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The Pumpkin Deal

A Win-Win Halloween

By Alan Venable

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This play is based on the 2021 picture book *The Pumpkin Deal: A Win-Win Halloween* by the same author, illustrated by Lena Venable, published by One Monkey Books and available from the publisher and on Amazon.

A class reading script for live or online performance

CHARACTERS:

NARRATOR(S)
WITCH/WIZARDS (any number)
BOSS
SCARECROW
CRICKET

OTHER ASSISTANCE

CHIMES OF MIDNIGHT
MOON HOLDER-UPPER

PROPS & COSTUMES:

Hats or other costumes as desired
Large drawing of moon
2 large drawings of Scarecrow pumpkin head (before & after carving)
Pumpkins and other vegetables to hold up as desired
Bats, salamanders, ghosts-in-sheets, etc. as desired
Slide whistle optional to accompany SCARECROW

STAGING:

Chairs for reading. Entrances and exits are optional. Characters could stand up when they speak.

NARRATOR:

In an end-of-October sunset they swarmed
Down from the sky on their rakes and brooms.
Of course, you know what eve I mean,
That dreaded eve called....(What?)

(BOSS & WITCH/WIZARDS ENTER or rise in their seats.)

WITCH/WIZARDS or AUDIENCE:

...HALLOWEEN!

WITCH/WIZARDS:

(Ad Lib) Woo-hoo! Yay Halloween! Boo! (etc)

BOSS:

Witches and wizards!

NARRATOR:

...The boss wizard yelled,

BOSS:

What nasty tricks shall we play tonight,
To fill our bitter hearts with gladness,
By driving other poor creatures to madness?

NARRATOR:

Oh, this was a squabbling posse of loonies,
Who nattered and nagged at a deafening pitch,
And haggled and argued, insulted and taunted.
So most often *none* of them got what they wanted.

WITCH/WIZARD 1:

I know!

NARRATOR:

...Said one of the quarrelsome gang.

WITCH/WIZARD 1:

Let's boil a cauldron of choke-berry juice.
We'll drop in some stink bugs and call it a stew,
And force salamanders to swallow the brew!

WITCH/WIZARD 2:

No, no! I'm sure we can do even worse.
Let's mire the spiders in buckets of honey,
Hold cheese out of reach of ravenous rats,
And sweep the air briskly to frenzy the bats!

WITCH/WIZARD 3:

No, no, no, say I! I say we get meaner.
We'll tie up the ghosts in their own white sheets.
We'll twist them together and leave them to dangle
All night from a tree in a terrible tangle!

BOSS:

Enough, you numbskulls, Now listen to me:
We'll go out and capture a bushel of lizards,
And fill their slithery heads with such scares,
They'll toss all night with reptilian nightmares!

WITCH/WIZARDS:

Oh, have it your *own* way, grumble, grumble....

NARRATOR:

They always gave in when the big boss took over.
At quarrels the old goat was always the roughest.
When wizards got tough, he was always the toughest.

CRICKET: (Entering)

Chirp! Chirp! Hello.

NARRATOR:

Then an eighth witch started chirping among them,
To whom none of them wanted to listen.
She'd just woke up from a nap in the thicket.
Her chirp was the reason they all called her Cricket.

CRICKET:

Good evening, oh my dear sisters and brothers,
Regarding the madness we're making tonight,
May I remind you, what all of us crave
When Halloween skeletons rise from the grave?

Did you all forget what we like to do first?
We like to carve pumpkins with terrible faces,
With candles inside them that cast a weird glow
To light up the rest of our terrible show.

WITCH/WIZARDS:

Fie!

NARRATOR:

cried the others (as witches must say),
But then fell silent 'til one of them murmured.

WITCH/WIZARD 4:

Our jack-o-lanterns! How did we forget
How we always brighten our Halloween fête?!

BOSS:

Well, I say...

NARRATOR:

Before the boss could command them to stop,
The other six maniacs screamed with delight,

WITCH/WIZARDS:

(Ad lib) Taking off! Whoopee! Giddy-up broom!

NARRATOR:

And flew in a fleet to the neighboring village
To burgle eight pumpkins by trickery or pillage.
But the market was closed at that darkening hour,
And not even one pumpkin was left in the stalls —
Just old, squishy carrots and other such clutter
As finicky villagers throw in the gutter.

BOSS:

Aha!

NARRATOR:

At once the boss wizard planted his claws
In an ancient, beat-up, yellowing cabbage,
Too moldy and rotten to make sauerkraut.

BOSS:

This is *mine*! I saw it first so I get it!

WITCH/WIZARD 5:

Finders, keepers! I'm taking this old rotten eggplant!

WITCH/WIZARDS:

(Ad lib) Here's an onion! I get this rutabaga! I get this!

NARRATOR:

With that, the rest of them started to fight
Over the rest of the garbage in sight.

NARRATOR:

I mean all except Cricket, who landed last.

CRICKET:

Aren't there any pumpkins? What's left for me?

WITCH/WIZARDS:

No, nothing for you, Cricket witch. That's fair.
You can't arrive late and expect *us* to share.

CRICKET:

Oh dear.
Well, let's stop and think here, if we can,
Since the market is all out of pumpkins,
Let's fly out to the fields on the chance we might find
That some farmers left some of their pumpkins behind.

BOSS:

But.... Wait a.... Ach! Ach!

NARRATOR:

And before the boss wizard could finish a phrase...

WITCH/WIZARDS:

(Ad lib taking off again) Yeah! Back on our brooms! To the fields! Let's go!

NARRATOR:

The others threw down what they had,
And sped off cackling, into the night,
Until harvested land came in sight.

WITCH/WIZARD 6:

Look down there! There they are!

NARRATOR:

The mob swooped down
On seven last pumpkins below,
By the side of a fence and mostly concealed,
And yet by the moonlight revealed.

BOSS:

Woo hoo!

NARRATOR:

Boss wizard landed at once on the biggest.
The other six followed his lead.

WITCH/WIZARDS:

(Ad lib) I get this one! No, I want it! I get this one! Let me have that!

NARRATOR:

They pounced upon smaller ones for their own,
Until all of the pumpkins were gone.
But when they tried to pick up these treasures
And carry their booty away,
They discovered each one was tied down by a tether
Of vine as tough as tyrannosaur leather.

CRICKET:

Wait, I see there are only seven.

NARRATOR:

Said Cricket, searching the shadows.

CRICKET:

It's true, I'm always showing up late.
However, the fact is, we do need eight.

NARRATOR:

Well, none of them paid her any attention.
They got down on elbows and knees.
They gripped their vines with bony thumbs
And nibbled madly with rubbery gums.
Then a sibilant whisper sniped from the shadows.

SCARECROW:

Ssssstop!

NARRATOR:

That voice—why it’s hardly a whistle.

BOSS:

Did someone say Stop? Ha ha! Now *who*
Dares to tell any of *us* what to do?!

(SCARECROW “enters” or pops up with measly paper pumpkin mask under his/her hat.)

NARRATOR:

Propped up in front of a stick-woven fence,
An odd-looking figure they saw.
In a hay-stuffed shirt and an old straw hat.

WITCH/WIZARD 7:

A scarecrow! Well, who needs to listen to *that*?!

WITCH/WIZARD 8:

Hey look, Cricky, I have a suggestion.
See what’s hiding under that scarecrow’s hat?
Another pumpkin, and what a fat one!

WITCH/WIZARDS:

(Pointing at SCARECROW) Hey Cricket, why don’t you take that one?

NARRATOR:

Poor witch Cricket! She wanted a pumpkin,
As much as the others. And yet,
She didn’t see how it could ever be right
To make off with somebody’s head in the night.

BOSS:

You guys all keep chewing, just like me.
No scarecrow is going to stop us.
If he raises a finger, we’ll lay on a curse
that will turn him into a cockroach — or worse!

SCARECROW:

Oh, yessss? Jussst try it!

NARRATOR:

Hissed the scarecrow.

SCARECROW:

Wait and see what you get!
I'll summon the barnyard hounds with a whistle.
They'll dash out here and tear you to shreds
Before those pumpkins are loosed from their threads!

NARRATOR:

This was not welcome news to these dithering witches,
For, as much as they doted on felines,
Of canines they harbored a terrible fear,
And shivered whenever a dog came near.

BOSS:

Very well, maybe we won't *steal* them all.
We will offer to *buy* all instead.
They can't be worth much. I'd say that a few
Of our bent, rusty pennies will do.

SCARECROW:

All my pumpkins you want? I reject your offer!
I'll never buy into that.
And don't for a moment believe that I'm bluffing.
We scarecrows may have more inside us than stuffing!

NARRATOR:

Meanwhile, Cricket was trying to listen
To all that the scarecrow was saying.
Who knew what interests might lurk in his head,
Besides these things that he'd already said?

CRICKET:

Excuse me, scarecrow. Do you mind my asking?
Is there more you might want to pass on?
When you talk, what I mostly hear is a squeak.
Is your mouth too little for you to speak?

SCARECROW:

Yessss, it izzzz. Boo hoo.
But it's all the farmers could find time to cut me.
My poor owners are always so busy these years,
They just poked me these pinholes for mouths, eyes, mouth and ears.

CRICKET:

Hmmmm....
Perhaps I could fix that.
Is there some help you think I might be?
Also, I'm wondering, or have I forgot
Why seven pumpkins cannot be bought?

SCARECROW:

Oh, I could sell *seven*, I could sell that many
As long as my head stays behind.
Surely, with *your* ears you just heard me say
That *all* is the number I can't give away.

BOSS:

I heard that! Hey, guys,
The scarecrow *says* he'll let us have take seven.
We just need to leave the eighth one behind.
I don't think that Cricket can *possibly* mind.

CRICKET:

But I *would* mind! Please don't leave me out.
However, perhaps we must settle for seven.
I can understand why, from what he has said,
He would not offer to sell his own head.

SCARECROW: (to CRICKET)

I don't think you understand *at all*,
Not even you. It isn't that simple.
Because if you did take it, please do explain
How, next year, could anyone carve me again?

(continues)

I realize my face is not much to look at,
And in two weeks my pulp will be mushy,
But if I can hold on to what I hold dear,
My farmer can carve me a new one next year.

How I wish you could see inside my head!
See how full it is of a treasure
That makes a farmer burst into a cheer
In spring, when warm days for sowing are here!

CHIMES OF MIDNIGHT:

Bong! Bong! Bong!,,, (12 times)

NARRATOR:

(Overlapping the chimes) At that moment, however, the strokes of midnight
Tolled out from the steeple in town.

WITCH/WIZARDS:

(ad lib) Rats! Oh bother! It's high time to scoot!

NARRATOR:

And with that, they tore up their vines by their roots.

WITCH/WIZARDS:

(ad lib) Tug, tug. Uuuh! Yippee! Off we go!

NARRATOR:

They flung some coins at the scarecrow's feet,
Took off with pumpkins a-flying,
Home to the thicket to duck out of sight
And party the rest of the night.

Meanwhile, witch Cricket's brain was brimming
With all that the scarecrow had said.
With her own and scarecrow's interests to guide her,
A new possibility sprouted inside her.

Slowly, with well chosen words she described
A new offer her brain had just hatched.

CRICKET:

Wait, Mr./Ms.Scarecrow. How about if I make you this offer? (CRICKET whispers more in SCARECROW's ear.) Psst Psst.....

SCARECROW:

(Overlapping.) Hmm... Really? Tell me more....

CRICKET:

So, is it a deal?

NARRATOR:

...she asked.

SCARECROW:

Yes, it's a deal! Let's shake on it.

(SCARECROW & CRICKET shake hands.)

NARRATOR:

And to Cricket...

WITCH/WIZARD 9:

Wait a minute! What did they just agree to?!

NARRATOR:

And to Cricket... he handed...

SCARECROW:

My head. (Hands his pumpkin face to CRICKET.)

WITCH/WIZARD 9:

I don't get it. What are they talking about?

WITCH/WIZARD 10:

Oh, we'll tell you later.

CRICKET:

(to SCARECROW) Thanks! Away we go! Hold on tight for takeoff.

ALL:

Whoosh!

NARRATOR:

(Accompanied by various howls, cheers, laughs, chortles from the
WITCHES/WIZARDS.)

By the time witch Cricket got back to the party,
The choke-berry punch had been boiled.
The stinkbugs were swimming around in the stew,
And some poor salamanders had tasted it, too.

Then they all carved lanterns with candles inside,
To light up the rest of their games.
They honeyed the spiders and frenzied the bats,
Hung up smelly cheeses to torment the rats.

For more fun, they tied all the ghosts up in knots,
And bombarded the lizards with stories
That left the reptiles laughing in stitches
And turned into nightmares for seven scared *witches*.

(Pause, silence. Twittering of birds before dawn. WITCHES/WIZARDS snore.)

An hour before daybreak, the madness was over,
With no other sound but the songbirds and snores.
The fire was ash, the sky was dawning.

CRICKET:

(Yawning.) Oh! Pumpkin, we must go.

NARRATOR:

She gathered up her new companion,
Flew over the mirroring moon

(Grinning paper MOON face rises.)

At just the right angle so scarecrow could see

(SCARECROW raises new carved pumpkin mask, which looks the some as the face on the moon.)

His own smile, reflected by the moon.

SCARECROW:

That's ME! Oh, wow, I can hardly believe how well this deal is turning out!

NARRATOR:

Back by the dew-covered fence at last
Cricket set scarecrow's his head back in place,
As he, after being awake the whole night,
Fell asleep in a new autumn light.

CRICKET:

(Holding up sack and spilling out a few pumpkin seeds)
And here they are, just like I promised,
They're all that your farmer will need,
In the spring when the days turn warm,
To sow you again with his corn.

NARRATOR:

So that, my friends, was the pumpkin deal.
I hope you'll discover its meaning.

SCARECROW:

Thank you! Thank you!

CRICKET:

You're very welcome. Well, so long until next year, my friend,

ALL:

When Halloween rolls 'round again! (ad lib.) Boo! Yay! Trick or Treat!

[CURTAIN]