

THE FAMILY

A Halloween Flash Fiction

By S. Labrecque

Oh dear, what are you doing out alone? Don't you know how dangerous this street is? Come inside, quickly. You poor thing, you're pale as death.

Yes, our house is a little different from our neighbors'. Isn't it lovely? It was built in the colonial style, before electricity was even invented. You can still see the old gas knobs on the pipes.

We try to keep it as cheery as possible, especially given our neighbors' sense of... *style*. Grandpa Joe and Aunt Aubrey tend the garden out front, and I keep the interior nice and tidy. Of course, I can't get the stains out of the floorboards here in the foyer, but you hardly notice them. The living room's on the left, there. You can put your feet up while I fetch refreshments.

How lovely, Grandma's already here. Grandma, we have a guest! Grandma? *Grandma?* Oh well, it looks like she's too busy with the radio to listen. Don't worry, I'll introduce you later. Make yourself comfortable.

As we always say in this house: guests are family!

The couch is a little stained too, isn't it? Just go ahead and sit elsewhere. I swear we're not usually this sloppy. Cousin Freddy, can you come down here, please? There you are. I asked you to clean that stain yesterday. No, no excuses. Go fetch the stain remover.

I'm so sorry about that. I do try to keep the house tidy for guests. Hey, what's wrong? Oh, Cousin Freddy? Don't worry about him, he smiles at everyone that way.

Since you're staying, I might as well introduce you to the rest of the family. Wait one moment while I fetch them.

I'm back! I hope I didn't take too long. How was the lemonade?

What? Hm, I'm not sure why it would taste funny. We have our own lemon tree in the backyard, so it's fresh.

Are you alright, dear? You look a little shaken.

Well, if you're sure.

Any case, here's the family! Well, most of us. Some were busy, but you'll have plenty of time to meet them later. I know it's a crowd— you'll get used to it eventually. It usually takes a while to learn everyone's names.

You've probably noticed none of us look related. That's because we're not. You see, we're the type of family who find the lost strays, and we take them in. I started out as a sister, but I guess you could say I've grown into the mother figure. We all find our place here.

Enough about me! I've been so rude not to make introductions. You've already met Grandma, of course. Look at her, she never leaves that radio. She got it in her youth, you see. It's a piece of history. So are Grandma and Grandpa— they've been in this house so long, they were around when it was built! Grandpa here, well, I already told you he keeps the garden. So does Aunt Aubrey, the tall woman in the back. They have a real green thumb. Don't worry about the smell, that's fertilizer. It made me gag when I first came here too.

Sister Larkspur and Sister Laburnum are the twins. (Honestly, even I have trouble telling them apart. How embarrassing!) They have their own greenhouse on the third floor where they grow their teas. You might have seen it from the outside— it's one of the boarded-up windows on the left. The man next to them is Sister Laburnum's husband, Brother Norman. They're newly weds— aren't they beautiful together? He wandered in off the street like you did, about... what was it, Laburnum? Thirteen months ago? He took one sip of Sister Laburnum's tea and just couldn't get enough.

Uncle Jack's standing behind you.

Goodness, sorry! I didn't mean to make you jump. He likes to lurk, but he's really quite reliable. Whenever someone's naughty, I can trust he'll give proper discipline in the basement.

No need to ask about the basement.

Wait a minute; Cousin Lector, what's that on your shirt? Are *you* the one who got the stain on the couch? What have I told you about putting down tarps when you do your art in the living room? I better not find any more fingernails beneath the cushions.

Now, now, no crocodile tears. You must learn there are consequences for your actions. Go with Uncle Jack and be a good boy.

And Jack, please keep it down this time. I don't want to keep bothering Sister Larkspur and Sister Laburnum to deal with the police whenever they're called. The twins' room is getting crowded.

So sorry about that. I'm downright mortified with their behavior. Now, where were we?

Of course! The tiny one on the end is Little Sister Valentine. We found her wandering the street all by herself, lost on her trike. The poor thing was so scared out of her mind, she couldn't form a single word

After we brought her in and gave her some lemonade, the screaming finally stopped. Now she's a perfect little doll.

Are you sure you're alright? You don't look well.

Oh, where's our bathroom? It's up the stairs and to the right. You'll pass Cousin Iggy's room, but just ignore the noises. Here, I'll take you there. Really, it's no trouble at all.

Cousin Iggy's room is here on the landing— that door there. I should warn you, things get a little weird near Iggy's room.

Feel fReE to hOld mY hAnD if it's tO much

mY hAnD

Hold *my* hand

run

get out

run

*al*most

stay with us

run

we're almost therE

stay

there *get out*

For god's sake, run

There

hello

Here we are. That wasn't so bad, was it?

Just so you know, there are bars over the bathroom window. It wasn't safe otherwise— our guests kept falling out. Now they help Grandpa and Aunt Aubrey grow the flowers in the garden. And the lemon tree.

Where do you think you're going?

run

rUN

Run

Where are you going?

StAy

...

Now, now, don't be like that. There's simply no use bolting for the door. You should know family never leaves.

Not ever.

And anyone who comes into this house is family.