

## Jiggles

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‘Happy Birthday!’

Max escorted her last guest through the house and outside to where her family and friends had gathered. The backyard was full of coloured balloons, food, and happy people. The laughter of the kids running around filled her up to the brim with excitement.

‘This is going to be great,’ she said to herself, as the front doorbell chimed.

‘Sweetie, can you answer that please?’ asked her mum, holding a tray of food, ‘I’m kind of busy.’

Max nodded and jogged to the door as the bell rang again, long and loud, as though someone was leaning against the button. *What the heck?* Max thought, pulling the door open. On the step was the strangest man she’d ever seen.

The man’s clothes, which were white except for some odd red splotches, hung off him in baggy folds. His shoes were strangely large and showed filthy scratches and dirt markings that could be summarised as showing “tough love”. But, the wackiest feature was growing out of his head. A bright-green abomination shot up from his scalp and revealed the dandruff hanging off every green strand of hair.

‘Are you lost?’ Max asked as she glared at him with a raised eyebrow.

She looked up into his face, which was smothered in a white, clumpy paste. A red foam ball was jammed onto his nose. They made eye contact. The colour drained from Max’s face as the man flashed an inhuman smile.

‘I am Jiggles, the clown you ordered, silly girl,’ the man said, and his squeaky voice drilled into Max’s ears. ‘Am I at the right address or what?’ The clown’s foul breath flicked Max on the nose as he laughed.

‘I don’t think my—’ Max said.

Jiggles pushed her aside. ‘Great, where’s the party at?’ He strode into the house in search of his audience.

Feeling violated, Max collected herself and chased after the quirky clown, but when she stepped into the backyard, she found her guests waiting for her to open her gifts, and no one else. She approached the table of gifts and took the card from a yellow-wrapped box. She

read the words inside and thanked her Grampa Joe, but all the while, she puzzled over the clown. *How could he vanish into thin air like that? And where the heck is he now?*

The clown's hideous smile burned in her brain, filling her with a sense of urgency. She rushed through the gifts, offered quick thanks, and darted off to search the house. Where is that damn clown, she thought, and ran straight into her mum.

'Whoa there, Max. Why are you in such a hurry?'

Max gulped. 'When I answered the door earlier, there was a man. He was some sort of, uh, entertainer, and he just walked inside—'

'I remembered booking a nice, jolly man to make the party more interesting. I forgot to tell you. There's nothing to worry about, darling.'

'But, are you sure?'

Max's mum stopped her with a kiss on the forehead. 'There is nothing to worry about.' her mum said, walking into the crowd.

Max followed her mum outside and sat down where the party pies, gummy worms and chips were close by. Staring off into space, she absently ate and listened to her friends laughing. *Why did Mum even bring a clown to the party? She knows I hate clowns. Did she know it was Jiggles?* She lifted a sticky blue worm towards her mouth, but stopped as a commotion by the tree caught her attention. She stood and strolled over to her guests, who were watching a tall figure with bright-green hair. Max gasped and started to reverse out to escape, but fell backwards onto a person behind her. All eyes were upon her.

'Maxine! I've been waiting for you.' Jiggles' shadow fell over her. 'We must play a game with the Birthday Girl.'

Everyone cheered as they grabbed her and placed her under the tree. The audience stepped back to see what the clown had to say.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, I will now throw, with great accuracy, a knife into an apple that will be placed on our blind-folded contestant's head.' Max's stiffened as the people applauded. 'But before I do, Maxine's mother, may I borrow an apple and a butcher's knife please?'

Max watched in horror as her mum handed Jiggles the knife. She wanted to scream, but the clown loomed over her. He took a red handkerchief from his pocket and covered her eyes. As he tied the knot at the back of her head, he whispered, 'You are breathing heavily, Maxine. If you continue this behaviour, I might miss.' He moved away and addressed the guests. 'Okay people, count down with me!'

Max's blood pressure dropped as the words came out of the clown's mouth. 'Here we go, one.' Max's hands twitched and shook. 'Two.' Tears overflowed her eyes and were soaked up by the red cloth around her face. 'Three!'

The knife broke through the air as it whistled; everyone was silent.

Then, it touched base. The crunch and splatter were so distinct. Blood flew outwards to the crowd as everyone gasped. Jiggles the clown skipped over to Max, giggling and wheezing. He grasped the handle of the knife and yanked it out, letting the blood ooze.

'I did it!' Jiggles said with delight.

The audience stared.