

# Bending the Rules

*A Halloween Tale*  
by Barbara Anderson



“I’m not a child, Father!” Vincent insisted loudly. “I’m fourteen years old! I’m old enough to make my own decisions!”

“YOU WILL NOT GO, VINCENT!” Father was frantic at the boy’s defiance. “I FORBID IT!!!!”

“All of the other children are free to go Above unattended whenever they like after their tenth birthdays. It *isn’t* fair!”

“You *do* go Above whenever you like, *don’t you?*” Father asked, looking at his son knowingly.

Vincent was taken aback by Father’s question. He couldn’t deny it, and he knew better than to tell Father an outright lie, so he stood silent.

Father took a deep breath, attempting to check his temper. “Did you think I was unaware that you sneak Above, when I have repeatedly warned you against it?”

When Vincent still did not speak, Father continued.

“There isn’t much I don’t know about what happens our world, son. And even though you *have* gone Above without incident before, ***this night***, *of all nights*, is vastly different. The streets will be teeming with people. There are dangers everywhere for someone like you.”

“You mean... *for a freak*... like me?” Vincent’s voice was tinged with bitterness. “I know what I am, Father. But this night, of all other nights, should be safe for me. Everyone wears costumes and masks. No one would even notice me.”

“That is a risk *I* am not willing to take,” Father replied. “If you are caught up there, you will endanger everything we have here, and I will *not* be able to protect you. ***NO ONE*** will be able to help you.”

This was not the first time they had had this argument, and Jacob Wells was sure it would not be the last.

Father's heart went out to the boy. He knew Vincent was at a difficult age. *The boy is right*, he silently acknowledged. *He is no longer a child. He is straining against the restrictions that his life, his very existence, demands.*

"But, Father—"

"NO!" Father slammed his fist on the desk, knocking over a stack of books. "I unequivocally FORBID YOU to go Above tonight! I will not discuss this further! There is nothing left to say!"

To emphasize his last words, Father stood. "I must speak to William about tonight's festivities for the younger children. This discussion is over." He turned away from Vincent and left the room.

Vincent roared in frustration and swept more books off Father's desk in a final act of defiance before fleeing the room. He ran through the Tunnels, needing to get as far away from his friends as possible. The last thing he wanted to do was watch them all preparing for their fun and then try to be a good sport as they left him behind yet again. He certainly didn't want any of them to see him cry. *I'm fourteen*, he chided himself. *I'm too old to cry.*

Finally reaching the bridge in the Chamber of the Winds, he sat down, his legs dangling freely. As he looked into the blackness of the Abyss, Vincent allowed self-pity overtake him.



"Please, Daddy! I'm not a baby anymore! I'm twelve years old! I don't need you to come trick-or-treating with me. If you come, I'll absolutely die of embarrassment! Nancy and Jenny's parents are letting *them* go alone. And anyway... if I'm with them... technically I *won't* be alone. And Susan will be at the party... and she's fourteen! Her parents will be at the party too. PLEASE... please, please, please."

Charles laughed ruefully. "You have the soul of a lawyer," he lamented.

The girl smiled sweetly, sensing she was winning. "Well, I *am* your daughter, after all. What did you expect?"

He considered Cathy's hopeful expression. There was an unmistakable, determined glint in her eyes that reminded him of her mother.

He laughed again as he reached to tweak her nose. "You, Catherine Rose Chandler, are your *mother's* daughter, through and through. It was just my luck she was a librarian and not a lawyer, or I never would have won a single argument in this house. If I say yes, you must promise me something."

“Anything!” she said breathlessly.

“If anyone at that party suggests playing Spin-the-Bottle, you will come directly home.”

Cathy stood up straight, crossed her heart and then raised her right hand. “Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye!”

Charles smiled wryly. “Well, I don’t think the needle or death will be necessary, but I’ll consider crossing your heart a binding contract, young lady. You *will* be home no later than nine p.m., is that understood?”

“Oh YES, Daddy! Thank you!” She squealed and threw her arms around his neck, kissing his cheek. She left the study quickly, before he had a chance to change his mind.

Two hours later, Charles stood in the open doorway and watched as Cathy and her friends ran up the street laughing and chattering in their Three Musketeers costumes.

*It will be fine*, he told himself, trying to allay his fears. *She knows to stay on the well-lit streets. This is a safe neighborhood... and Peter’s house is only eight blocks away.*

Closing the door, he sighed heavily. Gone were the days when he took his little girl trick-or-treating. It had been two years since she’d gone at all. Since his wife had passed away, Cathy had been content to spend Halloween at home with her father watching It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, and Arsenic and Old Lace on television while eating popcorn. *It was too difficult for her, seeing all the other children out there with their mothers enjoying the fun*, he surmised.



As he returned to his study, Charles looked lovingly at the picture of his deceased wife that always graced his desk. He sighed again. “I suppose I should be relieved that she’s finally learning to be happy again,” he said aloud. “Our little girl is growing up, Caroline. It’s been two years, since you left, my darling, and I still have no idea what I’m doing.”

Charles shook his head and turned to the ever-present work he had brought home from the office.



Vincent had no idea how long he'd been wallowing there on the bridge, but the winds swirling around him had begun to carry the sound of squeals and laughter. It told him that the people in the forbidden world Above him had begun to celebrate All Hallows' Eve.

"Aren't you coming, Vincent?"

The sound of her voice pierced his thoughts, and he looked up to see her standing at the end of the bridge.. "Lisa? Why aren't you Above with the others?"

"How can I be the Sugar Plum Fairy, if I don't have my Nutcracker?" she asked.

Vincent was mesmerized by the costume that Mary had made for Lisa. It had truly transformed her. She looked like a real, live ballerina.

*She's so beautiful*, he thought. *She's the prettiest girl in the Tunnels.*

"Are you just going to sit there?" she asked. "Everyone's already gone Above. If we hurry, we won't miss *all* the fun."

Though it was difficult to tear his eyes away from her, he turned and looked again into the Abyss. "Father has forbidden me. He says it's too dangerous... for 'someone like me.' He makes the rules. I have to obey."

"That's stupid," Lisa said, clearly irritated. "You go Above all the time,"

"Not tonight," he said, shaking his head. "Anyway, my costume is in my chamber and if I go back there to change, Father will catch me. He even has extra sentries in the upper tunnels tonight in case any topsiders want to explore the Tunnels on a dare."

Lisa sat down next to him and deposited a burlap sack in his lap.

"What's this?"

"It's your costume," she said smugly. "I got it from your chamber in case I convinced you to come with me."

"I *can't* go, Lisa," he insisted. "If I break the rules after Father expressly forbade me, I'll end up washing dishes and scrubbing the dining hall floors for the rest of my life."

"Who's asking you to break the rules? I'm merely suggesting that you *bend* them a little," Lisa suggested. He voice held a tinge of mischief.

"Bend them? What do you mean?"

“Peter invited us teenagers to a party at his house after the trick-or-treating. We’ve gone to Peter’s house before to watch movies on television, and Father let you do that.” She smiled at him, her eyes clearly beseeching him to accept her reasoning.

“That’s true,” Vincent agreed carefully.

“So, we go to the party, but we don’t go trick-or-treating. You still get to have some fun, and technically you aren’t really going Above, because you won’t leave Peter’s house.”

Vincent was silent as he considered her plan. He found it difficult to deny Lisa anything when she smiled at him that way.

“Listen,” Lisa said, trying one last argument. “If Father finds out, I’ll tell him it was all *my* idea. Then *I’ll* get the punishment. Father thinks I’m a troublemaker anyway, so I’m sure he’d be glad to blame me. He hates me.”

“That’s not true. He doesn’t hate you.” *How could anyone ever hate someone as beautiful as Lisa?* he wondered.

“It is true, and you know it. Father is always looking to blame me for something.” She shrugged. “I don’t mind... I guess he’s right... in a way.” She smiled knowingly. “I’m making trouble right now, aren’t I?” She laughed, as if it didn’t bother her. “Please come, Vincent. It’ll be fun.”

“You would give up all that free candy so I can go to the party?”

“If I’m going to be a ballerina, Vincent,” she replied seriously. “I *can’t* eat candy. After all, a ballerina has to watch her figure.”



“So just when did you ever win an argument with me, Charles?” a familiar voice demanded.

Charles dropped the contracts he had been reading. Looking up, he blinked in an effort to clear his vision. “Caroline?” He looked around the room. Nothing had changed since the last time he’d looked up... that is, except for the fact that his beloved wife, more than two years dead, was standing across his desk, as if it was completely normal. Not a ghostly, floating, ephemeral image of his wife, but a woman who appeared as solid and real as any flesh and blood person he knew.

“*How...* how are you here?” he asked, realizing his mind must be playing tricks on him. “How is this possible?”

She smiled demurely. "It's Halloween, Charles," she replied, as if that explained everything.

"What does that have to do with it?" he asked, clearly needing a more elaborate explanation.

Caroline smiled indulgently. "My dear Charles, *tonight is Halloween... All Hallows' Eve, Samhain... the night when the veil between worlds grows thin, and the—*"

"Ahhh... yes..." Charles interrupted, remembering the old ghost stories from his childhood. "...when the spirits of the underworld walk the earth."

"Yes," Caroline nodded, smiling approvingly. "That's the legend anyway. The truth is, some of us walk the earth everyday. You just can't see us."

Charles couldn't help staring at her. "Is that so?" Charles asked warily, turning her answer over in his mind. "I must say, Caroline, I've never imagined you a spirit of the 'underworld.' I rather assumed you'd gone to a much higher plane. Wouldn't it be more appropriate for you to visit tomorrow, on All Saints' Day?"

The unexpected sound of Caroline's laughter momentarily took Charles' breath away. He'd almost forgotten how it had always affected him.

"I'm no saint, my dearest," she replied, still chuckling. "*You*, of all people, should know *that*."

Charles closed his eyes and savored the sweet sound of her laughter. It left no doubt in his mind that it was indeed his beloved wife standing before him. "You still have the most beautiful laugh. Cathy laughs like you, you know. She reminds me more and more of you every day."

Caroline's expression changed at the mention of their daughter. "You're doing a wonderful job with her," she said, approvingly.

"I'm flying by the seat of my pants," he scoffed. "I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing. I don't know what I would do without Peter and Lillian, and Marilyn. They're Godsend."

Caroline looked disapprovingly at the stack of files on his desk. "I've got news for you, Charles. *Everyone* is flying by the seat of their pants," Caroline assured him. "That's what being a parent is. What's important is that you love her. It's the *only* thing that matters."

"Well, I have no problem with that part." Charles relaxed visibly, comforted by her reassurances. "We both miss you terribly, Caroline."

“Yes, I know,” she replied gently. “But you carry me in your heart... *always*. It’s *you* who are keeping me here. You must know... I’m never very far away.”

He looked longingly at his beautiful wife. “You’re not in my arms, Sweet Caroline... so excuse me if I beg to differ. *You are... much* too far away.”

Caroline nodded. “I miss you too... *so much*. But there are some things that can’t be changed... they just are. Truthfully, I shouldn’t even be here now. There are rules, you know.”

“No... I don’t know... and I don’t care. All I know is that I’m grateful you are here now.” Then realizing that it didn’t make sense to his logical mind, he asked. “Are you... *really* here... now?” he asked, still searching for an explanation for this amazing encounter. “Or am I just dreaming?”

“What’s the difference?” Caroline asked. “If I’m really here... or if I’m only a dream... if it brings you some comfort, does it *really* matter?”

“Of course, it matters! I’m a lawyer, Caroline, I deal in facts. “I want to *know* if we will ever be together again, or if I’m just dreaming of something... that can never be.”

Putting her hands on the edge of the desk, she leaned closer to him. “Listen to your heart, Charles,” she told him. “What does it tell you?” There was an unmistakable insistence in her voice.

“Why can’t *you* just tell me?” he demanded.

“Because, Charles... some things... *must* be taken on faith. *Knowing...* would make it all too easy.”

“I don’t understand.”

Caroline gave him a lopsided grin and sighed. “I don’t understand it either. But I don’t make the rules... and I can’t break them either.”

“But you can bend them? Like you’re bending them right now?”

She stood up straight and looked toward the window. “Shhhh...” she said. “Yes, I *am* bending them right now,” she said softly. “It’s Halloween... the gatekeepers are busier on this night than any other, so a little rule bending is to be expected.” Feeling her time was short, she changed the subject. “You never answered my question.”

“What question is that?”

“You told Cathy that if I had been a lawyer instead of a librarian, you never would have won a single argument in this house. I was just wondering when it was that you won a single argument with me?”

Charles sat up a little straighter. “You were an obstinate opponent, my dear,” he replied. “I’ll give you that. But I’ll have you know, I won more than a single argument... *I won two!*” he declared proudly.

She folded her arms across her chest and tilted her head to one side. “Would you care to elaborate, counselor?” she requested demurely.

Charles smiled, as he looked at the beautiful sight before him. “I convinced you to marry me, for one.”

Caroline nodded. “Yes, you *were very* persuasive...” she admitted, with a twinkle in her eyes. “...and persistent, if I recall...” She laughed softly. “You just *wouldn’t* give up. Nothing I did would drive you away.”

“I know a good thing when I see it, Caroline Winston,” he said, referring to her maiden name and the circumstances of their courtship. “I was head over heels in love, from the moment I laid eyes on you. I was *never* giving up.”

Her smile faded, and the twinkle in her eyes turned to sadness. “Are you sorry, now, Charles? Looking back... at how things turned out... are you sorry that you won that argument? Are you ever sorry that you married *me*?”

Charles stood up in defiance at the very thought. “Not for one minute!” He declared without hesitation. “Not for one second, have I ever regretted it.”

Charles stepped from behind the desk and approached her, bringing himself so close he could smell the familiar scent of her perfume, so close he could almost... But he didn’t dare... Something told him that if he tried to touch her, she would disappear like morning dew in the noonday sun.

Speaking with unmistakable passion, he continued, “My sweet, *sweet* Caroline, you made me the happiest man on earth. You brought me more happiness than most men know in an entire lifetime... more than any one person has any right to expect. If *that* were the only argument I’d ever won, I would count my life a resounding success. I still have my memories... and I still have Cathy.”

“And what was the second?” she asked, unable to tear her eyes away from him.

Lost in the love he saw in her beautiful green eyes, it took a moment for Charles to process her question. “The second,” he finally responded. “...was when I finally convinced you to have my child.”

Caroline looked at him with skepticism. “I don’t know if you should get full credit for that one, Charles. It was Peter who finally quelled my reservations with his medical expertise.”



Charles chuckled softly. “Peter always was a wonderful friend. No matter, the result was the same. I consider our daughter the single most important accomplishment of our lives.”

Caroline smiled mischievously. “I suppose you *did* have something to do with it,” she acquiesced.

Walking to the fireplace, she stared longingly at the most recent photograph of their daughter that stood on the mantle. “She’s growing up so beautifully.”

“Cathy hates that picture,” he said, following his wife and standing by her side. “She had just gotten her hair cut and it didn’t turn out the way she wanted. She wants me to burn it, but I think it’s beautiful.”

“She’s at a difficult stage, Charles. She’s no longer a child... and yet... she isn’t a woman either. It’s hard... for both of you, I know that. Just be patient with her.”

Charles nodded in agreement. “One moment she doesn’t need me anymore, and the next... she needs me more than ever... and the tears. What will I do, Caroline?”

“Fly by the seat of your pants, just like always,” she said simply.

They both laughed at that.

Caroline looked toward the window. “I’ve stayed too long. I have to go.”



Vincent and Lisa arrived at Peter’s basement Tunnel entrance just as their Tunnel friends had arrived from their trick-or-treating. They blended seamlessly into the festivities.

The house was dimly lit by hanging, paper lanterns in the shape of pumpkins and ghosts. The corners of the ceiling were decorated with giant, fake cobwebs and huge black spiders. Vincent shuddered at the sight. He had hated spiders since he was a small child.

Lisa laughed. “They’re fake, Vincent,” she said, stating the obvious.

“I know that,” he replied. “I still don’t like them.”

It was then that the front door opened and a group of teenagers he was unfamiliar with entered, laughing. He backed up due to his natural caution of Topsiders.

Susan approached Vincent and placed her arm around his shoulder, attempting to put him at ease. “Those are all my friends, Vincent. You have nothing to worry about. I promise, you’ll fit right in.” She pointed toward the group and explained. “Frankenstein over there is Buddy. The girl in the witch costume is Buddy’s younger sister Becky. And the Three Musketeers are Nancy, Jenny, and Cathy.” “Are you sure it’s safe?” he asked, barely loud enough to be heard over the music. Susan smiled reassuringly, “*I promise*. My dad would never allow it if it wasn’t.” Vincent nodded, knowing she was right, Peter would never allow him to be in danger. Still, he was content to stay in the shadows and observe the party from a safe distance.

After two years of avoiding Halloween and other celebrations that might remind Cathy of her mother, she was a little overwhelmed by the fun and noise of the party.

Looking for a way to calm her nerves, she headed for the refreshment table and lingered there apart from the crowd and nibbled daintily on a cookie.

Vincent observed her and found it odd that he could feel her trepidation, and that she, like him, seemed content to observe the party from a distance.

“I like your costume,” she said, after they stood in proximity to each other for several minutes.

Vincent turned toward her voice and felt even more nervous as he felt her eyes scrutinizing him. “You do?”

“Yes, it looks so real,” she said.

*Her voice is almost like music*, he thought. *She sounds friendly*.

“That’s a great makeup job,” Cathy continued, smiling shyly. “You must know someone who works in the theater. It must’ve taken hours,” she said with admiration. “But I can’t decide which character you’re supposed to be.”

“Which character?” he replied awkwardly.

“Well... at first I thought you could be the Cowardly Lion from The Wizard of Oz. But I could see right away that there’s nothing cowardly about you. A little bit shy, maybe... but *not* cowardly. You could be Aslan... you know... from The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe...” Then rubbing her chin, she mused, “Or you could be the cursed prince from Beauty and the Beast.”

Vincent didn’t know what to say. His looks were a very sensitive subject to him and it was clear she was talking about his face and the similarity it bore to the

face of a lion. *If I speak, she might see my teeth*, he feared. *I don't want to frighten her—*

“Well, am I close?” she asked, interrupting his thoughts.

“Close?” he answered nervously. “Oh... I'm supposed to be The Nutcracker,” Cathy stood in front of him, put a hand on her hip, and began scrutinizing him from head to toe.

Vincent could feel the blood rushing to his face. This Topsider girl was looking at him much too closely for his comfort. He could hear Father's voice booming in his mind, *I TOLD YOU IT WAS TOO DANGEROUS!!!*

Just when he was about to make a run for Peter's basement Tunnel entrance, the girl smiled. She reached to her side and removed a sword from her belt and handed it to him.

“What's this?” he asked, unsure what the girl was doing.

“It's a sword,” Cathy responded, pushing the sword handle towards him. “Haven't you ever seen The Nutcracker? You *need* this. No Nutcracker is complete without his sword,” she proclaimed.

Vincent shook his head. “No... I... I couldn't take yours.”

Cathy laughed. “Of course, you *can*. Anyway, it's *just* a toy. I can easily get another one.”

Vincent looked dumbfounded as he reluctantly accepted the sword and slid it into his belt.

Cathy smiled with satisfaction. “*Now... you're a proper Nutcracker!*”

Just then a ballerina slid up to Vincent's side and put her arm possessively through his.

“You must be The Sugar Plum Fairy,” Cathy guessed correctly. “I love your costume too.”

In exchange for the compliment, Lisa gave Cathy a sour look and began pulling Vincent toward the crowd in the middle of the room. “Come on, Vincent, we're going to play a game, and I need you with me.”

As they walked away, Cathy heard the ballerina ask, “Who's that?”

The Nutcracker shrugged. “I don't know. Just a girl, I guess.” The ballerina looked back one more time giving Cathy a withering look.

Cathy wasn't sure why, but she felt her face flush and had a sudden urge to cry. The Nutcracker looked back at her curiously.

“These brownies are so good,” Jenny said, as she slid up to Cathy’s side. “I’m so glad they have food, I’m starving. And aren’t the decorations great? Susan’s mother is something else. My mom would never let me do something like this. Oh, my mother’s great and all, but between you and me...”

Jenny was so busy eating and talking that she didn’t even notice that Cathy hadn’t heard a single word she’d said.

It wasn’t until Becky rushed over that Cathy was able to tear her eyes from The Nutcracker and his Sugar Plum Fairy. “Forget the refreshments, you guys! They’re getting ready to play Spin-the-Bottle. Come on, it’s loads of fun!”

“Spin-the-Bottle?” The promise she had made to her father came instantly to Cathy’s mind. *I’ll consider that a binding contract, young lady*, he’d said.

“Uhm...” Cathy stalled, as she looked around the room. Spotting the clock, she said, “Nah... I’m kinda tired. I think I’m going to head home.”

Jenny stopped what she was doing and looked at Cathy in shock. “It’s not even eight thirty, Cath... Are you kidding me?”

“No... I’m not kidding,” Cathy replied. “It’s okay if you guys stay. I’ll ask Peter to take me home.”

With that, she went looking for him.

As Cathy waited for Peter at the front door, she drew attention from the crowd of kids preparing for their game. She was hoping to make a clean get away, when Becky’s big brother called out to her.

“Hey Cathy! You leaving already? Things are just getting fun.”

“I’m tired, Buddy. You have fun. I’ll see you guys later.” She turned toward the door, but Buddy wouldn’t let it go. The room had gone silent and everyone was staring at her, including The Nutcracker and the Sugar Plum Fairy.

Ever the joker, Buddy realized he now had an audience. “I guess it’s past your bedtime, huh?” he asked, eliciting nervous laughter from several of the crowd. “I told Susan not to invite the babies. Why don’t you go on home then, and let your mommy tuck you into bed?”

Instead of laughter, there was an audible gasp from several in the room.

Cathy felt as if she’d been slapped across the face. She stood still, her feet frozen to the floor, feeling her face flush deeply. For some reason, she was acutely aware that The Nutcracker’s gaze was burning through her. Her only thought was that she not allow any of them to see her cry.

Presently, Peter appeared, his voice breaking the spell that held her there. "I'm ready whenever you are, Cathy. Let's get you home," he said cheerfully, unaware of what had just occurred.

Cathy turned toward the door.

"Hey, wait, Cath," Jenny called out, as her eyes shot daggers in Buddy's direction. "I'm coming too."

"Wait for me, you guys," Nancy said. She walked up to Buddy and punched him in the arm as hard as she could. "I don't care if you are fourteen, Buddy Richmond, you're a big, fat jerk! You know that?" Then pulling out her sword, she pointed it at his chest. "If this was a real sword, I swear I would run you through!" With that, she turned, the large feather in her hat slapping him in the face, and headed for the door.

The room was silent as everyone watched all Three Musketeers exit together.

After the door closed, Susan turned to Buddy who was rubbing his arm. "Why did you do that? You idiot!" she demanded.

Buddy was clueless. "What? I was just kidding around."

"Did you have to tease her like that? Did you have to tease her about her mother?"

He shrugged and shook his head. "What's the big deal?"

"Cathy's mom is *dead*, you buffoon! It's been two years since she's come to one of my parties and *you just had* to ruin it!"

Vincent had witnessed the entire scene in silence, horrified by the callous indifference of the boy. Most of the children in Vincent's world would never have teased a girl so mercilessly. But what shocked Vincent the most was that he had *felt* the girl's pain as if it was being inflicted personally upon him. He had always been sensitive to the emotions of those he cared for, but this was different. *I don't even know her*, he thought. *She's a Topsider.*

Until that moment, Vincent had always imagined that children who lived in the world above him lived perfect, fairy-tale lives. Now he realized that pain and sorrow existed everywhere.

Soon, the cloud passed, and the party went back into full swing, almost as if nothing had happened. But Vincent was no longer in the mood for a party. He drew himself back into the shadows and watched as Lisa laughed and flirted with all the boys in the room. She seemed to revel in the attention she was receiving. Eventually he made his way unnoticed down to the basement and slipped back into his Tunnel world.

As Vincent walked slowly home, he pondered the events of the evening. He couldn't get the Topsider girl out of his mind. Unconsciously placing his hand on the hilt of the sword she'd given him, he considered her pain that was so deep it had cut through him like a knife. He was almost sorry now, that he had defied Father by bending the rules.



Caroline looked toward the window. "I've stayed too long. I have to go."

"No... not yet," Charles begged.

"Rules can only be bent so far before they break, Charles," she replied, sadly.

"And you can't break the rules..."

"No," she said slowly shaking her head. "I can't."

"I wish I could come with you," he said, feeling as if his heart would break.

"I wish you could too. But one day... when Cathy no longer needs you. I'll come back for you, Charles, *I promise*. But that won't be for a long time yet."

"Sometimes I feel like she has already outgrown me... that she doesn't need me anymore."

"Oh, she *does* need you, Charles," Caroline insisted. "And she'll need you much more in the years to come. In fact, she needs you right now."

"She needs me now? How do you know that?" he asked, instantly concerned. "Is she in trouble?" he asked, as he turned toward the study door.

"She's not in trouble... She's in pain. Trust me, Charles. Cathy may not always confide in you. She may not always tell you how she feels. But it's vital that you be here for her when she needs you. *Just* be here for her."

Charles turned back to his beloved wife to see that she had disappeared.

"Caroline!" he cried out.



Cathy opened the front door and carefully locked it behind her. The house was dark except for the light coming from her father's study.

"Caroline!" she heard him call out as she entered the room.

*He's dozed off at his desk again,* Cathy realized.

Standing beside him, she shook his shoulder gently. "Daddy... wake up, Daddy..."

Charles was disoriented as he opened his eyes and looked around to see that they were alone in the room. He closed his eyes and sighed. *It was only a dream,* he realized sadly... *only a dream.*

Looking at the clock on the mantle he turned to his daughter. "You came home early. Wasn't it fun? Did something go wrong?" he asked.

Cathy smiled. "No, nothing went wrong," she assured him, crossing her fingers behind her back.

"Then why did you come home early?" he pressed, doubting Cathy was telling him the truth.

"Did you forget?" she asked. "I know we've missed Charlie Brown, but Arsenic and Old Lace is coming on at nine o'clock. Have you made the popcorn?"

Charles was taken aback. "Oh... I... I thought you'd forgotten."

Cathy smiled and looked at him with shimmering eyes that reminded him so much of her mother. "Well, I *didn't* forget! I'll go change into my pajamas and you go make the popcorn. If we hurry, we can just make it." She kissed his cheek and turned to run up the stairs.

*Flying by the seat of my pants indeed,* he thought. *First, she's can't get away from me fast enough, and now she can't wait to watch an old movie with me that we've seen before.* Shaking his head, he headed for the kitchen to make the popcorn.

As they settled on the couch with their popcorn and a bowl full of Halloween candy, Cathy snuggled into the crook of her father's arm.

"Did you have a good time with your friend's?" Charles asked.

"Shhh... The movie's starting!" she scolded, grabbing a small box of Jujube's and popping them into her mouth.

Two hours later, Charles carried his sleeping daughter to her room and tucked her into bed. He looked at her wistfully. She looked beautiful, even with the remains of a drawn-on mustache and goatee. He kissed her softly on the forehead. "Good night, Cathy," he said as he reached to turn off the lamp beside her bed.

"Night, Daddy," she mumbled.

He closed the door softly as he left.



Caroline stood beside Cathy's bed watching her sleeping daughter as the moonlight illuminated her bed. The glowing hands of Cathy's alarm clock told Caroline it was nearly midnight. Time was running out. She bent over the young girl and gently kissed her forehead. "Sleep my pretty one," she said. "I love you." "I love you too, Mother," Cathy whispered in her sleep.

With time running short, Caroline proceeded quickly down the hall, to the room she had once shared with her husband. He too, was sleeping soundly. Caroline had always loved watching him as he slept. She smiled as she reached to brush a stray lock of hair from his forehead and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Listen to your heart, Charles," she whispered. "It will tell you what is true."

It would be years before he was ready to join her, Caroline knew that. But it was all right, she intended to stay close by, watching over them.

As she was leaving, Caroline turned back. "When the time is right, my love... I *will* come back for you. *I promise.*"



*Wherever you find yourself this Halloween,  
always believe in your dreams.*