

## “Night Life”

The day had finally come. Joy, adjusting her mask, her smooth wig, the oversized romper and attached pacifier, regarded herself in the hallway mirror. There had never been a better baby nor had there ever been a more eager trick-or-treater. Behind the slits in her mask, Joy’s eyes glowed and the thin pads her cheeks brushed the rubber, unable to contain her smile. This was the time of friends and adventure and trickery and excess. On the other side of the door, sugar and play and all things different awaited Joy and she took one last look at the oblivious others at their computer screens then quietly snuck outside.

The sun was down and the streetlights were on and in the brightness of their intermittent cones, Joy at once saw little ghouls and witches, vampires, two-legged dinosaurs, clusters of superheroes and more princesses than she could count. She studied the flow of impersonators and dashed into an opening between a group of muscular turtles and a litter of cats and held firm to her pillowcase. “Awww, look at the baby,” one of the cats mewled her way. Joy put a gloved finger to the corner of her mouth and dipped her knees, giggling as highly as her voice would allow and joined the group wordlessly, hoping they would allow her to stay. The five cats took her in and then there were six of them darting up sidewalks, rushing over lawns, bolting across streets, ringing doorbells, knocking once here, more there, howling for candy until their bags were too heavy to lift and had to be dragged onward. Tired but unwilling to retire until the last porchlights went out and the last candy was given, they drew toward the condominiums where they could reach more homes with less effort. By now, Joy could feel pockets of blisters forming

on her heels and on the pads of her feet but she carried on with her new friends, weighting her bag with each tiny anvil, each little boulder. At last, Joy could go no more; not on, anyway, and she waved to her five feline friends before turning toward home.

Joy had gone no more than two blocks when the sounds of happy children and delighted patrons were suddenly severed by a cacophony of sirens and bells and alarms. She walked on, quickly now, ignoring the pain as streets were flooded with blue and red lights, tugging her bag over her aching shoulder so she could move with speed. She took cover in the dark between houses, under trees, behind fences, and soon she was staring up at the bright lights of the manor. Joy breathed, gathering courage with the cool air, then with her chin tipped high she went inside.

Silently, she thanked the saints and spirits that facilitated her invisible re-entry and swiftly hid her pillowcase in the back of the closet beneath her blankets. Then Joy pulled her mask off and instantly aged eighty-two years.