

Chippy: Behind the Mask
By Heather Nawara

It all started when I noticed something a little sinister about our friend Chippy: he wore a mask.

Now, I know what you may be thinking. Chippy is our *mascot*. Wearing a mask comes with the job description. In fact, so does the entire goofy costume. But what kinds of people wear masks? The answer: people who have something to hide.

I first challenged Chippy to take off his mask when I caught him strutting around the stadium after a football game.

I decided to catch him off guard by socking it to him with flattery. “Oh, Chippy! You’re so fine! You’re so fine; you blow my mind! Hey, Chippy!” I sang in perfect “Hey Mickey” fashion.

I liked to imagine he blushed beneath that deceptive beak. Chippy turned to face me and raised a black-and-red-feathered wing in greeting. “Hey, thanks a lot!”

“You must get pretty hot in that mascot suit.” I batted my eyelashes at him and twirled a strand of my long blonde hair. What man could resist seduction?

“Oh, I’m used to it,” Chippy deflected, acting nonchalant.

“Well, I think it’s thanks to you that we won the big game.”

“Nah, I think it was all the football team.”

What was with this guy? Couldn’t he take a compliment? I needed to up my game of seduction.

“How about you lift off the mask Spider-Man style and I can be Mary Jane?” I proposed. “You know, just a fun congratulatory kiss.” What was the harm in that? I wouldn’t even see his entire face.

“I have to go.” Without warning, Chippy took off down the hall and ran outside.

“Wait! Wait, come back! I was just kidding!” I raced after him, skidding to a stop outside the stadium. There was no trace of Chippy anywhere. It was almost like he just disappeared in thin air, like he flew away...

I asked around campus if anyone knew the kid who played Chippy.

“Why do you care about that?”

“I don’t know.”

“Wouldn’t figuring it out blow the fantasy?”

“I always thought it was President Hammond...”

None of these responses satisfied me. All they amounted to were indifference and mere speculation. If I wanted some answers, I was going to have to get to the bottom of the mystery all by myself.

On the morning of Cardinal Appreciation Day, I spotted Chippy outside the Boilerhouse. He was scheduled to be there for an hour so people could take their pictures with him.

“Hey, Chippy!” I greeted, trying to disarm him with a smile. “Early bird catches the worm, huh, pal?”

But Chippy wouldn’t talk to me. Not in front of all these people. No, he had to play the part of the mute mascot, just like all the mascots in Disney. But as I posed for a picture with him, I could sense the tension in the feathered-covered arm he put around me. He definitely remembered our encounter at the stadium. I knew he didn’t want me to know what lurked behind his mask, but I was going to find out anyway.

I went inside after having my picture taken to get a coffee. I couldn’t let him know that I was watching him, though the reality was I had a decent view of him from the window. When picture time was over, I followed after Chippy, keeping a safe distance in order not to arouse suspicion. He kept up appearances, waving to those who stopped him. The campus thinned out as most headed to their 9:20 AM class, which left Chippy relatively alone.

I kept following him. Chippy seemed to want to be by himself. He kept looking over his shoulder. Did he sense me? I kept after him but always maintained my distance. Finally, he came to a stop, and I hid behind a tree. He had gotten as far as Jefferson Lawn and crouched down in the grass near the fire pit. When he appeared fully immersed in his activity, I peeked out from behind the tree. My eyes widened in horror.

Worms! He dug up earthworms like a hungry bird dying for its next meal!

What was wrong with this guy? Didn’t he know he was taking this bird thing a little too far? I turned my head away in disgust.

I heard a swooshing sound. When I looked up next, Chippy was long gone. Not a trace of him remained.

The trail had gone cold for weeks. I couldn't find Chippy anywhere. I scoured the campus from Kiekhofer Hall to Res/Rec. Zilch. Nada. My best bet was to wait until the next football game. I had to finish this where it all began—the stadium.

My plan was perfect. I would make a trap for Chippy à la *Home Alone*. I would channel my inner Mac and devise the perfect trap inside on the first floor. Okay, it was just some trip wire in the hallway, but it would work. Chippy would play the part of the Wet Bandits and fall right into it. There would be nowhere for him to run.

After enduring the game, I spotted my target heading inside. “Hey! Chippy!”

He turned towards me and started to sprint. He fell for the trap hook, line, and sinker, falling over the trip wire and landing on his masked face. While he was dazed, I rushed towards him. I knelt beside him. Stragglers from the game heard the noise and poured into the hallway. Even if Chippy got up, all the exits were covered. This was it.

“Let’s see who you really are!” I yelled before ripping off the mask.

Underneath the mask was the oversized head of a carrion crow. He was a birdman, but he wasn’t a real cardinal at all. The on-lookers watched in absolute shock.

“I knew it! I knew there was something wrong with you!”

“Blast!” the carrion crow man screeched. “And I would’ve gotten away with it if it wasn’t for you, you meddling kid!”

“Take him away, boys!” I moved aside and campus security hauled the imposter off.

So there you have it. Something *was* sinister about Chippy. After that point, all who applied to be our mascot had to be either human or cardinal. The moral of the story? You never know your mascot. Or never trust a bird wearing a bird mask. Unless they’re a cardinal—a *real* cardinal.