

Halloween
October 31st

When I opened my window yesterday morning, the air felt crisp, and the sky was a perfect shade of blue. The sidewalk was covered in red, orange, and yellow leaves. And gourds and carved pumpkins were on each doorstep, and some bushes were even covered in giant cotton spider webs!

It was Halloween!

Everyone in my class, neighborhood, and family has been thinking about their costumes for the past few weeks. I've been asked, "What're you gonna be for Halloween?" at least one hundred times.

But only Clare knows the answer. I haven't told anyone else. (Except for my mom, who helped us make our costumes.)

School took forever. We weren't officially allowed to wear our costumes, but that's okay because it's all about the night.

I'll say this—I live in a fantastic neighborhood for trick-or-treating! In fact, a bunch of kids come in from surrounding neighborhoods because the houses here are close together, and there's good candy. Needless to say, Halloween is one of the best nights of the year.

Once school was FINALLY over, Amy and her mom drove me home.

Amy turned to me in the backseat, "So Joanie, what're you gonna be for Halloween?"

I hadn't planned to tell anyone, but Amy could be really annoying when you didn't go along with her. So, I explained, "Well, I'm going with my best friend, Clare. And so we're going as two mittens on a string so that we can stick together!" (I didn't share that the main reason why is because Clare gets scared in big crowds.)

"Hmmm," Amy said, staring down at me like she wanted to say something mean but changed her mind when she remembered her mom was listening in the front seat. "Well, if you *two mittens* can walk all the way to my neighborhood, there's a HUGE brick house that gives out king-size candy bars at 9 p.m. There are a lot of BIG houses, but this one always brings the biggest crowd."

Of course, pretty much every house gives out candy, but king-size candy bars are a different story! I knew I wasn't supposed to leave my own neighborhood, but I imagined Clare and me bringing king-size candy bars home and Ty and Ruby in awe.

"Which street is it on?" I asked.

She smiled and replied: "Oakley Street, at the very end of the block."

The sidewalks already had a couple of trick-or-treaters when they dropped me off in front of my house (mostly younger kids and toddlers with super early bedtimes). I passed a baby in a bumble bee suit as I walked through the front door.

Ty and Ruby were in the front hallway, and my mom was touching up Ruby's headband. "Joanie! Joanie! How do I look?" Ruby exclaims when she sees me.

She couldn't decide whether to be a cupcake or a rockstar, so she went as both. "Yah, yah, the frosting hat mixed with the punky boots is very...cupcake-rockstar." I managed. Ruby smiled widely.

Ty was in all gray. He went as a rock this year.

I took my costume from the closet and walked down the chilly street to Clare's house. My mom poked her head out the door to call out and remind me to "Be extra careful tonight! And PLEASE stay in our neighborhood!"

I ate a super early dinner with Clare and her dad before she and I set off on our route. We both ate fast! We finished, ran our dishes to the sink, and asked to be excused.

"Alright, alright." Clare's dad said. "But remember to stay in our neighborhood. And be very careful tonight!"

We put on our costumes in the front hallway. I looked in the mirror to see myself as a giant, clunky foam mitten. I laughed as I danced and marched around, swinging my arms in it!

Clare wasn't laughing, though, so I asked what was wrong.

"I don't know. It's just a little scary out there! Especially with all the kids and teenagers in the dark," She admitted.

"Well, look, that's why we have this!" I said, tying the piece of yarn from her costume to mine. "See, Clare? We'll stick together the whole time!"

And with that, we headed out the door together as the sky turned dark blue.

All down the street, you could hear doors opening, kids swinging their candy bags and laughing as they trick-or-treated. There were so many colorful outfits; we passed astronauts, cats, movie

stars, cowboys, witches, skeletons, football players, princesses, ghosts, and vampires. (And, not surprisingly, only one rock and one cupcake-rockstar.)

On the next street over, Grant and Grinspoon rode past on their skateboards. Grant thought he was too cool this year for a costume, but Grinspoon wore a giant hotdog suit.

"I thought you were 'too old' for trick-or-treating!" I called out to Grant.

"We're the neighborhood patrol!" He called back as they cruised past.

After twelve years of experience, I've learned the best method for collecting candy is to use a pillowcase. Each time we knocked on a door and someone answered, we had the same exchange: "Trick or treat!" We call out together. "Ohh, are you two mittens? How cute!" They'd say as they held out the bowl of candy, we reached in, grabbed a small handful, and tossed it in the pillowcase. Perfect procedure.

"Look at all this candy!" Clare said as we walked down the last street in our neighborhood.

"I know, totally!" I agreed. Clare seemed to be feeling good.

"You know what I heard? A house one neighborhood over gives out king-size candy bars!" I didn't tell her who told me that, though.

"Really? King-size?" Clare asked with big blue eyes that matched the color of her mitten. "Well, what neighborhood? Because we're really just supposed to stay around here."

"It's the next one over, on Oakley Street, you know, like a five-minute walk," I said, making it sound casual. I didn't want us to get in trouble, but we're in eighth grade, and we still had time before we had to go home.

"Five minutes?" Clare asked from inside the giant left mitten.

"Five minutes," I confirmed from the right.

We smiled mischievously and started to giggle as we walked toward Oakley Street.

There were no more toddlers out, just bigger kids. We passed Sarah and her friends, who were all fairies. We kept walking. The houses were certainly bigger in Amy's neighborhood, but the street was dark. We could see the moon moving behind the clouds as a pack of teenagers dressed as punks walked by us.

"So, Joanie, which house did you say it was?" Clare asked. I could hear in her voice she was losing confidence.

“Right at the end of the road,” I said, pointing.

My pillowcase felt heavier, and I knew I was starting to get blisters in my shoes. We could see the giant house with a mass of kids crowded at the end of the street, waiting for the famous king-size candy bars.

We stood on the edge of the group right beside the big, dark bushes. Clare looked at me nervously, sensing something might go wrong. And right then, something terrifying did happen.

“AHHHH!”

We all yelled and scattered as a bunch of terrifying zombies jumped out of the bushes right beside us, screaming their heads off.

All the kids waiting in line scattered everywhere in fear.

It was chaos: a wizard ran past me, and a lobster stood in the middle of the street sobbing. Two minions accidentally slammed into each other. Kids were zipping down the street, trying to escape the zombies chasing them down and spraying them with silly string.

I ran for the other end of the street, away from the chaos. I tripped and dropped my candy bag, spilling some, but picked it up and kept running. And, to make matters worse, I had no idea where Clare was!

My heart pounded as one tall zombie with a green face and ripped clothing chased me, a ghost, and a chef down the block.

Once I reached the street light at the other end, I leaned over with my hands on my knees. I could feel my heart pounding as I caught my breath.

In.

Out.

In.

Out.

The night was cold and I was alone. “Did Clare run the opposite way?” I wondered. It was too dark to tell, and costumed kids had scattered in every direction. As I hunched over, I heard skateboard wheels rolling past.

I heard a familiar voice say, “Ohhh, geez. Rough night? Need a...hand?” (Grant thought he was sooo funny because I was a mitten.)

Regardless, I jumped on the back of his skateboard and held tight. The air felt cold as it blew on my face, and my eyes started stinging. Grant's sweatshirt kind of stunk, but right then, I was just glad to be off Oakley Street and going back to our neighborhood.

"Where are we headed?" He asked as we zoomed down the pavement.

"Clare's house!" I yelled from the back. I felt terrible as I held the broken piece of yarn in my hand and thought of my best friend, who must have been so scared. I thought she'd think to meet me back there. At least, I hoped she would.

Grant dropped me on her doorstep, and my stomach turned as I waited for five minutes. Our street was now dark and empty.

I began to cry. I should have never convinced us to leave the neighborhood. And Clare must have been so terrified, I just felt awful for her.

I looked at the bag of candy and wondered, what was the point of the king-size bars when we already had all this? I picked a piece of silly string off my costume. Sitting alone on the stoop, I felt sad and guilty.

Then I heard a slight roll in the distance. "Could it be?" I wondered, standing up to see.

I strained my eyes to look down the road. I was relieved to see a giant hotdog and a bright blue mitten rumbling over fallen fall leaves and getting closer.

"Thank you, Grinspoon," I said in a weepy voice when they pulled up. I could tell Clare had been crying, too. The hotdog said "sayonara" and skated away.

"I should never have done that." I said as Clare and I walked into her house, "I'm sorry, Clare."

We were both a little rattled but glad to be safe inside. Clare nodded as she ate a fun-sized Snickers bar and wiped away a tear. "I f-f-forgive you." She sniffled out.

We turned on all the lights and sat on the couch in her living room. We were quiet and began sorting through our candy.

"Wanna watch a movie?" I asked eventually.

"Yes...but nothing scary!" Clare said, as she picked up the remote, turned to the kids channel, and smiled softly.

Your Friend,
Joanie