

An After Dinner Walk

by J. Kyle Kimberlin

There was a day, late summer because the days were still long and warm, when after dinner we decided to go for a walk. I thought it was a poor idea, being full and sleepy; I wanted to sit and watch a game or the news. To have the cat jump up in my lap and fall asleep, purring. But we started out, briskly, and she was in the lead as always, with her quick clipped steps. By the time we passed the gray bungalow with white window frames, two doors down, she was pulling ahead. She walked like a school principal, on her way to break up a fight.

Hey, after dinner walks are customarily taken at a more leisurely pace.

Oh, you have the book of customs for taking walks. I've been looking everywhere for that. You need the exercise.

Madam, I will not have you exercise me like a dog. Slow down and enjoy the stroll, or forge ahead alone.

No need to get mad.

I'm not. I'm just saying.

The needles of the fir tree in Mrs. Aldernecht's front yard had fallen to fill her bird bath again. The morning paper was gone from her drive, which meant she was getting too old to care for the birds, but not too sick to leave the house. I was relieved.

Two doors father and across the street, Charlie Harmon stood in his open garage, polishing his Yamaha. His wife had left him, took the kids, but he kept those tires black and the chrome bright. He had a new satellite dish, bolted to the chimney at the peak of the roof. We waved.

We got to the end of the block and turned, and turned again, circling back to the house. In the kitchen, she poured a glass of wine. She offered me the bottle but I shook my head.

You didn't want to go on, I said.

What?

We went around the block, and didn't go on to the park.

No. And she went on to watch Jeopardy on the bedroom TV, to change her clothes, to drink the wine. I sat at the table and watched the last light from the window slide from a metal rooster trivet hanging by the stove.

I wished we had gone on to the park, so I could pick a flower for her to hold. Someone would be playing Frisbee with a dog.

Everything would be different if she had held the flower I picked for her, watched the dog running and jumping. We would have gone on to the playground, and seeing the children playing there, we would have gone home to make our own. Charlie would have sold the bike and got his wife and family back, and I could have cleared the needles and filled the birdbath with water, to keep Mrs. Aldernecht from the nursing home.

We turned and turned and the dog never played. The sun went down, came up and there was a day after dinner when she wasn't there. Then neither was I, but sometimes I pick a flower, hold it for a while, and when nothing happens, I let it drop.



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