

THE LEGEND OF PUMPTY DUMPTY



Every year, the residents of Magnolia Point festoon their golf carts with cobwebs, skeletons, inflatable ghouls, and lights that twinkle like Jack-O'-Lantern smiles. The parade snakes through the winding lanes of the neighborhood, golf bags temporarily replaced with candy buckets atop additional seating. Children ride, wave, and collect sweets while judges tally up scores for "Most Frightening," "Most Creative," and "Best Use of a Sand Wedge in a Costume."

'Carts 'n Candy' is a night of laughter and sugar highs. It is also, though few will admit it openly, a night of sorrow. For atop a stone wall at the edge of the community, in front of a stucco home with warm windows glowing in the dusk, sits Pumpty Dumpty.

Pumpty was no ordinary Jack-O'-Lantern. His body was broad, rounded, and firm, the kind of pumpkin you'd expect to win ribbons at the Clay County Fair. His face, carved with broad cheerful strokes, glowed not merely with candlelight, but with a personality all

his own. And he sported with pride, snugly stretched across his spherical form, a crisp white polo embroidered with 'MAGNOLIA point'.

Residents swore he had been there forever, though no one remembered carving him. Over the course of many Halloweens he simply appeared, perched on the stone wall like he had always belonged there. Some said the grounds crew put him out, others whispered it was the board's doing, though the Board strenuously denied responsibility. "We don't handle pumpkins," the president grouched, "That's Landscaping's job." Which prompted Cindy, in turn, to address 'Pumpkin Care and Cultivation in Zone 9' for her report in *The Magnolia News* that month, referring all other non-horticultural inquiries to May Management. Laura, in turn, pointed back to the Board. Through all the gyratory attributions, Pumpty sat silently, grinning at the world.

Every October evening leading up to 'Carts 'n Candy', children stopped by Pumpty's wall. They patted his round belly, posed for photos, and confided their costume plans. "I'm gonna be a *dragon* this year, Pumpty," little Caleb from Olympic whispered one night. "Think the judges will like it?!"

Pumpty's grin seemed to widen in approval. But when the parade night arrived, Pumpty was never invited. He could only sit, lantern-light flickering, as the golf carts jingled by in gaudy Halloween splendor. He longed to ride among them, his polo-shirted rotundity perched proudly on *someone's* passenger seat, *anyone's!* He longed to hear the joy in the children's laughter up close, the rush of the parade, the hum of the tires, the rustling of the candy in the buckets. Yet he could not move. The stone wall was his home, and prison.

It was during 'Carts 'n Candy' 2021 that Pumpty's mood shifted. That year, a cart festooned with plastic gravestones rolled by, one of which bore the words, a fiction, surely a prank, for it defied Humpty's hale and hearty presence on that stone wall in a yard on Medinah that very night:

***"Here lies Pumpty. Fell off the wall,
Once was enough, Once and for all."***

The children laughed nervously. Adults clinked their wine glasses in approval of the joke. But from where he sat on his wall, Pumpty's triangular eyes glowed redder that night, and for the first time in his long history, a low grumble echoed from within his hollow chest.

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That was when Pumppty vow: if he could not join in their revelry, he would *haunt* it! Not cruelly, Pumppty was no villain, but mischievously, with a dry wit befitting the manicured lawns and tidy hedges of Magnolia Point.

The haunting began subtly, though there was no doubt it was at the command of Pumppty, who remained eerily colorful, firm and plump long past a pumpkin's expiration date for this climate. The first of Pumppty's shenanigans was suspected during a November golf tournament, where every player's ball seemed magnetically drawn to the water on #7. "Uncanny," muttered the pros. "A gravitational impossibility," declared the marshal. Yet Pumppty, from his stone perch, chuckled silently. At the December holiday gala, the dessert buffet suffered a peculiar mishap: every gingerbread man emerged from the oven wearing a frosted polo shirt. Guests swore they heard faint laughter: round, hollow, and 'hauntingly pumpkin-like', wafting through the dining room.

Pumppty's 'curses' were never cruel, just inconveniently humorous. And they went on: during the following January's Board meeting, the president's carefully prepared PowerPoint glitched, every slide replaced by a photograph of a smiling Jack-O'-Lantern in a Magnolia polo. At the Valentine's dinner, every rose in the centerpiece arrangements turned into baby carrots. In March, the St. Patrick's Day pickleball tournament was delayed when all paddles inexplicably morphed into shamrock shapes. At April's Community Yard Sale, one homeowner holding an impromptu auction opened bidding on a "Weekend Getaway to Hilton Head" only to reveal a certificate for a free pumpkin pie at Sweet Sensations. Residents shook their heads, laughed nervously, and someone was heard muttering, "*That Pumppty again...!*"



That year, no cart was seen to bear gravestones mocking Pumppty. Instead, several were decorated in his honor, some seating round orange balloons wearing little white polo shirts. And for 'Carts 'n Candy', however, a new award



category was christened: "Best Tribute to Pumppty Dumpty."

And so it happened that year that he was gone from his stone wall perch, gone without a trace. But not from the hearts and minds of his admirers; it continues each autumn, when the air cools and golf carts sprout instant cobwebs, and Magnolia Point turns its collective gaze, and hopes, toward that stone wall. Pumppty is always there for the true believers: grinning, glowing, polo pressed, but the community insists on a formal "search" nonetheless. And so toddlers are turned out to trundle about with flashlights as bright as their futures, teenagers feign reluctance but secretly hope to be the first to "find" him, and retirees approach the affair with binoculars and clipboards, as if tracking rare birds. Some call it "community engagement." The children call it "fun." And every year, someone gasps theatrically at some 'discovery', as though a rotund pumpkin in a branded polo might ever blend seamlessly into the landscaping. Still, the ritual persists, part hide-and-seek, part homage, part stubborn Southern tradition. And in the laughter that follows, Pumppty Dumpty remains what he has always been: found, beloved, and still very much watching over all.

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR

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