

Morning Routine

I like my wallpaper most in the morning sun. I honestly don't think I'd be a morning person if I didn't wake up to it. I need tea too—Irish breakfast, with or without a breakfast. But, if I'm going to have one, toast is nice... toast and raspberry jam is better. Music is a must—a mellow melody to lull me out of my lull. A loud yawn and a good stretch puts my joints on alert. Followed by a slight snuffle from the chilling fall air and a brisk walk to the bathroom—it's beckon being what pulled me from my rest in the first place. But, what I don't need, and have actually come to very much dislike, is looking out my window to see a homeless man eating from my birdfeeder.

"Hey!" I screamed, leaning out my window, holding my bathrobe shut with one hand while thrashing aside my curtains with the other. "Stop eating out of my fucking birdfeeder!"

He jumped aside and shimmied down the fire escape to escape. I grumbled to myself as I shut my window and returned to my morning routine.

A nice hot shower was perfect—with two gigantic fluffy towels waiting for me when I got out. I had a mismatched pair of slippers—one from each pair of two pairs I'd lost one of.

Work was at the other end of my walk through the park, which was exactly what I needed to wake up. I served people bagels and coffee—always with a big smile and a napkin. The regulars were my first-name-basis-friends who allotted me a window into their lives every day. And, in return for my open ears, they'd come back again and again with more stories to tell.

There was a hot pile of seed-speckled-bum-crap on my balcony, next to two dead squirrels he'd managed to overthrow. He'd used leaves from one of my plants to wipe his ass—hygienic enough to service himself but had still left the leaves crumpled together on my bench.

This morning, I needed a drink.

A good café inspires life. People come in—tired, groggy, grumpy—and they leave awake, alert and happy. I love my job. Not because it pays the most, or is all that easy—any server can tell you how hard it is when a tour bus empties in on top of the morning rush. Instead, I love my job because it makes me feel like me.

“You’ll never guess how they met,” Gregor announced, keeping his voice two clicks above the norm to accommodate anyone who cared to eavesdrop. “He was riding his bike and he lost control of it going down a hill. So he veered off the road and hit a parked car—smashing right through the back windshield.”

“Are you sure you’re telling me the right story?”

“Yeah, yeah... anyway, he was knocked unconscious and just lay there in the back seat. So, after a couple minutes, she came outside and got in her car—not even noticing what had happened. She drives off and starts talking on her cell with me. Then I heard her scream at the top of her lungs when the guy woke up. They’ll have been married two years next week.”

“Wow.”

“So, you see, you can find it anywhere.”

“What? A concussion?”

“No, love... or, whatever variation you’re after.”

“Ha... I’ll just stick with your stories and keep to myself,” I laughed, shooting down yet another patron’s encouragement. Gregor was the most interesting morning conversationalist I knew—but even him trying to instill hope in me was hopeless. It’s not hard to smile with a broken heart, but it is hard not to frown. Everyone had noticed my change of pace and the subtle sulk of my face. With my ex, Jordan, things made sense. And now I was without him.

“Amy, can I have a word,” my boss, Michael, exclaimed—poking his head out of the back room—arms crossed and frown loaded.

“Sure thing,” I replied, saying a quick goodbye to Gregor before sliding into the back.

“Ok, um... now I’m not accusing you of anything, but, I’ve asked everyone else, so I have to ask you too,” he explained, fidgeting, wincing and avoiding eye contact all at the same time. “There were a few packages of poppy seeds missing from the inventory, do you know anything about that?”

"No, not at all... is it an inventory error or did someone steal them?"

"I'm looking into it."

"Ok."

"Also, there were a couple of dead squirrels found in the back, any idea how that happened?"

"Uh..." I muttered, my face unable to convey how confused I was. "There were dead squirrels in the café?"

"Yeah, and I'm pretty sure they weren't here when I locked up last night."

"That's weird... I found two dead squirrels on my balcony earlier today."

"Really? Huh... maybe there's like a rodent plague going around or something," he joked, as I tried my best to swallow the coincidence of missing seeds and dead squirrels.

"Maybe."

"Alright, now, this is the really weird one," he stated, taking a deep breath and giving a loud sigh. "Did you... or... do you know who might have... taken a shit on the floor?"

"What?" I gasped, immediately thinking of my homeless adversary's attack upon my balcony and, apparently, my employer as well.

"Yeeeah... I'm sorry to have to ask but... I really need to know."

"Someone took a crap on the floor here in the restaurant?"

"Over there, specifically," he replied, pointing to a handful of paper towels covering up the evidence. I walked shakily over to it, feeling my heart start to quicken. Then, with a delicate finger and an agitated nostril, I peeked under the fluffy white sheets to see a pile of seed-speckled-bum-crap.

"Mother fucker," I exclaimed, taking a quick step back to keep from throwing up—this meant war.

Continued in The Collection: Volume One
