

And Still the Sun Comes Up  
by Ruth Fenton

Much to their displeasure, the alarm clock rang precisely on time. Roused from decadently comfortable microfleece sheets they trudged between bedroom and bathroom performing their morning rituals.

She was thrilled to find a nearly full pot of cold coffee made the night before and miraculously not consumed. Into the microwave and BOOM! Actually, it was BEEP. First cuppa taken care of.

They took turns throwing soft objects at the sleeping child who needed to be dragged along on their out of town errand. Though sorely tempted to jump on the mattress creating both an incredibly annoying experience and one destined to dissolve into giggles, they refrained because the bed was old and no longer sturdily assembled, so they contented themselves with missile lobbing and singing cheerful wake up songs, loudly and off key. The child was not amused. But they were, and that was good enough for them.

The trio pulled miscellaneous articles of clothing out of various drawers and off numerous hangers and onto their several and separate body parts until they three deemed themselves presentable to go out into the world at large. They had fairly low standards.

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They breakfasted on cereal low in nutrition and high in refined sugar and artificial dyes, knowing they shouldn't eat anything of a color not seen in nature, but not really caring much. When they return home from their outing they will eat bacon. Just bacon. Because bacon is real food. Bacon is THE food.

They do boots and coats and seat belts and quit kicking my seat and no, I didn't bring your tablet. We don't have wifi in the car. Read a damn book. I'll curse if I want to. You're not the boss of me; you're not even tall enough to go on all the rides. When you're learned enough to use vulgarity properly, you can curse, too. And quit kicking my seat.

Their errand is mundane but a necessary part of their agreement of how their world should work. Grocery shopping or dropping off recyclables or taking the car in for an oil change. So they determine to make it a wondrous adventure for the entertainment of all, but, no, it's really not and they don't even fool themselves. They enjoy each other's company but don't pretend to enjoy what they're doing.

They run into a couple they know from running into them. Will and Billy or Dan and Dani or some other combination of names destined to make them indistinguishable from each other, which they are. They own a business run from their home where they work side by side as co-owners and

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co-workers. The business is successful. Their household functions smoothly. They accompany each other on their mundane but necessary errands. Their hobbies and extracurriculars all are shared and apparently enjoyed with each other. She finds it horrifying. The couple is pleasant, always. And smiley, always. She does not think they are human.

She and her own husband had never spent a full week seeing each other daily until they were eight years into their marriage. After their first six weeks of dating, they lived in different states up to and through their engagement. After they married, they worked different shifts, and there were temporary assignments of varying lengths away from home. When he finally got a 9 to 5 position and was home every evening, every weekend, every holiday, he was so happy to relax at home surrounded by his family, he forewent all outside interests. No golf. No softball league. Not even an occasional night out with the boys. She couldn't stand it. So she declared she would go out Fridays nights to play board games and drink exotic beers with a group of lady friends and return sometime next day. She's pretty sure that saved her marriage from inevitable ruin.

But that was a long time ago. Now they enjoyed cocooning, keeping the outside world at bay bolstered, comforted, and protected while delighting

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in each other's existence whether engaged or oblivious, binge watching Netflix, or more often wall to wall analysis of current events.

They prided themselves on knowing the value of eating family dinners together while seated at furniture designed for that purpose but often ate from tray tables in a clannish gathering surrounded by electronic entertainment like Neanderthals around a fire with their fresh kill complete with monosyllabic grunting and gaseous expulsions. From time to time she insisted they eat green food, even salads, which turned out not to be an ordeal as they all of them actually liked vegetables. And they liked fried take out and stuff that came in cans and ice cream sandwiches made with imitation vanilla flavoring.

Some mornings she did yoga. She popped in a DVD and the 65 inch screen delivered a soporific narration of stretching exercises and instructions to grab body parts in ways not seen in polite society. It propelled him out of the room and directly to something on his to do list he had been hoping to defer yet another day. They were both masters of procrastination and models of productivity, by turns and in spurts. The backlog of their lives was long and frustrating, but what had to get done got done. Or it didn't. And still the sun comes up each day.

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Before the child came to live with them, they were long retired from the responsibilities of maintaining schedules for others. Or setting a good example. Or revealing the world to another in its myriad marvels. They'd gotten used to selfishly enjoying the enjoyments and rarely sharing.

They consciously and unapologetically split infinitives whenever they wanted to. And ended sentences with prepositions. And spoke in fragments. They inconsistently mixed number agreement and sometimes just trailed off before they...

She finished a book the adult child had passed along with a lukewarm review. "It's OK. It's readable. It'll pass the time." She enjoyed it very much. It was a story filled with tragedy with a bittersweet ending. She preferred happy endings, but endings that were faithful to the tale. There could not be a 'happy ending' to this book. It would not have rung true.

He was reading yet another murder mystery by one of those authors whose every book lands on the Best Seller list because he'd written a book or two worthy of the placement and now his name assured him success no matter what words he put between the covers. They'd lost track of the titles so when she grabbed something from the new book shelf at the library she relied on the computerized check out program to tell her whether or not she'd borrowed it before.

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The small person was caught up in a dark chapter book about supernatural beings in the forests of an unidentified island in warm climes. They read. To themselves. To each other. Books. Poems. News articles. Letters. Internet posts. They digested and discussed. And still they shoved their faces into the screens to watch and listen and play and engage. They tried to absorb everything while simultaneously trying to turn off, tune out, shut out all of the everything out there trying to come in.

They guarded their cloister unyieldingly while leaving the door wide open and welcoming all comers. They were private and defensive but delighted in the company of all. Except those they didn't. Who were welcomed anyway. With coffee and conversation and debate and promises to get together more often. The younger cat always says hello and rubs legs and noses. The older one always bolts and hides until it is safe to emerge, after the guests have gone, when it is just them again. They often desire to do the same, but they don't.

They dance the dance, walk the tightrope, juggle the balls of cosmic balance keeping them in the air and in constant movement so their world will continue spinning in its orbit. Except for the ones that fall which they quickly dive to recover to toss back into rotation. Except for the ones that fall which they kick under the couch to deal with later. Except for the ones

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that fall which just lay on the floor ignored. And still the sun comes up each  
day.

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