

A NAVRITTO STORY

The Thirteenth *Costume.*

✦ NAVRITTO STORIES · THRILLERS & SUSPENSE

The Thirteenth Costume

Written & illustrated by Navritto.

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The shop appears in October the way mushrooms do — overnight, in a storefront that was empty in September and will be empty again in November. I worked the register. The owner, Mr. Vane, worked everything else, and counted the stock himself, every night, by hand.

“Costumes are the only thing people buy to stop being themselves,” he told me once. “You want to know exactly how many you've let out the door.”



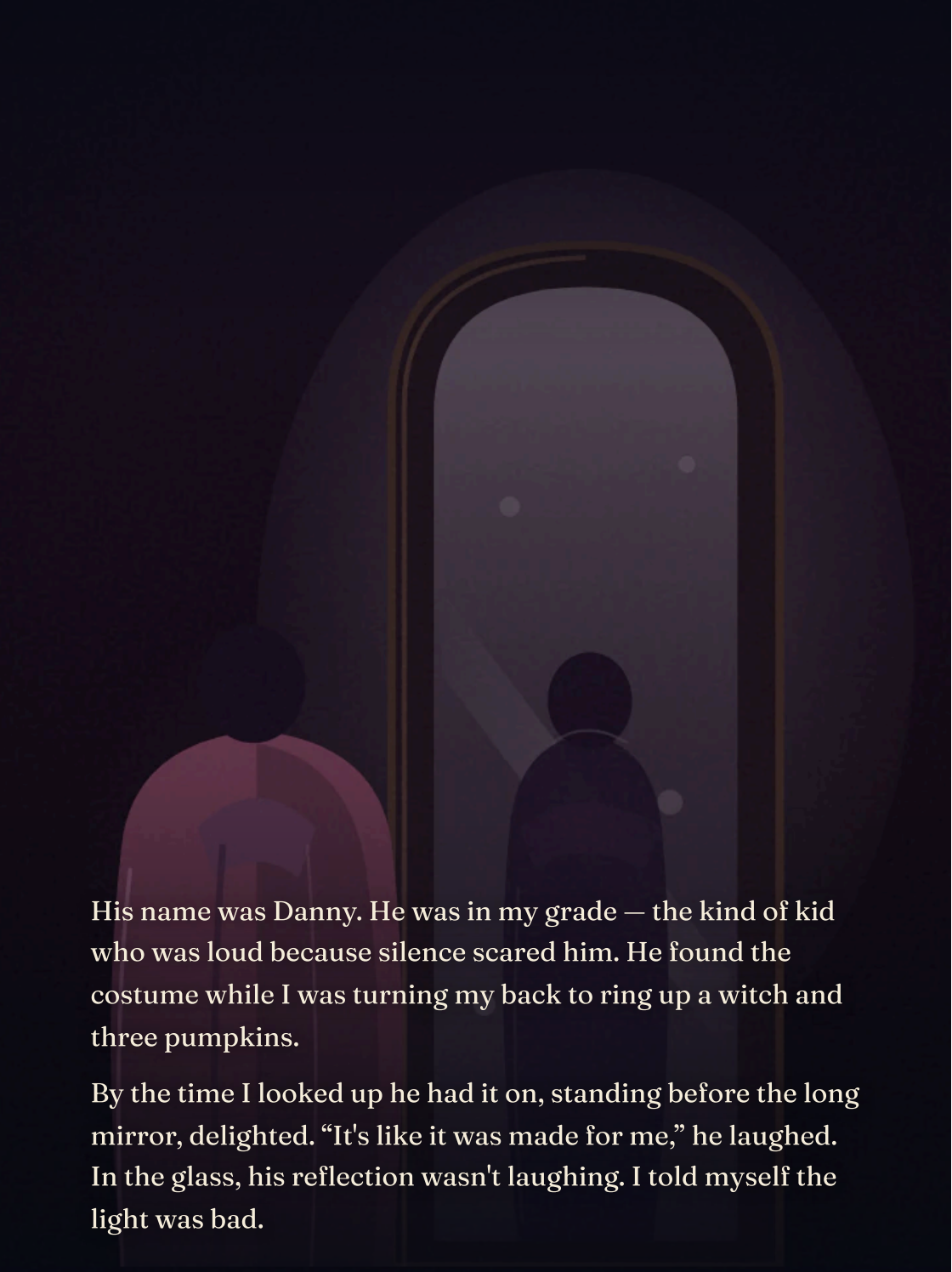
The invoice said two hundred. We hung two hundred. By the first week of October the rack held two hundred and one.

Mr. Vane counted it four times. Then he went very still — the way you go still when a stair creaks in an empty house — and said, “Don't sell the last one.”



It hung at the end of the rack where nothing had hung that morning. Tailored, old-fashioned, a deep velvet the colour of a bruise healing. No barcode, no brand, no price.

No size, either — and yet every single person who touched it said the same thing, quietly, like a confession: that it would fit them perfectly.



His name was Danny. He was in my grade — the kind of kid who was loud because silence scared him. He found the costume while I was turning my back to ring up a witch and three pumpkins.

By the time I looked up he had it on, standing before the long mirror, delighted. “It's like it was made for me,” he laughed. In the glass, his reflection wasn't laughing. I told myself the light was bad.



After Halloween, Danny was still around. I'd see him across the street in the thinning fog, at the back of the bus, at the far end of the hall — always in the costume, always the mask, never once out of it.

When I waved, he lifted a gloved hand and held it there, too long, the way you hold a pose for a photograph that is never taken.



The shop came back the next October — same empty storefront, same two hundred on the invoice. And on the first morning, two hundred and one on the rack.

But I knew the two hundred and first this time. It was stitched from Danny's things — his red hoodie, the frayed cuffs, the little pin he always wore — sewn into a costume in his exact size, waiting at the end of the rack for whoever would say it fit.



I don't ring up the last one. I've learned that much. But every year the rack holds one costume I recognise a little too well, cut closer to my own shape than the year before.

And lately, when I lock up and pass the long mirror in the dark, the newest costume is already being worn — by someone standing exactly where I stand, waving, waiting for me to say it fits.

✦ THE END

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