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MIDDLE MATTERS



The Mask

By: Abrianna Locke

Abrianna, daughter of Aimee and Shaun Locke, is a seventh grade student in Leigh Fry's class. She chose to write a story about a mask, a hospital visit, and the strange events that surround both.



A black figure ran across the lawn. Its red eyes stared into my soul. As I reached for the door, leaves crunched under me. The hinges creaked as I opened it. Then black. That was the last I remembered of that night. My vision was blurry, but I could make out two red glowing dots. Darkness came again, and I fell back asleep. I could hear voice after voice after voice saying the same thing, "Oh, my darling. I know you probably can't hear me but..." They would always take the longest pauses as if they were about to say something, but questioned it silently and continued, "I can't wait for you to wake up." Their voices sound scared, covered by hope.

When I woke up there was a vent tunneling into my mouth. I could feel the vent reaching down into my throat. Further down connecting to my lungs, pushing in and out air. Other machines, some with liquids, and blood pierced my skin. My mother squeezed my hand as tight as she could. Her eyes met mine and she started to cry, but she held the tears back and stopped. She looked painfully at me. She stuttered but managed to get out, "Don't go i-nt-tt-to the woods agai-ain." With that, she got up, looked at me, and said "I love you, my treasure." Her eyes now wet, with tears streaming down her face.

Just as soon as my mother had left, my dad walked in. "Oh, my God!" He looked at me in horror and started screaming. "That's not my son! That kid doesn't have a face! It's just blood and bandages!" He stared hard at me. He almost looked angry and left. My doctor walked, head down, and entered my room. He told me the flesh on my face had been torn and ripped off, but there were still patches of skin around my eyes, lips, forehead, and cheeks.

My face was completely wrapped with white bandages. Some of the wrap was stained with blood. If or when I looked in a mirror I couldn't recognize myself. I still had my amber eyes and buzzed blonde hair, but my skin was pale, and my nose and all my facial

features were gone. Because they didn't have the torn-off skin, or nose bones, they couldn't fix my face completely.

Two months later the wrap was removed, and they put a prosthetic on my face. The doctor's cold hands gently and carefully, adjusted the strap to fit just right. They smelled of antiseptic. They said over a long period of time my face might heal more or it might not. It just depends.

The prosthetic looked just like a mask. It was plain white with brown leather straps wrapped around my head, a small space where my lips were in sight, and amber eyes glowed.

The next day everything was normal, the doctors rushing around the hospital in a hurry. One of the doctors though, was different; he was just standing there staring at me.

I looked at him, and a slight red glowed in his eyes. I normally didn't get scared if someone stared at me but this man gave me a bad feeling the harder I looked at him the harder he looked at me. At that moment I pushed the help button.

Several doctors raced in frantically thinking I had been hurt. They stared at me in disbelief. Some of them asked why I had done it. "I'm sorry but that button is for emergencies. If you needed one of us you could have pushed this one." The man pointed to a shiny black button next to my bed. I hadn't realized it was there. I felt what was left of my cheeks turn bright red and pink. I felt so embarrassed, but I didn't say that. Instead, I continued to tell them about my problem.

"Th-thhhere, ma-ma-maaa-maan." I still had trouble speaking, but I had no trouble pointing. I pointed at the counter where the man had previously been. The doctors moved off to the side, but there appeared to be nothing but a shadow. One of the doctors, Jade, sat beside me and held my hand. Her voice was reassuring and sweet. "There is nothing to worry about; everything is fine. It's just a shadow." Something felt off about her though. Her grip tightened, and a gleam of red showed in her

eyes. I quickly reached away. Her warm, comforting hand sat there for a second before she got up and started to walk away. Before she left she turned her head slowly. Her tied-up brown hair flipped straight around with her head. She looked me up and down then quickly left. The rest of the doctors started to flow out. Some looked back annoyed at the inconvenience.

Every day after that the same boring things happened, therapy, resting, more therapy, then even more therapy, and more resting. One day I woke up, and I said a real sentence. "Where is my fa-ff-family?" One of the nurses rushed into my room.

She looked at me for a moment, "Can you say something else, sweetheart?" She stared at me with hope. "I miss my-mo-mo-mother."

My eyes started to tear up. My face burned as salty tears raced down my face, forcing out even more tears until I just couldn't stop. The nurse looked at me sadly, her kind eyes looked like she was truly sorry. She continued with, "I'm sorry dear but your mother died a few years back."

Her words dug deep. I couldn't remember her dying, just her warm hugs and her voice. "But my," I stopped. Only I could know she visited me. The hospital would probably think I was crazy if I said my dead mother visited me.

Even now I couldn't stop crying. Even when I wished really hard that I would. I felt my eyes start to close. A yawn came from me, and I fell asleep. "My treasure." Everything was white, but a gentle voice filled the room. It was my mother's voice. "My treasure, I know this won't make much sense, but you have to trust me." She started to come into view.

Tears dripped from her eyes to her chin, and from her chin to the ground. "You can't trust your father. I know he may seem like a good man, but he has hurt you in unimaginable ways. You probably won't remember what he has done, but you need to trust me when I say don't go home with him. Don't trust him." Her eyes stared into

my soul, and I did trust her. For a millisecond the room glitched, but she continued, "Listen, I have some vital information, and I love you but I won't sugarcoat it.

I was killed by that same man, the man hunting you. Don't let it get near you. It's a shapeshifter, a shadow that lives in the woods. I once came face to face with it and it struck. It grabbed me by my throat and ripped my heart out from inside. You're fortunate it only got your skin." She tried to hug me but I couldn't feel her, just some air. Her tears were now falling so fast she was practically bawling. "I love you and I wish I could've come home to you that night." With that, she started disappearing into the distance. She blew a kiss to me, and she was gone. I woke up with tears still streaming down my face. I finally knew the truth, although it could have just been a dream, it felt real like my mother had really been here.

A year ago I had come here with my face completely ripped off. I could now talk, and walk, and I only needed the prosthetic. I was finally ready to come home. My father ran in and slammed the doors behind him. He looked like he was trying to be sad, even though he wasn't really. He was doing it for attention, trying to seem like a good father. He wasn't really sad and he didn't feel bad for me. I looked him straight in the eye, "I'm not coming with you." I said sternly.

My Grandma, my mother's mom was sitting next to me on a chair in the corner. I didn't feel comfortable going with my dad, not after my visits with Mom, and his little hissy fit. He didn't care about me, and knowing this I didn't know if I could trust his parents to watch over me either, so I picked my Grandma Hailey. He raised his hand and slapped me hard. I could feel the blood running off my face. I couldn't believe he hit me. I couldn't even remember him hitting me hard before. Security guards rushed into the room, grabbed his arms, and took him away.

My Grandmother squeezed my hand as tight as she could. Now I knew what Mom had

meant when she said he seemed like a good man. Doctor Dave came in and fixed up my face and said it would probably be best to stay in the hospital for a few more nights. That made me scared. My dad knew my location. He knew I would be here.

After that, I was so mad I decided to cut my dad out of my life. He knew that could've killed me. Several times he tried to apologize, but I didn't respond to his messages. I now had to spend one more night in the hospital. My father hadn't come to visit again so far. I knew if I could survive one more night I would be fine. At this point, I wasn't sure if my face would ever heal. This kept me up, and I tossed and turned all night. I couldn't fall asleep. No mom to cradle me. No dream at all.

I lay silently staring up at the ceiling. The same glitch from my dream happened, and the vent was opening. A man started to crawl out of it. It was my dad, but it wasn't him. It was a shadow, a red-eyed shadow. It was the shadow, my dad's shadow. At the exact moment he came in a million visions popped into my head at once. One was the night my mother died. Others were just my life flashing before me. My mother's death stuck out to me, it was the shadow holding my mother by the neck. His other hand was raised in the air. It reminded me of the way my dad's hand raised before he hit me.

The red reflection of the shadow's eyes gleamed in my mother's. Her eyes watered as the hand reached deep into her skin, and came out with her heart. Her heart still beat, veins connected. He now held her by her heart with his first hand now taking a lung, and ripping it in half. He had no remorse when he did this. My mother's eyes looked lifeless as the light left them.

A cold hand lifted my head and slipped the strings of my prosthetic. The prosthetic clung to my face. The dry blood connected my face and the mask. The blood snapped and my prosthetic was off. The flashbacks finally stopped and I could see him the shadow, the shapeshifter. His nails connected

to his fingers, long and jagged, held my mask above my head. His head cocked, and red eyes flickered. He was a black figure, holding me and my life in his hands. Red eyes glowing into my soul. He raised his hands. I knew I wouldn't survive this. There was nothing I could do to make him stop. Tears started to fly down my face. His hand started downward at lightning speed. His hand ripped into my skin. I opened my mouth to scream but nothing came out. He held my heart in his hands. My heart beat at a racing speed. My entire body was in agony. My eyes started to shut. I wasn't dead but I was close. I saw a bright warm light. I wanted to walk towards it but I knew I couldn't yet.

I still heard some voices. "Someone get him to the E.R. No! Book me a room now!" I couldn't tell who but it was one of the surgeons. I felt something being strapped to my mouth. Everything became dark and cold. It was too late. The sharp beep filled the room. The warm light was back and I knew this time I couldn't wait. I had to go in. My mother greeted me with open arms. We walked into the light together. I now felt safe. I knew my father couldn't harm me here.

Meanwhile, the surgeons stood around my dead body, "I can't believe we lost him, or that he did this." Another responded with, "He didn't know what he was doing, he had mental problems. He confused reality and thought of things differently. He ripped off his own face thinking something, did it." He stared sadly at the body. "His brain didn't work right."

Jade piped in, "He didn't mean to hurt himself." Almost mocking the surgeon. "He had mental issues caused by his father, he..."

She found it hard to continue but did so anyway. "His father abused him. That's what caused his brain to malfunction, but none of you paid attention when his father hit him."

She continued to cry and yell at the surgeons until her voice was gone.

The End