

SOMETIMES MONSTERS WEAR

*Beautiful
Faces*



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At first it happened slowly. Quietly. A dull, senseless feeling that stole through his being without course or name. For the longest time he didn't even recognize it, so subtle was the feeling, so slight was the thought.

But then it grew. It grew so large that it took form in his head, and turned into something like a nightmare. The nagging thought was no longer a feeling—it was a thing. A real live thing that lived inside of him, as if trapped in a moving cage that had lost all direction. The thing had eyes, a mouth, even a ghastly smile that was decorated with jagged teeth and crimson lips...

Jacob Malcolm moved down a snowy street, just as the large clock chimed ten on the top of the capital. His eyes stayed fixed ahead of him—unchanging, determined—maybe even aloof, even though the monster inside of him was screeching.

Then he passed the place. He stopped along the weather-worn, picket fence, and put his hand on the gate, much as he had done many years ago.

The wind, cold and vicious, pounded snow against the shutters of that old house—against its cracked glass—against its ever rocking porch swing. Every noise screamed the louder, “Come in, Jacob! Come in!”

But never did he heed to the call.

Never, that is, until that snowy November night, with the old door swinging crookedly open and closed, beckoning him with each fateful screech.

He opened the gate. *Go back.* A voice whispered inside him, coming from somewhere within the broken fragments of his heart, as if knowing that the old house could bring him only more hurt. But Jacob had long since stopped listening to his heart. He had long since quit obeying its wisdom. Now, a different voice controlled him—that monster of a thing.

The porch creaked under his steps. The boards quivered and shook, trembling as if in breathless excitement to at last be trodden upon. Then he reached the door, catching it with his hand even as it blew back open, welcoming him.

“Come in,” it called. “Come in! Come in!”

Another step.

Then another.

Finally the house was around him—the door slammed shut. His entire being froze, even as his eyes scanned the room, taking in each broken furniture, each blasted mouse...

There should be lights. Noises. Decorations and people. Pain jerked through him, ripping open wounds that had festered too long. *She should be standing here to greet me.* With a movement ever so graceful, ever so habitual, Jacob pulled the hat off his head and smiled.

He smiled because that's what he'd always done before. He smiled because every time he entered this house, she stood waiting for him, beaming at him, loving him...

But now the house was dark. She was gone. Gone. Gone. Gone...

Jacob took a step further. Every step left him breathless, every inch made the memories sharper, more painful.

“Jacob, you came.” A voice. Her voice. Her sweet, beautiful voice...

He froze, heart jerking, pain realer than he'd ever known. Slowly, he turned.

From within the shadows of the dark house emerged a figure. A thin, willowy figure with eyes that were luminous and hair that was golden. A light seemed to follow her, and it glowed upon as if she were wearing it as a gown. She smiled, a beautiful thing that etched along her features and glowed on her cheeks. “Hello, Jacob,” softly came her whisper.

Jacob couldn't move. The thing—the feeling—the monster raged within him. “I held you,” he breathed.

She only blinked at him.

“I held you when you died.”

She took a step forward, the light following her.

Only still he couldn't move. Agony, hope, bewilderment raged through him, and his heart wasn't sure how to beat and that monster just screamed...

“Jacob.” Another step towards him. “Jacob, I'm sorry.”

The words stuck in his throat. He ordered, begged, pleaded with his voice to speak, only nothing would come.

“Jacob. I'm sorry for dying.”

“Then you are. You're dead.” He didn't understand. He couldn't believe she was here. Talking to him. Almost to him. Almost touching him. Just inches from his reach...

“Can I hold you?” he finally whispered.

“No.” She stepped back, even as the glow on her dimmed.

“Please.” Horror pressed on him, agony too hard to bear. He fell to his knees, gritting his teeth. “Let me hold you, love! I'm your husband! Let me hold you!”

“No, Jacob.” Calmness caressed her. “I hold you.”

He didn't understand. It didn't make sense. She'd died four years ago. She'd left him alone, she'd left

this house. She'd left his world and now she was back, only he couldn't touch her...

“*Why?*” The scream ripped from his throat. “*Why—?*”

“Because I hold you.”

“How?”

“Jacob.” She paused; the light grew dimmer still. “Because I'm in you, Jacob, and you won't let me go.”

He couldn't breathe. He touched the floor with his hands. The boards were dirt. So dirty. She'd never have let them be this dirty, not if she was alive...

“Ever since I died, you locked me up. I've screamed to be let out, for your sake. This house has begged you to face it's memories.”

He stared at her. Into her. So deep into those somber blue eyes that he felt he could search them forever and never find an end.

Then she smiled, very softly, and when she spoke, her voice was a passionate whisper, “Let me go, Jacob. I'm dead.”

Then she was gone. The light was gone. Darkness fell onto him, crushing him, burning him alive...

He stood up and put the hat back on his head. He glanced back to where she had been, and almost wished he had the voice to whisper goodbye.

Jacob Malcolm walked out the door of that old house, late one November night. He shut the door behind him, and left a monster with a beautiful face locked tight within its walls.