

# TRICK OR TREAT

by C M Henley

## A RAY OF HOPE

### **OCTOBER 1980**

“Vincent, Vincent!” Mouse called, from far down the tunnel.

Vincent waited as Mouse came running with something bright cradled in his arms. A pumpkin! Where had Mouse gotten it? The pumpkins that found their way Below for Halloween usually did not arrive until the last minute.

“Mouse, did you steal the pumpkin?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

“Took it,” Mouse corrected, his nine-year-old grin showing several missing teeth on both sides. “Lots there. Never miss such a little one.”

Vincent shook his head and laughed.

“Help me, Vincent?” the boy requested. “Time to cut faces. Lots, Up Top.”

Vincent nodded. “Yes, Mouse, I’ll help you carve your Jack-O-Lantern.”

But Mouse didn’t want any help, once the top was cut and the pulp scooped out. Vincent merely watched as Mouse carefully carved his design into the orange-colored rind.

When the Jack-O-Lantern was done, Vincent found a short candle to place in it, and carried it to Father’s chamber.

“Father,” he called, “see what Mouse has done! It’s... work of art!”

Father looked, then chuckled softly. “Indeed it is,” he agreed. “Mouse, if you’ll allow me, I’ll give it the place of honor right here on my desk, until Halloween.”

Mouse nodded vigorously. “Can do another one,” he offered. “Get pumpkin now...”

Vincent snagged him by the collar. “**No**,” he said firmly. “We will have our own pumpkins here in two days. Wait.”

“Sure, Vincent,” Mouse agreed. “Okay. Mouse can wait.”

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Vincent was writing in his journal when Mary came looking for him. He sensed her approach - the soft pad of her moccasins, and the rustle of her dress - and looked up.

“Vincent,” she said in the tones her voice took on when she need to ask a favor. “I have a terrible problem.”

He put his pen aside. “What is it, Mary?”

She sat on the edge of the other chair at his small table. “Mariah promised to come tomorrow to take the children trick-or-treating, but she just sent word that she has sprained her ankle. Will you escort the children, Vincent? It’s Halloween... Only to a few of the Helpers’ houses,” she added, a note of

pleading creeping into her words.

Even knowing that Father would be less than pleased, Vincent agreed.

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The energy level of a group of ten children seemed boundless. Even Vincent found himself exhausted -- if only emotionally - as he and his charges approached their last stop for the evening.

He hung back while the children thronged to the door, settling his hood closer about his face.

A taxi, pulling up to the curb next door, distracted him. He watched several young adults move toward the house, where a party was in progress.

"Steve! Cathy!" A young man hailed the partygoers. "How come you're not at some high society party?"

The girl - no, she was a woman of about Vincent's age - pirouetted, her ponytails flying. She was costumed as a bobby-soxer; her date wore black leather and had his hair greased back. She laughed. "I convinced Steven that Nancy's parties are more fun," she said in a teasing voice. "Aren't they, Rob?"

"Probably," Rob replied as the door opened to admit them.

For one moment, Cathy glanced at Vincent before she entered the house.

He was enchanted by her green eyes... then chattering children surrounded him, and he was swept away from his glimpse of the world he could never be part of.

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