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—Format.....Opinions
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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Hi, Sarah — I made some slight shifts to work around the immediacy of Halloween — I think it still works without being out of date. You are such a good writer. Thanks so much. — Jeff

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 To be scared to death and keep marching anyway

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 Fear takes root in my marrow and becomes a thrumming
3 part of me, just below the surface. It tries to get the last word.

#####END SUBHED#####

4 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

5 HOW DO YOU DRESS UP your fear for Halloween?
6 Mine is tucked beneath a swashbuckling hat and beaded
7 onto a gold chain I looped around my neck — part of my pirate
8 queen costume I found for \$8 with two plastic buckles and a
9 sash. It's a great costume, but still, my fear glows and splinters
10 and keeps catching the light. It won't go away.

11 When I was 14, my high school band marched in the
12 Terribles Parade, a snaking line of raggedy children dressed as
13 elves or superheroes or strange creations of cardboard if their
14 parents were ambitious and didn't believe in store-bought
15 costumes. (Those kids tended to not have TVs.)

16 I hadn't yet got the memo that Halloween was when you
17 become sexy, so I smeared my face with white paint, put on my
18 mom's polar fleece and a Dr. Seuss hat, and became the
19 decidedly unsexy Cat in the Hat. When I arrived, I was greeted by
20 sexy spiders and sexy frogs and sexy fire hydrants. I wanted to
21 hide in the gutter.

22 I never spoke my fear aloud those days, but it was there,
23 buried in my bones — fear of not understanding jokes, of saying
24 my favorite band out loud and no one knowing who they were.
25 Fear of illness and death and war. Fear of being alone.

26 And, that day, fear of looking foolish as I marched down
27 the street with my striped, sky-high hat and unzipped heart.

28 In other words, fear of being alive.

29 * * *

30 THEN, DECADES have passed, it's July 5, 2025, the day
31 after the Big Beautiful Bill has passed, and I'm at my favorite local
32 café where I go to stave off loneliness and "work on my
33 dialogue," i.e., listen to unblemished college students spill out
34 their insides for their equally unblemished friends to hold in their
35 open hands.

36 "Any asshole can open up a haunted house," says a
37 woman in a plaid miniskirt and red cowboy boots, and with a
38 posture like she's being suspended from the ceiling. "It was the
39 weirdest era of my life."

40 And now I'm in the weirdest era of my life, where fear
41 isn't just in my bones, it's in my brain and my heart and every
42 second of every day. Still, I won't give it a name — it's too flimsy
43 and silly and embarrassing to invite in.

44 So it takes root in my marrow and becomes a thrumming
45 part of me, just below the surface. It tries to get the last word.

46 * * *

47 Now I'M THINKING of how, if I asked most people in the
48 United States whether they want to spend more time hanging
49 around with fear, they'll say, "Ummm, no thanks, I'd rather suck
50 slugs, you can find your own way home."

51 And I write on Halloween, of all days, when we expect
52 horror and chills and iridescent blood. I think it's time to
53 barricade the door.

54 But then I scoop gooey insides from pumpkins and light
55 a candle to illuminate the dark. I step into the night for fistfuls of
56 candy and I dress up as what scares me.

57 I remember what it's like to look fear in the face and to
58 give it a name, to let myself be scared to death and keep
59 marching anyway.

60 I remember that a night full of fear is also a night full of
61 stars, that I can excavate fear from my bones and instead walk
62 alongside that murky, snaking river, that coiled up grease. I can
63 still find my way home.

64 We can still find our way home.

#####END TEXT#####

BIO/COATTAIL:

#####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL#####

65 **SARAH ELLIS** is a writer and mental health advocate
66 based in Burlington. A Windham County expatriate, she
67 addresses mental illness, resilience, and hope in her newsletter,
68 "Composted Mayhem," at sarahrebeccaellis.substack.com.

#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

#####BEGIN MAXISSUE#####

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#####END MAXISSUE#####

LINKS:

#####BEGIN LINKS#####

70

#####END LINKS#####

VIDEO:

#####BEGIN VIDEO#####

71

#####END VIDEO#####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

#####BEGIN LOGLINE#####

72

#####END LOGLINE#####