

Saturday Morning Jog

By C. Jade Wyton

Toni goes on his usual early-morning jog and sees some not-so-usual occurrences. Though, nothing seems too out of the ordinary, so he doesn't let it bother him.

Contains some very mild supernatural themes.

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Toni awoke at the same time he did most Saturdays: 5:30am on the dot.

He threw in the clothes he had chosen and hung on the back of his desk chair the night before and, after a quick break for the bathroom, made his way downstairs and out front.

A glance at the house told him Garrett was already awake and getting ready for the day, with the lights on in the man's bedroom window.... And a look around the yard told him the same was true for Goya, as he picked up the porch chair that had been knocked over and replaced it.

He slipped out the front gate after that and, after making sure he had his phone and keys by tapping his pockets, began his usual morning jog.

It was still dark out, of course. The sun wasn't due to rise until at least ten minutes after he planned to get home. As was the norm of the routine he had been slowly falling into.

He listened to no music, much more content being able to hear his surroundings as he ran.

Birds rousing in the nearby trees. His talons against the pavement. A dog barking.... And a car starting up and idling as the engine warmed for someone's drive to work— Not that it would need long. It was the beginning of Summer, after all.

Toni gave the owner a quick wave as he passed, despite the gripping anxiety in his chest begging him to pretend he hadn't seen them or heard their greeting.

He knew them from church, and he wasn't about to let his anxiety and his trauma turn him into a rude neighbour. No matter how scared he was of people... just in general.

Gods, he needed to get back on his medication!

He took a deep breath and turned his focus back to his jog. The route he took lead straight to the woods, minimising his chances of running across any more of his neighbours.

The only *downside* of this route is it made him much more likely to accidentally come upon Goya. Which, he knew, was a terrible way to think of the poor old man... but he couldn't help himself with being uncomfortable. It wasn't that Goya was homeless and dirty, as seemed to be most people's issue with him. It was that he was so extremely *creepy*.

*Was that offensive?* Toni winced as he made his way onto the worn little trail. *There was clearly something wrong with the guy. Was calling him creepy*

*ablest?*

He shook the thought from his mind and continued on, the sound of the bugs and the birds becoming more frequent as he got deeper into nature and the day edged closer.

He heard what sounded like a fox calling as he came to an old bench and he slowed to a stop, pausing a moment to collect some rubbish —a few chocolate wrappers and what appeared to be a single-use vape— that had been left behind by a more careless visitor in the woods.

The fox stopped calling as he slipped the wrappers and vape into his pocket and he listened a moment longer to see if it would start up again.... When it didn't he continued on his way without another thought; comfortable in nature despite the strange feeling that was floating in from the trees around him.

There was an odd air in the woods, today. Not a dangerous one. But still odd.

Toni paused again as the fox gave another loud cry, sounding almost distressed this time, and he glanced around. It sounded closer than it had before.

It cried again and he peered in its direction, wondering if there had, perhaps, been an illegal trap laid that he would need to call Russ about.

But, instead of a fox in a trap, he found an abandoned plastic bag with litter spilling out. He figured the fox had probably been going through it, and had been spooked off by his presence, so he picked it up, scooping all the loose pieces that had fallen out back into the bag before tying it closed and picking it up to take home with him.

'This what all that distress was about?' he jokingly asked the empty air. 'Don't worry, I got it! Let me know if there's any more around you need me to pick up!'

It was funny until he turned back to the trail and found a fox standing in the middle of the path, staring at him.

He hesitated as he came across it, his smile fading as he and the animal met eyes.

'Uh...' he lifted the bag, awkwardly, as if showing the fox— Though for the life of him he didn't know why he did it. 'I... I cleaned up for you?'

The fox, in fox fashion, ran into the nearby bushes and vanished, leaving Toni standing on his own in stunned silence.

After a few seconds he shook it off and continued on his run, rubbish in hand, and put the unexpected encounter down to a coincidence.

There was no more litter or foxes along the rest of the trail and Toni was able to enjoy the scenery without much further distraction. The trees rustled in the wind, the occasional bird or squirrel finding themselves disturbed and briefly running into view as they moved somewhere more comfortable.

At most, Toni stopped to let an opossum waddle past without frightening it. But that only took half a minute, and he was soon back in town and on his way home, where he deposited the litter in his outdoor bin and washed his hands with the hose.

He saw movement on the porch and winced when he realised Goya was sitting on his porch lounge with a handful of pancakes. His eyes were locked onto the hose and his body was tense, like he feared he might be about to be sprayed, so Toni gently replaced it back on the ground and used the back door instead of front to go inside.

Garrett greeted him warmly, confirmed he gave Goya breakfast, and then went to wake the kids as Toni returned to his room to do his cool-down stretches and weekend tidying.

He opened the door and paused, staring, as he saw a shadow and the glint of golden eyes standing to greet him in the darkness of his room.

A long pause, followed by him hurriedly fumbling for the light.... Though when he turned back the shadow was gone.

That was... weird.

‘Morning, Mum.’

Toni turned to his son as the boy opened his arms and walked into him. It felt more like a collision than an embrace, but he hugged him back tightly and nuzzled his cheek.

‘How’d you sleep?’ he asked.

‘Like shit,’ Ralph replied. ‘Tegan woke me when she snuck out. And *again* when she came home.’

‘She snuck out?’ Toni asked with a sigh.

Ralph paused as he realised what he’d said. Then he swore. ‘Please don’t tell her I snitched. She’ll be pissed.’

‘Don’t worry, I’ll deal with it,’ Toni promised, making a mental note to talk with Tegan later. ‘She doesn’t have to know it came from you.’

‘Cool.... You need help cleaning up?’

‘Nah, I got it,’ he reassured. ‘See you at breakfast?’

‘Cool,’ Ralph repeated; not really actually answering the question or agreeing, though Toni knew what he meant.

He staggered off, leaving Toni alone, and the man simply put his hands on his hips as he turned back to his room. Once he was satisfied that there was no evidence of a break-in (person, animal, or otherwise) he entered.

‘Can you quit it?’ he asked aloud to the air as he closed the door and retrieved his yoga mat from behind it.

He took it to the balcony and rolled it out, intending to continue his day without it being ruined, and settled down to do his stretches. As he did he looked out to the backyard and saw Goya creeping around their duck coop.

He didn’t try and break in, though, so Toni simply let him sniff at it like some sort of feral animal, and pushed the strange morning to the back of his mind.

‘Ugh,’ he mumbled as he reached up for the sky and felt the tension in his shoulders loosen. ‘I need to go back my meds....’

—END—

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