

Routine

Donald McMann

She awoke at six-fifteen, as she always did. No alarm clock required. Jeffery remained silent, lying on his left side, undisturbed by her exit from the bed, undisturbed by the closing of the door to the en suite bathroom, undisturbed by the muffled sounds of urination and then the flushing of the toilet, undisturbed by the running of water in the basin, the opening, again, of the door.

"Time to get up, sleeping beauty." No response.

She took her robe from the back of the chintz-covered chair, where it awaited her every morning. She walked to the kitchen, switched on the coffee maker that she had made ready the night before, and went to the front door to collect the morning paper.

Next, a whole-wheat English muffin. Toasted. Cream cheese? She hesitated. But this Thursday morning seemed like a good occasion for a little treat. She could have less to eat at lunch. Or at lunch tomorrow. And to make that treat complete, some raspberry jelly was in order. She retrieved it from the refrigerator and noted (briefly) how little remained in the jar. But there'd be no guilt. A little cream cheese and jelly represent a much-needed treat that helps the dieter stay on track. Besides, it's not such a big thing.

She carried her breakfast to the table, sat at her place, reached for the newspaper. But then she was drawn to Jeffery's place. Evidence of another restless night. The bottle of TUMS. Cap off. A half-empty cup of milk. His reading glasses, lens-side down — as usual. She picked up the glasses and studied them. Black rectangular frames. One of the nosepieces loose. Some scratches, of course. And the smudges Jeffery's lavish black eyebrows had left on the inside top corner of each lens. She set the glasses down again, this time with the lenses up. What would he do without her to look after him?

"Jeffery," she called out from the kitchen, "time to get a move on. Jeez. Why do we have to go through this every morning?" And a few minutes later, "Okay. Stay in bed. Get fired. This isn't my problem," though of course it would be.

She emptied the dishwasher and put her breakfast things in the machine. But before she went to get ready for work, she poured him some coffee in his dog mug, the one with the Airedale on the side.

"Okay," she called out, "I'm bringing you some coffee. Please. Get a move on. I'm begging."

When she got to their bedroom, she lingered in the doorway and stared at Jeffery. Minutes passed. He remained silent, motionless, lying on his left side, just as though he were asleep.

When the dog mug smashed against the hardwood floor, coffee splashed everywhere. So much coffee.