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Kenneth D. Hannan

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The ghost of the Pumpkin Man hangs over this small town, kinda like a curse. Everybody knows about the Pumpkin Man, and almost everyone's seen him at one time or another. Some of the younguns still get kinda nervous around pumpkins, and a lot of people carve watermelon on Hallowe'en. 'Course, there are those who still carve pumpkins: y'know, it's like they want to symbolize their independence.

One old man says he remembers a time when the Pumpkin Man was just a legend, but he also remembers his trips into what you might call your alternative universes. Good stories, but only the really younguns take him at all for serious.

Once, there was rumor that the Pumpkin Man had returned when Harry Ruston disappeared for a few days, but the truth was he was out visiting relatives and he just didn't tell anyone. Whenever a barn burns, or a pet strays, or a crop fails, or Melba Martins refrigerator conks out, people say "The Pumpkin Man has returned!"

I never really believe what I hear about him, but I gotta admit, they are good stories.

I remember Jack Mayberry. He was what you might call the town drunk. One night, Jack thought it was a good time for a celebration. Hell, when Jack could find his furniture it was time for a celebration! Anyway, Jack went out and got himself pickled as Hitler. What he did after that was he got himself a pumpkin, put it on his head and tried to be the Pumpkin Man. My uncle got the town together with their shot guns and damned near blasted his ass off. He got lucky, though. He tripped and the pumpkin smashed. He spent three weeks in jail for that one. Didn't drink in public after that, either. Private, I don't know.

I suppose we'll never really get rid of the Pumpkin Man. Yep, as long as superstitious parents tell their kids not to talk to strangers, he 's gonna be around. Give these people time. Before long his grave'll get dug up and some really wierd things'll happen. These people can get downright sick at times!

You might think the Salem Witch Trials were bad. We had 'em too, but the people hereabouts just killed every one suspect. It's a wonder there's any population at all today. It was a booming business, you might say, until a few people accused the parson of witchcraft, using a false church as a front. The parson wasn't lynched, though. The crowd lynched the folks who accused him. After that, I guess the taste for blood lost its appeal. Took long enough, though! In three months, sixty eight people met their god under a hand supposedly ruled by God. May the people behind that hand burn in Hell for it, too!

This entire town is less than two square miles, and everybody knows everybody else's lives pretty well, kinda like lives were a community property. Even so, when the Pumpkin Man came to town, everybody was a suspect. As I recall, nobody ever did rightly find out just who it really was. One day Bill wakes up, goes out to his barn, and there's the guy on the floor. His neck was twisted awful funny. He must've fallen off the hayloft, looking for a place to stay the night. Maybe he slept up there a lot. Who could tell?

He had a decent size beard, greasy red hair, and misformed teeth, some of which fell out from the fall. The wierd thing was the eyes! Bloodshot, o.k., but the base color was the weirdest combination of red, grey, and blue. Never seen anythin' like it!

Anyway, he's got his own little part of the local cemetery, and every month we draw lots to see who gets to smash a pumpkin on the headstone. These people are really too superstitious, and probably will be until this town is nothin' but dust.

I gotta get out of this place! But I guess I'll wait, for a little while anyway. Yep, wait just a little bit.

Kenneth D. Hannan