

Follow Your Gut

By Charlotte Moon

Age 17

Coquitlam

“Have fun!” Mom waves goodbye. Butterflies jump in my stomach. It feels weird to be going trick-or-treating without her. Carter doesn’t seem to mind. He giggles when our neighbour Holter, opens the car door for him, chattering about Minecraft, candy, and Naruto—who he’s dressed up as tonight. Holter nods but says nothing. Must be hard to talk under his mask. He’s dressed as the scream.

We park on the best trick-or-treating block in town. It smells bad in the car. Carter squirms impatiently.

“Holter, our seatbelts won’t undo.”

Holter grunts, pressing a button beside the speedometer. Our seat belts snap open. Carter’s eyebrows shoot up. “That’s some high-tech childproofing.”

Stepping outside, I gulp lungfuls of brisk night air. Holter should try mouthwash.

I jog after my brother. Mom told me to keep him safe.

It’s late, the streets are now deserted. Bags full, we’ve hit every house on the block. Satisfied, we head back to the car. Carter shows Holter his loot. Holter says nothing. He’s been standoffish all night, speaking to no one, practically a stranger under that mask.

Holter unlocks the car and waves us in.

Something seems off. My insides churn. I freeze. Inside the car, Carter glances at me questioningly. Not sure I should, I get in the car with my brother. “Keep him safe”.

We start moving. I can’t shake this queasy feeling.

In the stillness at a stoplight, like thunder through a mausoleum, a growl echoes through the car.

“Jeez, want a Snickers?” Carter offers Holter. Gosh! Was that Holter’s stomach?

Suddenly we swerve — in the wrong direction.

“Where are we going?” I yank at my seatbelt. It won’t budge.

“STOP THE CAR!”

We skid down a narrow gravel road, the lights of the freeway fading.

We grind to a stop.

Rummaging through the glovebox for something, Holter steps outside. He stalks around the car, opens our door, and sets a rusty carving knife and long-tined fork on the seat next to us.

He pulls off his mask.

I shut my eyes against a putrid stink of dead things, hot rancid breath falling thick on my face.

Carter shrieks. My heart lurches. Inches from Carter's face, sickly scaly skin stretches over a head without eyes, smooth except for a gaping hole, filled with jagged, rotting teeth.

I see the knife coming toward Carter's throat. Instinctively, I kick Holter—no, the monster in the gut. The monster topples backward out of the car, its knife sticking in the seat beside me. I grab it, slice through our seatbelts, and yank Carter out the other side, the monster, grasping behind us. I slam the car door behind me, a macabre crunch of metal on bone. A spectral scream follows us hungrily up the gravel path as we scramble away.

The car revs to life, killing our hopes of escape.

I push Carter into the ditch at the side of the road. "Stay quiet."

A moment later, the car is upon me.

My world goes black.