

CCO4: Halloween

FLOORBOARDS CREAKING

WIND WHISTLING

TAPE IS INSERTED INTO A RECORDER AND BEGINS TO PLAY

WIND CUTS OUT

MISS TENOR: They say that Arborwood Grove is haunted. They say that all the ghosts and spirits from within fifty miles of it convene there, once a year, for a Halloween party. They say that, on this one night, if you knock on the door, it might open. If you ask for candy, you might get some. They say that if you eat it, you will be attending next year's Halloween party at Arborwood Grove. But they say a lot of things.

THEME MUSIC PLAYS

CREDITS: File CC, Track Four. Halloween.

BELLS CHIME

HORROR MOVIE BEGINS PLAYING IN BACKGROUND: WITCH'S CACKLE

FERN: Robbie. Robbie!

ROBBIE: Hmm?

FERN: What time is it?

ROBBIE: Uh... 2:15?

FERN: Okay. Keep an eye on that, will you?

ROBBIE: Sure. What are we waiting for?

FERN: I'll tell you in a minute.

ROBBIE: Maman-

FERN: I'll tell you! Just... not right now. Watch the movie. And don't fall asleep this time.

ROBBIE: I wasn't asleep.

MOVIE FADES OUT

CAROLINE: And... Agh, there it goes. Time. Robbie said it, and I tried to hold on, but it just...

(Sighs)

MUSIC FADES IN WIND WHISTLES

CAROLINE: Time was invented by the living, you know. I suppose that's obvious. Most things were. But the idea of time, I think, is where the line is drawn between the living and the dead. The whole point of time is to break down a life into smaller pieces. But once a life is over, there's nothing to break down. Nothing to look forward to. Nothing to wait for. No "untils", no "afters". Just this. The way things are, here and now. Forever.

When I first died, I didn't figure it out for a while. I thought I was still alive, that I was escaping, crawling my way up through the rubble. And when I did realize the truth, you know what it was? What finally drove that nail in? It wasn't everyone ignoring me. It wasn't my sudden inability to interact with the world. No, it was before all that. Before I even had the chance to notice how non-existent I was.

After I died, I crawled up the stairs into the kitchen, and then up from there into the sitting room. And I just stood there. It was so familiar, and yet so different. There was just... there was just something... missing from the world. I couldn't quite

figure it out, so I simply stood there, and I looked up at the clock on the mantle. I listened to the clock tick, and I stared at the hands. And it took me a while, but I eventually realized that it was counting out an internal rhythm that I no longer had. The sound of my heartbeat, the weight of my body, the constant rush of blood through my veins.

Every detail of that moment is seared into my memory forever, but if someone were to ask me what time it was when I died I would not be able to answer.

(Sighs)

That clock. I saw that clock every day. It regulated my meals, my chores, the schedule of my life. When I looked at it on the first night of my death, I asked the question most people ask themselves when they're looking at a clock: What time is it?

I remember learning how to read that clock when I was a child. I remember my mother sitting me down on the sofa and putting that clock in my lap and patiently teaching me what the big hand meant, what the little hand meant. I remember sitting there, day in, day out, until I learned how to tell the time. But on the night that I died I stood beside that same sofa, and I stared at that same clock, and I... just... couldn't.

MUSIC ENDS

That clock ticked on and on, incomprehensibly, for an amount of time that I didn't know how to describe. And then at one point, long after my family had left the house, it stopped.

They didn't take it with them. They just left it there, on the mantle. I'm looking at it right now. The big hand is there, and the little hand is there. I am looking at it right now.

And I still don't know what time it is.

MOVIE FADES IN: FAINT SCREAM AND MUSIC

FERN: What time is it now?

ROBBIE: 2:19.

MOVIE FADES OUT

MUSIC FADES IN

CAROLINE: In a way, I think it's a blessing. When time is meaningless to you, you're less likely to notice how long it's been going on for. If I wanted to, I could just let go of the whole concept, and... drift.

But I don't. What I do is count. I still know how numbers work, and seasons. I count them as they pass by outside the window. I don't count winters or summers, because we sometimes get hail in August, and I know that would confuse me. Instead, I count autumns. One hundred and twelve, including this one. Some are nicer than others. Windy, and cold, whipping golden leaves across the sky. Flying, and tumbling, and skittering into every nook and cranny they can find. The upstairs nece- Washroom gets a new carpet every autumn.

As luck would have it, I've recently been able to turn my autumn count into a Halloween count. I never really celebrated Halloween when I was alive - it was a Celtic tradition, and the practice of trick-or-treating only started to take hold after I died. But I've watched the holiday grow and spread over these one hundred and twelve autumns, and now it's really quite large. It doesn't seem to have maintained its original meaning, but I don't mind that. I never celebrated it.

Now, though, I can look out my windows, and I can see children dressed up in costumes, collecting candy from their

neighbours. They never come here, but why would they? I don't have any candy.

(Laughs a little)

Sometimes, I wish I could make myself visible to the living, just so I could go out in my century-old nightgown and ask strangers for candy. I'd fit right in, if I was solid enough. Just another young ghost among the masses.

Of course, if I were to do that, I would first have to actually leave the house. So, I'll settle for celebrating the dead with those who choose to come to me. Like I said, there aren't many, but there are some.

MOVIE FADES IN: ZOMBIE NOISES

FERN: Almost there?

ROBBIE: What are you waiting for?

FERN: You'll see.

ROBBIE: Ugh, Maman—

MOVIE FADES OUT

CAROLINE: Thirty-four Halloweens ago, there were two girls, not much older than me. Fern and Sadie. The two of them snuck in here on Halloween night. They brought something with them, something I learned was a film projector. I'd never seen a film before. They were a novelty when I was alive, and the town wasn't nearly big enough back then for a cinema. There was a theatre, for plays and such, but I never went to one of those, either.

But on that night, here in my sitting room, I was finally able to experience the miracle of the motion picture. And I must say, if that's what all modern films are like, then I...

Well. I didn't have any expectations to begin with, but what I saw managed to defy them anyway. There was so much violence, profanity, indecenty. I mean, I haunt an empty house. I've had my fair share of teenagers who tried to... be indecent. None of them seem to get very far, even without any interference from me.

Which is good, because that kind of thing is not the kind of thing anyone should do while somebody else is here. And it is certainly not the kind of thing that should be projected up for everyone to see.

(Clears throat)

It took me longer than I'd like to admit to realize that all of those films had something in common. Monsters and murderers. Terror. Death. Ghosts.

Don't get me wrong, I did enjoy it. I loved every haunted, monstrous moment, and I'm not entirely sure why. It was all so familiar, and yet so... not. The spirits and ghosts in those movies... Not only did they have the ability to interact with the living, they used that ability for evil. And it's rarely explained, at least not in a way I can accept. A violent death does not necessarily create a violent spirit. If it did, I-

Well, I'd be an anomaly, wouldn't I?

Perhaps I am an anomaly.

Fern and Sadie came back the next Halloween, and the next, and the next, and the next. I have seen so many films, and so many different interpretations of beings like myself, but none of them felt... right. There are no stories about a ghost who cannot do anything.

So I'm left here, every Halloween, happy to have seen these people again but no closer to an understanding of why I am here. It's... difficult.

It's kind of ridiculous, too. After all this time, the only things I really know about ghosts are the things that living people acted out. And I don't think any of those things are actually true. They couldn't possibly all be true. It's like all the stories you tell, Miss Tenor. There are too many contradictions. They all seem to have a different idea of what it means to be a ghost, and none of them are right. Not yet, at least. I'm still waiting for a story that might ring true. And I know that one will find me. Until then, I'll simply enjoy the ones I get. And I do enjoy them, I really do. I love seeing these stories come alive on what is normally just an empty stretch of wall above the fireplace.

There used to be a painting of my grandmother there. The films are much less frightening. And not all of them are frightening. There are a few that seem to fall in the vein of Halloween, but are much less violent. Ghostbusters, for example. They always watch that one. They always somehow time it perfectly, so that it finishes right as the sun is rising.

They always go out and watch the sunrise together. Watch the world fill with light, to chase away the darkness they've been watching all Halloween.

And it really does fade away. Even Ghostbusters. It's odd - I know what the film is about, but every Halloween, by the time the sun comes up, I've forgotten nearly every detail. Until they start watching it again, I can't name the characters. Can't hum the theme song.

There seem to be quite a few things that are like that.

MOVIE FADES IN, SCREAM AND CREAKING

FERN: What time-

ROBBIE: 2:21. Maman-

FERN: Not yet.

MOVIE FADES OUT

CAROLINE: This is the thirty-fourth Halloween since Fern and Sadie first arrived. It's been so long. I've seen them slowly grow up. Fern, with her elaborate Halloween costumes and hairstyles. Sadie with all those superstitions, and a collection of tattoos that seemed to grow every time she came here.

They got married. Had a son, Robbie. He's been coming for the past few Halloweens, and he sometimes pretends to dislike it but we all know that he doesn't.

I didn't know a family could be like that. Two mothers, no father. Sneaking into a haunted house to watch scary films until sunrise. Maybe the world is different now from when I was alive. Maybe I just didn't know much about the world. Maybe I still don't.

But I'm learning, I think. Slowly. I like to imagine that I'm keeping up, at least. It all moves so quickly out there. Everything changes, even things that feel constant.

Fern isn't wearing a costume this year. Just a leather jacket with pink ribbons on it.

Sadie isn't here.

MOVIE FADES IN

FERN: Robbie?

ROBBIE: It's two-

FERN: No, no. I know. Almost 2:26, right?

ROBBIE: Just about, yeah.

FERN: I'll pause the movie.

MOVIE PAUSES

ROBBIE: What's-

FERN: You know the saying, that a broken clock is right twice a day?

ROBBIE: And those two minutes are the times when the veil between worlds is at its weakest. For those two minutes, the impossible becomes possible. Yeah, Maman. I know. Remember who raised me?

FERN: I know. The clock up there is stuck on 2:26.

ROBBIE: Well, it's 2:25 right now. But come on, Maman. I know you don't really believe all that crap.

FERN: She does.

ROBBIE: Maman-

FERN: She does. Sadie believes in "all that crap" with everything she has, and if belief counts for anything then... I have to do something, Robbie.

ROBBIE: It's 2:26.

FERN: Hello?

ROBBIE: Maman-

FERN: Shh. We've been visiting this place for over thirty years. Sadie says she's always felt that there might be something – or someone – here.

CAROLINE: What?

FERN: She says you might be worried about her. But she's okay. She just couldn't make it tonight. She's getting a new treatment, and she's not allowed to leave the hospital yet. She also says to tell you that the next time you see her, she'll have lost all her hair, and it probably won't have grown back very much.

ROBBIE: She really thinks the ghost is gonna care about that?

FERN: You never know. And, also, this isn't from her, but... if there's anything you can do, any... I don't know. Connections?

ROBBIE: I think you're getting ghosts and fae mixed up, Maman.

FERN: There could be fae here.

ROBBIE: I don't think Mom would let us come here if it was a fae house.

FERN: *(Laughs a little)* Fair enough. But still-

ROBBIE: 2:27.

FERN: Well, if anything miraculous does happen now... Don't tell your mother.

ROBBIE: Oh, I'm not even gonna tell her you asked. She'd never let us live it down. Now come on, we can't pause it too long.

MOVIE BEGINS PLAYING, FADES OUT

CAROLINE: ...Oh. Has Sadie really been... sensing me? All this time? She's never said anything about it before. Perhaps she thought that announcing her feelings to me would make me uncomfortable. That sounds like her.

I know Fern never sensed me. I don't even think she's sensing me now. She wants to, but... Whatever she might be feeling, it's likely just wishful thinking, or imagination, or-

Oh. Oh, I- I just tried to put a hand on her shoulder. Huh. I never learn, do I?

I'm glad that Sadie is alright, though. Last Halloween, she was sick. Even I could tell that. She was weak, and thin. She fell asleep early on into the night, and neither Fern nor Robbie woke her. Until Ghostbusters. They made sure she stayed awake for that. And they all cried when the sun came up. I think they thought that Sadie would not be coming back here.

For a while, I wondered if they were right. If Sadie was... gone. So I'm glad, because she's not gone. She's not trapped, or silent, or alone. This is not an existence I would wish on anyone, and Sadie is so much more than just anyone.

And I'm glad, too, that last Halloween wasn't the last Halloween. Her last, anyway. I'm going to be here for quite a while still. But that's alright. I've made it this long, haven't I? I am not the kind of ghost I see in those films.

But sometimes, I wonder if that's a good thing. As long as I remain the way that I am, I... will remain. Exactly as I am. If the Ghostbusters were real, I don't even think anyone would bother to call them on me.

And that's exactly the problem, isn't it? I have no way of knowing whether the Ghostbusters are real. I have no reason to believe they are not, I simply assume, just like everyone else.

I haven't seen much of the world, but I've certainly seen enough to know that skepticism never changes. Not in a hundred and twelve Halloweens. I don't think it ever will.

RECORDER CLICKS OFF
END MUSIC

CREDITS: They Say a Lot of Things is written by Shannon Smyth and

produced by Vienna Munck. Original music by Nathanael Kumar. This episode featured Max Kittleson as Caroline and Meaghan Cassidy as Miss Tenor, as well as Noah Letscher as Robbie and Andréanne Lamothe as Fern. For more information on the show, as well as transcripts and full credits, visit our website or check us out on tumblr. Links are in the description. If you're enjoying the show, please rate and review us on your favourite podcast provider, and tell a friend about us so they can enjoy the show too. Also? Stop thinking about elephants. The next time you think about elephants, let us know. Thanks for listening, and until next time, happy haunting.

MUSIC FADES OUT