned away, blue eyes alight with Halloween abandon. She listened to each youngster's questions, spun stories on the fly of caped crusaders living in the woods beyond the house. As she had their own children, now settled far away, his Emma kept the crowds enthralled with her gift for creating magic.

He stood apart, blew his nose in a faded bandana, allowed her the glory of the evening. By nine o'clock, the goody bags were gone and they'd shut off all the lights on the gables and in the pines. "One more light left on out back. Be up directly."

He made his aching way back up the ladder, rolled the big light back to bring the children next year, if he was still around. "Well, ladies, we did good tonight." The horses snuffled as he passed. Closing the barn door on its rollers, he made his way through the silent yard to find his Emma.