

Two-Way Street

The will o'wisp and the jack o'lantern were rejoicing because the foggy season had arrived. Their jobs were much easier during the foggy season.

The two had just recently moved to this small town, and they lived at opposite ends of a long street that was, in fact, the only street in the town.

The will o' wisp was named Jack, and the jack o'lantern was named Will. Though different, both of these magical creatures did basically the same thing. They had the job of leading others astray. Their whole lives were centered on getting folks lost in woods, bogs, prairielands, and sometimes even amongst the buildings of larger towns.

Jack carried a magic lamp to lure with, and Will owned a fancy lantern that did pretty much the same thing. People, birds, animals, and other creatures found it impossible to resist following the magical lights. And since the foggy season had finally arrived, Will and Jack now began putting the lantern and lamp to their proper magical uses.

Unfortunately, living at opposite ends of the long street turned out to be a big problem for the two, as far as their jobs. For no sooner had Jack led a group of teenagers down the street, than they found the house they were looking for by the light of Will's lantern coming towards them.

At about the same time, Will had been luring two grannies along, who were trying to find the post office in the fog. He was hoping to take them all the way out to the swampy forest to get them lost. But the grannies spied Jack's lamp heading straight for them. The lamp lit up the pillar on the porch of the post office, and the ladies stepped right inside to buy their stamps and mail their parcels.

This went on for quite some time, with Will and Jack accidentally helping folks to find their way. And the people soon began kindly thanking the two for providing such excellent light to lead them safely through the fog. The dogs of the town were also happy to have plenty of light to prowl by, and they licked Jack's and Will's hands to say thank you. And the cats rubbed up against their shins, purring their thanks for help in finding their way. The townspeople even started looking for Jack and Will, instead of avoiding them as they once would have.

When two weeks of the foggy season had passed, with neither Will nor Jack leading a single creature astray, the two became very frustrated with one another. So they met by the stone wall in the graveyard at midnight to talk things over.

As lamplight bounced off the headstones, making the tree shadows look about a mile long, Will and Jack faced one another angrily. But they were so mad that they couldn't speak for awhile.

Finally, when midnight had become five minutes older, Jack took a deep breath and stated, "You are messing me up!"

"That's the pot calling the kettle black!" replied Will, his face very red and hot. "You're messing me up!"

Jack shook his head hard, as he said, "This is never going to work. We're just spinning our wheels. We can't do our jobs like this."

"So what are we going to do about it?" said Will.

Swinging his lamp very close to Will's shoulder, Jack answered, "You're going to have to move!"

"No way!" shouted Will, his lantern bouncing dangerously close to Jack's nose. "You need to move!"

"I'm not moving!" yelled Jack, with steam now shooting out of his hairy ears. "I finally found my dream house!"

"Well, I used my nest egg to buy my retirement house," replied Will, "so I'm not moving."

The two continued to glare at one another for quite some time. But they couldn't think of what to do to fix the problem.

Will sighed as he lowered his lantern. Jack also sighed as he placed his lamp on the ground. Then the two sat down on the stone wall to try to think things through.

After a time, as they sighed and sighed some more, they became less hot and angry. And their brains began to work better, as often happens when people get over being hot and angry.

When the clock on the church struck exactly one o'clock, Jack had a great brainstorm. "What if we work together for a bit?" he said.

"You mean head in the same direction down the street?" said Will, who had also just thought of this.

"It might work," stated Jack, hopefully.

After thinking a minute or so more, Will nodded and said, "We could go one way one night..."

“...and the other way the next,” finished Jack.

This seemed like a good solution, and the two new partners shook hands on the deal before heading home.

The next night, they met in front of Jack’s house to carry out their plan. Barely thirty minutes later, the pair of mischief-makers managed to lead a man deep into the swampy forest, where he became very lost. And it took the man until dawn to find his way home.

Will and Jack were pleased that they had been successful in doing what they were supposed to do. However, something felt wrong. Getting a person lost wasn’t nearly as much fun as it used to be. Something was missing.

As they were having tea together the next day, Jack and Will discussed their new problem.

“It just wasn’t any fun at all,” stated Will.

Jack nodded in agreement. “I know. What went wrong?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” answered Will. “We did just what we were supposed to do.”

As Jack was nibbling his second teacake, he had a funny thought, and he told his friend, “He didn’t thank us.”

“You’re right,” said Will, in surprise. “That’s what was missing.”

“And he didn’t smile either,” said Jack, thoughtfully.

Both Jack and Will suddenly realized that they missed whatever it was they felt when looking at the smiling faces of people thanking them upon reaching their destinations.

In order to solve this new problem, the two decided to go back to working alone, because they figured out that they liked helping folks find their way, instead of getting them lost.

The two friends began meeting for tea every afternoon. But in the evenings, they did their jobs, starting at opposite ends of the long street to help lead others safely through the fog.

And even though people sometimes forgot to smile and say thank you, Will and Jack eventually decided that they liked their new jobs much better than they had the old ones.