

Henrietta and the Great Pumpkin Mystery

A Henrietta Short Story

By J B Angell

It was the day before Halloween, and everyone across Gillyford was busy getting ready to celebrate their favourite day of the year. Ben, Tilly, and the rest of the children had been working on their costumes since the beginning of October and were rushing around to get the last few details perfect for the annual Trick or Treat Parade. Meanwhile, Henrietta was preparing a unique display for the evening. She didn't want to use regular fireworks as they would be too loud for the animals of Gillyford. So instead, she was using some special magic to create a story in the sky, while the Gillyford band played music in the town square.

Halloween wasn't just a celebration for the people of Gillyford of course. All the magical creatures and beings who lived on the island were just as excited. The Twiggerts living in Brimbleberry Woods had been busy making sure all the leaves were turning the correct shades of gold, orange, and brown. The forest fairies had been busy decorating with firefly lanterns and spiderwebs. Even the mischievous Grumble Fruit had joined in the fun. They had let Miss Katrina, the schoolteacher, bring her class to visit them. They made funny and scary faces for the children to copy onto sheets of paper which they would later use to carve out pumpkins.

Pendle the dragon had come over to help Henrietta with the display. It would take both of them flying together to bring it to life. The two chatted as Henrietta mixed potions and poured them into special flasks, while Pendle studied the flight directions they had worked out together. He was looking forward to showing off some of his flying skills. Rover sat beside him, purring contentedly when a small *tap tap tap* at the door startled him awake.

"Meow," he said, somewhat disgruntled that he had been disturbed.

Henrietta looked up from her potions.

"What's wrong, Rover?" she asked.

Rover pointed to the door with one paw and gave another annoyed "Meow!"

Henrietta listened and could just about hear the faint sound.

"It's open," she called, "You can come in."

The door didn't open, instead, the tapping just became more urgent.

Tap Tap Tap Tap Tap

Curious now, Henrietta walked over to the door and peered out of the little window at the top. She couldn't see anyone outside, but she noticed a faint glow. As she opened the door, she realised why they had not been able to come in. Outside, hovering just above Henrietta's waist, was a whole tizzy of garden fairies. Henrietta understood why they hadn't come in. The door was too large and heavy for them to move. She made a note to make a fairy door so this wouldn't happen again.

One of the fairies flew up so she was face to face with Henrietta. The witch recognised her friend Beatrix. She had a very worried look on her face. Something that does not often happen to fairies.

“Hello, Bea,” she smiled, “I didn’t expect to see any of you today. Shouldn’t you be at Sunnydale Farm getting the pumpkins ready for the carving contest?”

“That’s why we are here, Henrietta,” said Bea, her voice filled with panic, “It’s the pumpkins, they’ve all disappeared!”

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Henrietta invited the fairies in, and they all huddled around on the kitchen table. Pendle had made them a pot of hot tea to warm them up. However, he did struggle to pour into the tiny cups with his large dragon claws. They all chuckled at his awkwardness, none of them except for Henrietta realising he was doing it on purpose to help them calm down.

Once they had a moment to sip their drinks, Henrietta turned to Bea.

“Now what’s going on with these disappearing pumpkins?” she asked.

Bea put her flower-shaped cup down and took a deep breath.

“We’ve been helping Mr. Sunnydale with the pumpkins for the contest tomorrow. This year has been one of our best crops ever. They were all there yesterday when we went to sleep. But when we woke up this morning, they were just...gone!” said Bea, becoming flustered.

“A whole field of pumpkins can’t just up and walk away,” said Pendle, “Even on Gilliyford.”

“You’re right,” said Henrietta, picking up her magnifying glass and holding it close to her face, “We need to find out what’s happened. And we need to do it quickly. Bea, can you take us to the scene of the crime, please?”

Bea nodded and gulped down the rest of her tea. As fast as lightning she was in the air, her wings beating like a hummingbird’s.

“Oh broom, time for an adventure,” called Henrietta.

Broom quickly appeared from where he had been napping down by the fireplace. He was already decorated for Halloween, with orange, yellow, and black ribbons woven into his bristles. Autumn vines were wrapped all the way up to his handlebars, where little jack-o-lanterns hung to complete his spooky look.

Ding, Ding

“Maybe our fairy friends should ride with me,” said Pendle, “They can hold on to my back so we can get there faster.”

Some of the fairies looked a little nervous at the idea of riding on the back of what was to them, an enormous dragon, but they climbed on anyway. Bea fluttered down and sat on Pendle’s head, grabbing onto his horns.

“Everybody ready?” called Henrietta.

Pendle and Bea both gave a thumbs up, with Pendle extending his big, purple wings at the same time.

“Then let’s fly!” said Henrietta as she twisted the throttle on Broom's handlebars and shot off down the garden path. Broom revved his bristles hard, as he lifted higher and higher, taking them above the trees of Brimbleberry Woods. Pendle, meanwhile, crouched down and with a great push, launched himself into the air. He beat his wings furiously to catch up with Henrietta and Broom.

“Which way?” asked Henrietta, having to shout over so the others could hear her.

“Head to Sunnydale Farm and take a left before you get to Morris the Bulls field. It’s just behind the house,” Bea shouted back.

Both Henrietta and Pendle banked left. Broom gave a ‘ding ding’ on his bell as they did so. Morris the bull snorted and nodded his head to say hello before going back to munching on the grass. A few minutes later they were landing gently at Sunnydale Farm, the home of Henrietta’s friends; Ben and Tilly. Henrietta took extra care as she brought Broom to a gentle landing. She didn’t want to upset the chickens again. She could see Marjory, a particularly plump and intelligent chicken, eyeing her up as Broom set down. Marjory was very protective of her girls, and Henrietta knew better than to upset any of them by coming in too fast.

“Hello!” called Henrietta.

There was no answer. The farm seemed to be deserted.

“Everyone must have gone into Tumbledown,” guessed Henrietta.

“Where’s the pumpkin patch?” asked Pendle, looking around.

“This way,” said Bea, “Follow me.”

The fairy flapped her wings and hurriedly buzzed towards the back of the farmhouse. Henrietta, Pendle, and the other fairies followed behind her. They all rounded the corner of the house and stopped, shocked. Where there should have been a huge pumpkin patch, there was just a muddy field of ground. A few leaves and some vines from the pumpkin

plants were scattered here and there. But not a single big, round, orange pumpkin could be seen.

Henrietta couldn't help but give a little gasp. For so many pumpkins to vanish overnight was something even she had never seen before. She could feel the disappointment of her fairy friends. Garden fairies took great pride in their work. For something like this to happen was unthinkable to them.

"Pendle," she said, "Would you please fly up and see if you can spot anything from the air? Whoever did this must have left a trail behind."

"Good idea," said Pendle. And with that, he stretched out his wings and gracefully launched himself skyward.

"Okay," said Henrietta, "Let's spread out and see if we can find any clues."

Everyone began looking around to see if they could find anything that would explain where the pumpkins had disappeared to. After a few minutes, Pendle called down to Henrietta.

"Henrietta, I think you should come up here," he said.

Henrietta whistled for Broom and flew up to where Pendle was circling.

"What have you found?" she asked.

"Look down there. What do you think of that?" he said.

Henrietta looked down to where Pendle was pointing and let out a gasp when she realised what she was looking at.

"Those look like footprints," she said, "There's something familiar about them as well."

"Those are funny-looking footprints," said Pendle, "They look almost...leafy. We should follow them."

Henrietta followed the trail to see if she could figure out where they were going. She peered over into the distance as far as she could. Her eyes widened when she realised where they were headed.

"Oh dear," she gasped, "Oh dear, oh dear. This could be a bigger problem than we imagined. I think I know who our Pumpkin thief is."

She flew down with Pendle following her. Henrietta called everyone over. The serious look on her face had them worried.

“Everyone, I think I know who took the pumpkins and where they have gone,” she said.

“Then we need to go there and get them back. And find out why they took them,” said Beatrix.

Henrietta shook her head.

“It’s not that simple,” replied Henrietta, “You see, I think they’ve been taken by the Spirit of Halloween himself.”

Everyone stood in shocked silence.

“But why would the spirit take our pumpkins?” asked Bea.

“I don’t know,” said Henrietta, “But I’m going to find out.”

“We’re coming as well,” said Pendle.

“It could be dangerous. I don’t want any of you to get hurt,” said Henrietta.

Pendle and Beatrix looked at each other “We’re coming!” they both said together.

Henrietta smiled. She hadn’t wanted to go alone. Although she and the spirit were friends, she knew he could be difficult if he was upset about something. And if he had taken the pumpkins, he must have been very upset. Henrietta whistled for Broom, who came flying around to her. Henrietta climbed on, while Bea got herself comfortable back on Pendle’s head.

“The rest of you go and find as many fairies as you can,” said Henrietta, “Let them know what’s going on, and gather them together. We will need help bringing the pumpkins back.”

The rest of the garden fairies nodded and flew off to gather up everyone they could. Henrietta turned to Pendle and Beatrix.

“Ready?”

They both gave a thumbs up.

“Right,” she said, her hat changing into a crash helmet, “Let’s go, Broom!”

Broom revved his bristles and shot into the air; Pendle and Bea stayed close behind as they headed towards Haunted Hill, the home of the Spirit of Halloween.

It took them about 12 minutes to get to Haunted Hill at the far end of Gillyford. They landed a little away from the entrance to the Spirit's cave. Henrietta didn't want to just burst in. They needed to be very careful. Something had upset the Spirit and they had to be mindful of his feelings.

As they walked up to the cave entrance, they noticed several signs had been put up.

KEEP OUT!

GO AWAY!

VISITORS WILL BE TRICKED AT!

"Tricked at?" quizzed Pendle.

"Well," said Henrietta, "He is the Spirit of Halloween."

Pendle and Bea nodded as they worked it out. For the Spirit, a trick would be the ultimate punishment for anyone. They carefully approached the cave, past the signs. Henrietta stopped them just before they got to the entrance.

"Look at that," gasped Bea, pointing to something on the ground.

Henrietta walked over to where Bea was pointing and picked the object up.

"What is it?" asked Pendle.

"It's a piece of broken pumpkin," replied Henrietta, "We must be on the right trail."

"There's another one," said Pendle, "And another..."

The three of them followed a line of broken bits of pumpkin all the way up the cobweb-covered cave. There was no doubt anymore where the pumpkins had been taken. Henrietta didn't know why her friend would take them, but she was going to find out. She walked up to the cavemouth and peered in.

"Hello," she called, "Spirit, are you home?"

They waited for a minute without a reply.

"Spirit, it's me, Henrietta Hedgekin,"

Another pause. Henrietta was going to call out again when suddenly a booming voice shouted:

"GO AWAY!"

Bea grabbed on tight to one of Pendle's horns. Even the brave dragon was trembling at that great, booming voice. Henrietta, however, was not intimidated by it. Everyone was depending on her. And she also knew the Spirit's bark was a lot worse than his bite.

"We need to talk to you," she continued, "About the pumpkins."

"GO AWAY!"

Henrietta was getting annoyed now. She had very little time for rudeness or bad manners.

"Jack O'Lantern, you get yourself out here right now young man," she said sternly.

Pendle and Beatrix looked at each other. They had never seen Henrietta upset like this before. A soft groan came out of the cave; followed by slow, sulky footsteps. The two looked on as a figure began to appear from the darkness. Whoever it was, had a lantern in one hand held up high. The light made it difficult to see their face. Only once the figure had fully emerged, did they drop the lantern low enough for the others to be able to see.

Even Henrietta gave a little gasp. Instead of his normal pumpkin head, Jack had an old, grubby turnip.

"Oh, you poor thing," said Henrietta, now wishing she hadn't got angry, "What's happened to your glorious pumpkin head?"

It had been many years since she had seen Jack with his old turnip head. She remembered how he had been back then. All grumpy and unhappy. Right until he found his pumpkin head. That had been a very special Halloween. It was when he had finally become his true self. So why was he now standing here with his old head? What had happened?

"I'm sorry, Henrietta, I shouldn't have been rude," he said, not wanting to look the witch in the eye, "I'm not feeling myself lately. You see...someone has made off with my pumpkin head. I've been having to use this old thing."

Jack tapped on the side of the gnarled, grey turnip on his shoulders.

"It's okay old friend," said Henrietta. She put a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Tell us what happened."

Jack slumped down on the ground and hugged his knees close to his chest. Bea and Pendle had come over, and all four of them now sat in a circle.

"Well, it all started a couple of days ago. I was busy getting things ready for Halloween. You know how busy it gets at this time of the year. I'd decided that my head could use a bit of a shine. Must look my best for the festival."

He tried to put on a smile, but it looked more like a sneer on the old, stringy turnip.

“Anyway,” he continued, “I’d put it down and went to get a cloth to give it a good polish, and when I came back, it was gone. It just vanished.”

“So that’s why you’ve been taking all the pumpkins,” said Bea.
She couldn’t be angry anymore. She could only imagine that it must be very upsetting to have someone make off with your head.

“Yes,” said Jack, “I’m sorry, I just didn’t know what to do. I need to find my proper pumpkin head, or Halloween will be ruined.”

“You should have come to see me,” said Henrietta, “You know can always rely on your friends.”

“That’s right,” said Pendle, “We dragons know when you’re in trouble, there’s one witch you can always turn to.”

Henrietta blushed a little.

“Now let’s get on with finding your head, Mr. Jack.”

Both Henrietta and Beatrix nodded in agreement. They were going to get Jack’s pumpkin back.

“Thank you, everyone,” he said, seeming a bit happier.

“There’s just one thing,” said Henrietta, “We need to get the pumpkins back that you took.”

“Of course,” said Jack, “They are down in my cave. But how will you get them back in time?”

“Leave that to me,” said Beatrix confidently. She pursed her lips and made a sound very much like birdsong. A few seconds later, a chaffinch flew down and hopped over to her.

“I need you to go and get the fairies, please. Tell them to come here to the caves and collect the pumpkins.”

The chaffinch whistled a reply and flew off.

“Thank you,” Beatrix called out.

“Where did you last see your head?” Henrietta asked.

“It was right over there,” replied Jack, “On that rock by the trees.”

Henrietta and the others walked over and began looking around for clues. It only took a few minutes before Beatrix spotted something.

“Over here,” she called out, “I’ve found something.”

The others rushed over.

“Look,” she said, “Those are fairy tracks.”

“Why would a fairy take a pumpkin?” asked Pendle, “I thought you were looking after them.”

“I think that might be why,” said Beatrix, “I think one of my garden fairies must have spotted it and thought it was one of the pumpkins from the farm.”

“That’s why I could hear my head singing to me when I flew over,” said Jack, “But I couldn’t find exactly where it was coming from, so I panicked and took all the pumpkins.”

Jack suddenly felt embarrassed.

“I know it was wrong and I was acting silly,” he said apologetically, “Can you forgive me, Beatrix.”

“Of course, silly. I don’t know what I’d do if my head suddenly walked off by itself.”

Everyone giggled at this.

“Now, enough wallowing in self-pity. We have a pumpkin to find,” said Henrietta.

“We found the other pumpkins by spotting tracks,” said Pendle, “Maybe we can do the same again.”

The others nodded and spread out around where the Spirit had said he had left his pumpkin head. They looked around, being careful not to disturb the ground too much. It wasn’t long before Beatrix spotted something.

“Over here,” she called.

Everyone rushed over to see what Bea had found. She was pointing to the ground excitedly.

“Look, those are fairy tracks. And I think I know just the fairy they belong to,” she said, “Pendle, how fast can you fly me to the farm?”

Pendle gave her a big toothy grin.

“Very fast,” he said.

Bea flew up and perched on Pendle’s head, holding on tightly to his horns. The dragon spread his wings, leapt into the air, and sped off to Sunnydale Farm.

It took them almost an hour to return to the cave, and when they did, they had someone else with them. It was another garden fairy. Henrietta recognised him as Cosmo. He was a particularly neat and tidy fairy who liked everything just so.

The three of them landed by where Henrietta and Jack were sitting. Pendle was puffed out from going so fast and fell into a heap once the fairies had climbed off him.

“Sorry it took us so long,” said Beatrix, “I think Cosmo has something to tell you.”

Cosmo was staring in awe at Jack. He had never seen a spirit before, least of all the actual spirit of Halloween. Bea nudged him with her elbow.

“Erm, well,” he stammered, “I was scouting around making sure everything was tidy when I came across a stray pumpkin. I thought it was from the farm. Remember when the field imps kept trying to sneak off with them?”

Beatrix nodded. She had chased off quite a few field imps herself.

“Well, naturally I picked it up and started to drag it back when I noticed it had a ghastly face already carved in it,” continued Cosmo.

“Ahem,” said Jack, glaring at the fairy.

Cosmo gulped as he realised what he had said.

Henrietta stepped in before anyone said or did something they might regret.

“What did you do with it, Cosmo?” she asked.

“I dropped it in the forest, just over there.”

Cosmo pointed towards an area inside the forest.

“Come on, Cosmo,” ordered Bea, grabbing his arm, “We need to get that pumpkin back.”

It didn’t take them long to return with the pumpkin. Henrietta was pleased to see it hadn’t been damaged. Jack was overjoyed.

“My head,” he shouted with glee, “My glorious pumpkin head!”

He quickly ran over to the two fairies who were now struggling with the huge pumpkin. They set it down as Jack ran over. He quickly took off the old, shrivelled turnip and picked up his pumpkin head, putting it on his shoulders. The second he did, the magical candle inside lit up. It made him look warmer and friendlier. And for the first time since they had arrived at the cave, everyone saw him smile.

“Oh, thank you, thank you,” he sang as he danced around with joy.

His happiness was infectious and everyone else was smiling and clapping.

“I’m sorry I mistook your head for just another pumpkin,” said Cosmo, feeling ashamed.

“It’s okay my little friend. I know you didn’t mean any harm,” said Jack, “And please let me apologise for taking all the pumpkins in my panic. I should have trusted in my friends and asked for help. I was wrong to take everything and nearly ruin Halloween for everyone.”

“Speaking of which,” said Pendle, “How are we going to get all these pumpkins back?”

Just then the air was filled with the buzzing of lots of tiny wings. The group turned to see a whole flight of Garden Fairies flying around the corner.

“The gang is here,” said Beatrix excitedly.

“But even with everyone’s help, I don’t think we can get all of the pumpkins back in time,” said Cosmo.

“I think Henrietta and I can help with that,” said Jack, a mischievous grin on his face. Henrietta smiled and nodded.

“Everyone grab one pumpkin each and start making your way back to Sunnydale Farm,” she said, “Jack and I will handle the rest.”

“You can’t carry all of these by yourself,” said Beatrix.

“Don’t worry,” said Henrietta, “When friends work together, they can do anything.”

Once everyone had picked up a pumpkin, Henrietta and Jack joined hands and together spoke a special spell.

*“Orange fruits,
That fairies have grown.
Pick yourselves up,
And head for home.”*

Everyone held their breath, waiting to see what would happen. For a moment, it looked as if the spell hadn’t worked. Henrietta was about to try again when suddenly, one of the pumpkins sprouted vines...and stood up. Another one did the same, then another, and another until all were standing to attention.

“It worked,” clapped Jack.

“Let’s get these fellows back to the farm,” said Henrietta, “Pumpkins, quick march.”

Following Henrietta’s command, all the pumpkins began marching down the mountain and back towards the farm.

“Thank you, Henrietta,” said Jack, “Halloween would have been ruined without your help.”

“I hope you know that can always come to your friends when you need help, Jack,” replied Henrietta.

“I have,” he said, “Now I need to get to work. That Halloween magic isn’t going to weave itself.”

With that, they gave each other a friendly hug, and Henrietta followed the pumpkins back to Sunnydale Farm.

That Halloween was one of the best in many years on Gillyford. Not least of all because everyone’s pumpkins seemed extra magical. With a little something that no one could quite explain. No one, that is, except a few fairies, a dragon called Pendle, and a witch called Henrietta Hedgekin.