# OctoberTown

Mia Dalia

EARTHLING PUBLICATIONS
2026

*OctoberTown*
by Mia Dalia

Copyright © 2026 by Mia Dalia.

This edition copyright © 2026 Earthling Publications.

*What Is Horror For?* copyright © 2026 Michael Marshall Smith.

Artwork copyright © 2026 by Ben Baldwin.
Interior design copyright © 2026 by Desert Isle Design, LLC.

First edition, first printing
October 2026

ISBN-13: 978-1-963418-15-6

Earthling Publications
60 Thoreau St., Suite #186
Concord, MA 01742
USA
email: earthlingpub@yahoo.com
Website: www.earthlingpub.com

Printed and bound in the United States of America

# Prologue.

This is how a perfect day goes. You, hand in hand with the love of your life, are walking down a street made golden by fallen leaves and sunshine. It is unseasonably warm, a summer day, if you ignore the calendar that emphatically states October.

You are dressed as Pugsley solely because your wife, the beautiful woman next to you, has decided that morning to dress up as Wednesday and, while you do not own a pinstriped suit or other Addams family accouterments, there is a black and white striped T-shirt in your closet, along with black shorts and a pair of knee-high socks.

The two of you might look ridiculous, decked out as the famous morbid siblings, on any other day of the year. But not today. Today is a perfect day, and you can be anyone you want to be. You can walk across your picturesque small town with confidence and get nothing but smiles from passersby. You can look at the seasonally decorated storefronts with their whimsical pumpkins and grinning skeletons and nod approvingly at your reflection.

Sooner rather than later, because the town is compact in a way that still surprises a dedicated city dweller, you arrive at your destination. The famous street. The one that goes all out for the celebration every October.

By suburban standards, the street is broad enough to justify calling itself an avenue—and it does. Each meticulously maintained, oversized house lining it costs millions and looks it. Picturesque on a good day, on October thirty-first, the street is magnificent. Exactly as you might imagine a staid and sedate place to look like on the one day it permits itself to go wild. Yes, it's over the top, and there's enough money to make it so. Everything is larger, flashier, and more exciting than strictly necessary or even perhaps recommended. That's what makes it magical.

Full-size, movie-quality props and decor are everywhere you look; ornate scenes are laid out in the giant, perfectly shorn front yards; enormous wraparound porches have been turned into haunted house attractions. Witches stir their bubbling and steaming cauldrons. Arachnophobes' worst nightmares crawl on the sides of the houses amid the two-story tall webs. Ten-foot animatronic skeletons and werewolves come alive as you pass them, their eyes glinting like demonic rubies. Blood-drenched prom queens and masked serial killers await to terrify and pose for photos. Red balloons drift through the air, their strings clutched by small, chocolate-sticky fingers.

Candy wrappers are everywhere, as colorful and crunchy as the autumn leaves. This place knows how to do treats. They buy them by the box, with extras kept on the porches for backup, and lay them out on the tables for your pleasure. Full-size bars abound. This is the candy store you've always dreamed of as a kid, and you can have anything.

The police have blocked off both ends of the avenue to keep everyone safe, because, of course, no sidewalk, no matter how broad and smoothly paved, can hold this many people. The revelers and trick-or-treaters spill into the street, a colorful wave of superheroes and clowns and dinosaurs.

The cops in the suburbs are jolly in a way a city person might find disconcerting. Not to be outdone by the houses surrounding them,

they've set up their own tables full of treats. They've even rigged up one of their white-and-blue cars to blast cheerful seasonal tunes.

There's something to see everywhere you look, and the two of you are pointing and exclaiming as unselfconsciously as children. A man dressed in a movie-quality Batman suit is pacing and flexing on a low porch roof of one of the houses. Fully in character, he pauses occasionally and sits on his haunches, looking up, as if expecting a signal from a modified spotlight to blast into the sky and summon him to fight evil.

The best thing is that you can almost believe it might happen, because surely if there was ever a day for such a thing, it is today.

It's eighty degrees outside. Those in the more elaborate costumes are overheating—sweat is beading their ghostly makeup, heavy headpieces and custom layers are coming off—and you are glad for your T-shirt-and-shorts getup.

"Indian summer," you tell your wife, and then the two of you muse on the origins of the phrase, deciding in the end that it is likely something dated, potentially racist, and best purged from one's vocabulary.

Then you promptly switch to talking about the dramatically nonlinear evolution of Pugsley Addams as a character, while Wednesday has remained more or less the same.

That's the best part about sharing your life with someone—you never need to be alone in your thoughts, no matter how weird or random they may be.

You walk up and down the avenue twice, and there's always something new to behold. People are driving in from all over to come here today. For once, the notoriously lily-white town is sporting some racial diversity, looking a bit more like the real world. It's difficult to imagine what it must be like for the people who don't live here. You are a local now and have been for a couple of years, and the place still feels surreal, with its picture-perfect houses, manicured public spaces, sparkling clean streets, and smiling people. Even the

dogs here appear to be mostly of the same breed—expertly groomed labradoodles, trimmed curls and effortless poise.

The town has been recently voted one of the country's thirty safest and richest. It never quite stops feeling like you've walked onto a movie set. Perhaps something nostalgia-driven or a horror movie's calm-before-the-storm idyll.

You take turns snapping photos of each other, because selfies never come out looking right. In the end, you give up and ask others to take pictures of the two of you together. One woman does a particularly wonderful job, squatting low for a panoramic perspective, as you pose next to a humongous skeleton that looks like it is climbing either into or out of the ground. There, a season's greetings card is done. Two people, happy, in love and in costume.

You continue holding hands, ignoring the presumed incestuous vibes of it in relation to your respective getups. No one cares what you do, not here, not on this perfect October day.

You used to worry about moving here from the big city, imagining small towns might be too…well, small-minded. But look at it today. Anyone would move here in a heartbeat. This place is spectacular.

Unlike you, your wife grew up in a blandly Rockwellian small town and has the fondest childhood memories of suburban Halloweens, though they pale in comparison to the splendor before you. Now, her inner child is out, giggling with delight, sugar-high, distracted, and delirious.

Back in the city, October candy giveaways were limited and vigorously monitored, for kids only. No one would let an adult, even a costumed one, have a piece of chocolate.

Not here. Anything goes here. Want a candy? Take a candy. Heck, take two. Help yourself. They bought it, and you'll eat it; no two ways about it.

As the two of you walk the surrounding streets, slowly winding your way home, there's less trick-or-treater traffic, and on their

decorated porches, people with candy are getting more enthusiastic. Some have even put together small gift baggies full of sweets. Others have given up altogether, abandoning their posts, leaving nothing but bowls of candy in their wake as proof of participation.

Fewer kids can be found out and about the further you get from the avenue of madness. Groups of young teens, or perhaps tall preteens, roam around with pillowcases, like career candy hunters. After a while, the two of you seem to be the only adults in costume, and far too happy to be self-conscious about it.

Needless to say, your wife ends up with a full purse of candy. It's in your pockets too. It's just what happens. To avoid it would be like walking in the rain without getting wet. She enjoys one intermittently, but you're experiencing the bathtub effect in real time: the treats are coming in faster than they can be eaten—and isn't that the neatest trick of all?

Eventually, you run out of town. It's easy enough to do in a place this small. Technically, you live in the next town over, though all that separates your house from the town's "Welcome" marker is a five-minute walk. Still, it's a different zip code, a different tax bracket. To get home, you walk past a nineteenth-century cemetery for atmosphere, then cut the corner through a park.

In the city, such a wild expanse of nature would likely be considered the woods, but here it's a park. The river that runs through it is nothing but a creek. How strange geography is—different locations requiring an entirely different terminology to describe the same things.

Like proper woods, they can be spooky at night, but it's a short walk, and you enthusiastically crunch the leaves beneath your feet the entire way to warn off any real or imaginary predators.

Soon enough, you're back in civilization. Across the road, your modest home beckons. It's the first one you've ever owned, alone or with someone else, the one you're still trying to make fit, like a particularly recalcitrant suit. It feels too big, but everyone says it's just right.

It doesn't matter—your wife adores it. And you adore her. She is your home, and the rest are just walls and windows and laboriously restored pine floors.

You look at each other as you wait for the cars to pass. Her eyes are like stars.

Nothing would complete this day and highlight its perfection like a full moon, but the moody satellite is being coy, showing only a part of its pockmarked face.

"Someone ate the sky cheese," you say, and it gets a laugh. When you're in love, you laugh at each other's stupid jokes. It's one of the unwritten rules. Your wife's hand is warm in yours. It makes you feel like an electric appliance in the best possible way—connected to power, grounded, purposeful.

The stars are out tonight. You don't see a showing like this in the city, not with all the light pollution. You wish you knew constellations to make sense out of their randomness. Or maybe randomness is part of its beauty.

You gesture to it, smiling. She smiles back. Your hearts are full of love, and your pockets are full of candy. The spirits are roaming free tonight, and there's a smell of fire in the air. It doesn't get any better than this. It's the perfect Halloween. A perfect day. A perfect night.

You step off the curb to cross the street. A scary movie awaits you at home, preselected weeks in advance for the occasion. The car comes out of nowhere. There's a screeching of brakes, a hot metal breath on your skin, and suddenly your hand is empty, and all you see are stars, winking out of the indigo sky one by one by one…