

Autumn by Kate Portillo In the midst of October, with the sky a French grey I wander the empty streets of Lavender Springs. The streets are littered with fallen leaves and the smell of pumpkin spice. A crowd of people exits the costume store with bags full to the brim with candy and pointy witch hats. Everyone is getting ready for this year's festivities. Everyone except me, for I don't have the luxuries of a home, money or a loving family like they do. Oh how I wish I did, I'd usually view the festival from the tops of buildings but it's not the same as actually walking around and interacting with the people.

As I approach the woods at the end town I decide that I too will join in with the people of town in the fall festival this year. But where would I get the supplies or even money for my costume. I pace around and brainstorm. I finally choose to find the materials for my costume. I continue to wander through dense thicket that is the forest, I eventually find materials good enough for a decent costume. Whilst I venture I bump into a familiar face. It's Mandy an old friend from elementary school, what a pleasant surprise I hadn't seen her in ages. It appears like her family came into town for the festival.

"How odd to find a friend wandering around the woods at this hour," I say to her.

"I'm just looking for Nicola; she ran off again" Mandy says in response.

"Again? Oh that stupid cat," I sigh. Mandy's cat always ends up skittering off somewhere. Heaven knows if she'll be found. "Well I really do hope you find her," I say half-lying.

Mandy soon disappears into the dark in her search for Nicola. I go back to making my costume I use twine to bring it all together. I'm actually quite satisfied with the final product it's a mix between a pilgrim and a witch. I put it on then hurry back to town. Once I return I see a sign that says 'entry is 5£' Where am I to get that money from, cause I'm not about to rob a bank or beg for it either. I find myself in a quandary. "I might just sneak in" I think to myself "seems like the only option".

The very next day, I wake up lying against a tree. I rub the sleepiness from my eyes and look over to the street and see people setting up canopies, bringing out delicious pastries, and hanging up signs with big bold letters saying "Lavender Springs FALL FESTIVAL". The buildings are adorned with fairy lights and lanterns hanging from strings they would give a warm glow against the cold, cold night. Watching it all come together is almost as good as being there if only I had a mother and father to bring me to the festival each time it would come around, but seeing as it's not the case I have to find my own methods. Hopefully I see Mandy there.

I doze of staring at the street. Nicola jumps down from the tree onto my head and I let out a gasp "Stupid cat, Mandy is looking for you." I shoo her away in the direction I last saw Mandy. I then find something to do while I wait for dusk to roll in. People start arriving at around 10:30 so I walk down there and climb over a fence while people are distracted buying snacks. It is truly wonderful. the lanterns light a path through the darkness of the street. I walk around admiring the decorations. The smell of the pastries call my name "Ash" they say. It's tempting to steal one or two of them but I stop myself and instead sit down to watch the parade. People are dressed in terrifying costumes of ghouls, ghosts, witches and other horrifying monsters and in the background they are blasting out someone's horrible excuse for a Halloween mixtape at full volume. It's an eerie yet thrilling display. It makes all the

effort I put into getting here so worth it. I spot Mandy in the crowd dressed as a grim reaper. Her cat is walking beside her. I guess she found Nicola after all. As the parade ends I join her.

We walk around from store to store buying stuff we don't need just for the sake of it. It's the most fun I've ever had in a long time. I'd almost forgotten how to behave childishly. It feels like none of this is real. It feels like a dream, Where I'm running around having a whale of a good time. But all good things must come to an end. As dusk becomes night people leave zombishly, Mandy hops into her car and drives off. And I go back to the forest from where I came. I lay my back against a tree and drift off into my thoughts. I set myself a goal, which is to participate in all the town's annual festivities because they are actually quite enjoyable and there's no better way to spend my time.