

The Three Lost Kids
and
The Death of the Sugar Fairy

by
Kimberly Kinrade

Chapter 1 - The Haunted House

My first double-digit birthday should have been the most amazing birthday ever, especially since it took place on Halloween. And it would have been, too, if my irritating little sisters hadn't spent the whole day arguing about costumes and candy and complaining that they didn't get any presents. Well, duh, it was *my* birthday, after all. I didn't get presents on *their* birthdays, either.

Still, we had a whole night of trick-or-treating ahead of us, so I didn't let their sour moods spoil my special day.

The wind outside howled with the voices of the dead. That's what I liked to imagine, anyway – that all the stories about Halloween were true, and tonight the veil between the living and the dead would be so thin that we could connect with spirits. How cool would it be to actually talk to a spirit on Halloween?

"It's mine, give it to me!" Bella grabbed the brush from Lexie's hands and Lexie screamed at the top of her lungs, right outside my bedroom door.

I slammed it shut, grateful we'd moved to a bigger house and I could finally have my own room.

"Girls, it's time to go," Mom said. "Are you ready? Bella, please don't take things from people's hands. It's rude. Lexie, please don't shriek like a wild banshee. It's annoying *and* rude."

Mom was so funny sometimes.

I checked my costume one last time and straightened my black Fairy wings, then made sure my dog TayTay's wings were centered. He stood on his hind legs

and smiled at me, excited to be going trick-or-treating. We couldn't take River, our Chihuahua, because she'd just bark at everyone and be a pain. I wanted to dress the kittens up and take them on a leash, but Mom and Dad said "Absolutely not!" in that kind of voice that I knew I shouldn't argue with. At least I got TayTay.

We left the room and Lexie, my six-year-old sister, stood by the front door in her angel costume, looking so absolutely adorable you'd think she'd just fallen from heaven... if you hadn't just heard her whining two minutes ago. Bella, my eight-year-old sister, had the best dragon costume ever. I almost wished I'd picked that too, but then I looked in the mirror and smiled. Mom had put black eyeliner on my face in neat designs, and my dark Fairy costume fit me perfectly.

I grabbed my plastic pumpkin and TayTay's leash, and we all headed out.

Mom and Dad wore the same costumes they always wore. Mom was a witch and Dad was a sorcerer. They held hands and kissed as we left, and Bella stuck her finger in her throat like she was gagging.

I laughed, because Bella always made faces when Mom and Dad kissed, which was all the time.

Mom turned and smiled at her. "Better we kiss than fight, don't you think?"

We all nodded. I had friends whose parents fought all the time, and I totally preferred that my parents kissed a lot, even if it did embarrass us.

The night was colder than we'd been told, and I quickly regretted not bringing my jacket. It would have ruined the look of my costume, anyway, and my wings would have gotten smooshed, so I dealt with it.

We walked to a neighborhood that everyone said always had the best decorations and candy anywhere, and so I couldn't believe what I saw when we got there.

Nothing. Well, almost nothing – a few dying jack-o-lanterns with their candles snuffed-out, and one lonely ghost hanging on someone's tree.

We went to the first house and knocked, but no one answered. Same with the next three.

Finally, we came to a house with a light on. Mom and Dad waited for us on the sidewalk as we walked up the sidewalk. When the door opened, we held out our buckets and yelled "Trick-or-Treat" in unison.

The old woman at the door smiled and held out a bowl for us. "Go ahead and take a few. I can tell it's slim pickings this year." Her breath smelled like onions.

I couldn't help but ask, "What's going on? Why aren't more people handing out candy or decorating?"

She shrugged, then winked at me. "The magic of the season is fading. People just don't care about Halloween anymore."

We walked back to our parents, heads slumped in sadness. Even TayTay's tail stopped wagging. Dad reached for my hand. "What's wrong, honey?"

"This is the worst Halloween ever. No one's giving out candy. No one decorated. The lady at that house said no one cares anymore." A tear stung my eye and I tried to dry it off without smearing my makeup. My birthday was ruined, and so was Halloween.

Bella and Lexie both wrapped their arms around me. Lexie smiled up at me with her too cute angel eyes. "It's okay, Maddie. We'll make sure your birthday is the best!"

We hit up some more houses and got some more candy. Bella shoved pieces into her mouth when Mom and Dad weren't looking.

Lexie saw and didn't hesitate to tattle. "Mom! Dad! Bella's eating her candy without permission."

Mom sighed. "Girls, please save it for later. We have a lot of houses to cover and I don't want you getting belly aches."

Nobody listened. I snuck a tootsie roll in my mouth as we rounded another corner, and chewed it as fast as I could.

By the time we finished the block, all three of us had our hands on our bellies. With half my candy already gone, my stomach rumbled and ached, but I refused to say anything. If we complained at all, our parents would just take us

home.

We turned the corner, and all thoughts of stomach pain disappeared as we approached the coolest haunted house I'd ever seen. "Wow, check it out. Hundreds of carved pumpkins!"

Lexie squealed and jumped up and down. "And ghosts and spider webs and fog!"

Bella charged ahead. "I bet they have tons of candy. Come on!"

TayTay and I followed Bella at full run, ignoring Mom and Dad, who hollered at us to slow down. Like that was even possible. This was the first sign of real Halloween we'd seen all night and we wanted to enjoy every minute of it. TayTay howled at the moon as we raced to the door, panting and excited.

Bella stepped back. "You ring the door, Maddie, since it's your birthday."

"Aw, thanks." I pressed the button and a creepy song played in the house.

After a moment, the door swung open, but no one was there. I peaked inside. "Hello?"

A headless skeleton placed in the hall came to life and nearly scared me to death. "This house is haunted as you can well see. Close the door and let it be. But if you are a brave lad or lass, come inside and take your chance."

Lexie frowned. "Lass and chance don't even rhyme properly."

Leave it to the smartest first grader ever to pick apart a spooky riddle from a skeleton.

Bella grinned. "We should go in. It's obviously a haunted house you get to walk through."

I looked around, and then behind us. Mom and Dad hadn't quite caught up yet. What was taking them so long? "I don't know, guys. You know we're not allowed to go into houses without our parents. We'd be so busted!"

But Bella being Bella, she didn't listen and just bolted into the house.

Lexie and I looked at each other and shrugged. I couldn't let my sister go in alone, so we followed her in, with TayTay at our heels.

As soon as I stepped inside, the door slammed closed behind me and I nearly

jumped out of my wings. Lights in the hall flickered on and off, then shut off completely, leaving us in the dark. "Bella, where are you?"

"I'm right here. I didn't leave."

She sounded close, but I couldn't see her.

Lexie clutched my hand. "I'm scared, Maddie. I want Mommy and Daddy."

"Me too. Let's go get them. Bella, follow my voice to the front door, we're getting out of here."

"O-okay." Her voice trembled as she spoke, and she sounded farther away still.

"Bella, come on!" I turned around, and pressed my hand against the smooth wood of the door, looking for the handle. "I can't find it. The doorknob, it's gone."

"But that's not possible. Let me try." Lexie shook in fear, but scooted forward to feel around. "You're right, it's just a wall. The whole door is gone. Bella, where are you?"

"I'm over here. I can't find you."

I scrunched up my eyes in an attempt to see. "Why do you sound like you're in another room? You're going the wrong way. You have to walk to us." The darkness was so complete, like a black room with no light. "Okay, on three, we're all going to scream. Someone will hear us. Mom and Dad are for sure caught up by now. One, two, three!"

"Help!" We screamed as loud as we could, over and over.

When we couldn't scream anymore, our throats too sore, a flickering of light came back on and the skeleton waved at me. "Welcome to the haunted house, where guests stay forever and the dead linger on to play."