October Leaves

My pocket vibrated as I pulled into Paul’s driveway. I thought it might be him answering my previous text about when he was going to be home but it was just Joe. I turned off my lights and pulled the keys out of the ignition. The sky was a light gray as the day began to turn into night and a little wind pulled at my wool sweater and tossed my curly ponytail. I walked through the grass beside the sidewalk purely just to be obstinate. I liked to hear the leaves crunch under my boots.

I was nervous as I opened the door with my key. Lately I felt as though I was abusing my key privileges. It was supposed to be so I could come over and take care of Bishop while he was at work but I came over sometimes to just do homework and nap. I liked his place better than mine because it felt more like a home and didn’t have a weird smell emanating from the dirty dishes I refused to wash. The problem with not having roommates anymore was that no one cleaned up after me now. So, the solution it seemed was to commandeer someone else’s home.

I don’t think Paul minded that I did this since I was still hanging with Bishop and he mostly knew about it. The difference between today and the previous days however was that yesterday we had had a discussion about moving in together next year. Neither of us was really for this idea but I wanted to know his opinion on the matter since we were practically living together already. I entered my apartment solely to shower and change anymore and the other day he had suggested that I bring my stuff over to his so I could do it there instead. I was the one who chose to keep that separate.

Then, yesterday morning when my best friend Tony asked if I wanted to live with him and our other friend Sam, the thought crossed my mind. I asked Paul what he thought about it and at first he didn’t understand what I was getting at or else he was playing dumb because he didn’t want to talk about it. Then, after I kept pushing, he finally answered me and said: “that’s a long way off. Let’s talk about this later”. I was sort of relieved that was his answer but at the same time I felt embarrassed being shut down so hard. When I tried to explain my position later, he talked about how a man needs his space and that’s a big step for any couple. Now, as I unlocked his front door, I felt like a creepy girlfriend intruding upon his “manly space”, even though I was just there to walk Bish.

The house was eerily dark and quiet. I felt as though I should announce my presence but I wasn’t sure to whom. Paul might have been here but he was probably still at work. Tuesdays were usually pretty long for him. Bishop came up to greet me right away and I bent down to scritch his excited little brown head. Bishop sort of looked like a large corgi with normal sized legs. He had the pointy little ears and a little white stripe down his nose and tummy. For the most part he was a light brown but he also had a white tip on his tail that I compared to a balloon animal. Paul thought it looked like the tip of a condom.

I got the sense that I should be quiet and so I whispered hello to the dog and tip toed past the bookshelf to the hallway on the left. I had to sort of dance around Bishop’s wiggly little body as he was trying to push me back out the door and onto our walk.

“I have to go put my stuff down first bud, then we’ll go for a walk!” I was never a fan of baby talk to small humans but when it comes to animals, my voice will go to the most annoying, gushy, high pitched baby talk register that it can go without sounding shrill. I stepped to the side of bishop and crept along the gray runner carpet that lined the red tile floor. It was the same carpet that bishop often slid on when he got too excited to go out. I looked around at the smorgasbord of framed items on the wall that I had noticed a hundred times. Paintings his sister had done, movie posters, pictures of France, they embodied all of the best parts of Paul’s personality. I smiled involuntarily and sort of wished he was here.

I reached the bedroom and set my bag on the floor beside his off white dresser. This was sort of my corner. I had my various crap that I left there on the floor and on the dresser. Perhaps this wasn’t the most considerate thing considering our talk yesterday. I probably needed to talk it home; I wasn’t likely to use it anytime soon anyways. Black high heeled boots, lacy tights, cut off tank top and various other clothing items as well as a root beer bottle from the other night when Paul made pizza. Most of it was just the remnants of a night out with my girls. I stepped on the floor board that always creaked and heard a big sleepy lump roll over in the bed. I turned around and noticed Paul was home. Instantly I felt like an intruder.

Bishop jumped up on the bed then and bent down in his play position with his butt up in the air. I wanted Paul to know I had come there for the correct reason and so I encouraged the pup.

“You wanna go for a walk bud? Let’s go for a walk!”

I went into the hallway where his leash and harness were and he followed. For once he let me get his harness on in one fowl swoop and click him in with ease. He sat and cocked his head at me with one ear tilted outward. I mirrored his action and thought about how cute he was and how his harness reminded me of a blue seatbelt for dogs. I picked up the other end of his black leash that I had bought for him when we first got him. I had looked for a plain black one but only found one with white dog bones on it. At first I thought it looked sort of silly but now he wore it handsomely. As usual, Bishop tried to pull my arm off as I locked the door behind us.

We started off on our usual route, across the street and down Yewell. Every five steps Bishops diligently stopped to smell something. Everything must be smelled. Like clockwork he stopped to poop in the cranky old man’s yard three houses down. I think he did it primarily out of spite for the signs that the guy had put up. There were three of them - sharpie on cardboard - that proudly said: “No dogs!” “Keep dogs off grass” and my favorite “I pay taxes!” I was glad to know he would not be visited by the IRS anytime soon but I wasn’t entirely sure what it had to do with dogs and his grass, which honestly wasn’t that spectacular. Maybe he was mostly protesting to the fact that I never remembered a bag to pick up the presents Bishop left for him and taxes just muddled his thoughts. Silly old man.

We trudged on through the swimming pool of leaves that coated the sidewalk. I was amazed the trees still had any leaves left at this point but I guess that’s just the magic of October. A few houses had some decorations up already. It was the second week of October so Halloween was slowly creeping up on us. I had gotten some decorations the other day but still had yet to put them up in the yard. Perhaps it was because I wasn’t satisfied yet. You either go all out with your Halloween decorations or you are a pussy that needs to reconsider your life. The family that lives four blocks down was the latter. Their yard was decked out with two pumpkins, a big orange one and a small yellow one, and a kiddie pool. I mentally spat on their lawn as we passed their house. Though I did give them props for the tandem bike with the horn stuck to the front. I missed bike horns.

As we went along I looked at all of the houses with feng shuied yards, little fountains and benches with frog statues thinking about life. I admired these people for their creativity. If I were to attempt something like that it would come out looking like a five year old started playing in the yard with rocks then got distracted by something shiny and went on to do other things – mostly because that is what would happen.

My favorite house, however, was just before we hit Highland Street. It was a stone house covered in vines and flowers and it looked like something out of a fairytale, especially now with the multicolored leaves sprinkled all over the yard. They seemed to glitter with magic and fairy dust and the house seemed to glow separately from the other suburban boxes that lined the street. Bishop peed on their lawn.

We continued on but as we neared Highland Street Bishop began to pull back the way we had come and whimpered. I turned back to look at him and he had his tail tucked.

“What’s wrong bud? This is the way we always go. You’re okay” I pulled him along and commanded him in German to keep going.

“What is up with you? Everything’s fine bud. Geradeaus.” I pulled him along for another block before he started trying to go back again.

“What is your deal dude?” I squatted down to pet him a little and he shied away. “It’s okay buddy!” We kept walking. Bishop pulled for another couple of steps and then he saw a dog. He was a little black and white spotted guy that sort of looked like a beagle. He was half the size of Bishop but Bish cannot resist the chance to smell anyone else’s butt. He was loose in the shaggy lawn in front of an old blue house. I couldn’t remember seeing this house before. All of the houses in Paul’s neighborhood were small charming little places so I should have remembered a dump like this one. The leaves in front of this house were dead and the paint was falling off in large chunks like hair. The bare wood underneath was rotten and termites crawled in and out of its pores.

I let Bishop walk up to the little dog since he loves other animals so much. The little dog began to bare his teeth. Just as we were about to walk away an old man with sunken eyes rimmed with dark bags and thinning hair walked out. He was hunched over and wearing a royal blue sweater and jeans. He smiled at me and I could see old, yellowed teeth underneath his pale, wrinkled lips.

“Sorry about that!” He ran over to the small spotted dog and hooked a blue leash through the link on his yellow collar.

“Oh that’s fine! Bishop loves other dogs.” The old man reached down to pet Bishop and he cowered away in fear. His tail curled under him more than I had ever seen before and he backed up behind my legs.

“It’s okay buddy! He’s sort of scared of people. He wasn’t separated from his mother when he was young so he likes animals much more than people.”

“Oh, that’s alright. What kind of dog is she?”

“He’s an Australian Cattle dog.”

“Oh it’s a he.” The old man turned his back to me and walked in the opposite direction.

“Okay! Well have a great day!” The old man said nothing in return. He probably didn’t hear me. “Come on bud!” I tugged on the leash and we continued on down the street. Bishop was still hesitant but he walked with me this time. We turned to go down Macy like we usually do.

“Nach rechts!” but as we turned nothing seemed familiar. I looked up at the street sign again to make sure this was the right street and it still said Macy. Perhaps I was just remembering a different street. There were only two houses on the right of the first block. Neither of them was big but there was a wide span of untamed wilderness between them. It was as though there had once been a house in that plot but it had been swallowed up by a lawn that had never been mowed. Next to the empty land was a two story yellow house.

It had a neglected garden between it and the street and a large tree hiding the rest of the house. A tire swing hung from one of the lower branches of the tree. Bishop suddenly stopped and refused to go any further. I turned back to him and tried to coax him along but he wouldn’t budge. He began pulling me into the street away from the sidewalk in front of the house. I gave up and let him go around the house. I turned forward again and noticed a large clear ball with stars on it in the middle of the sidewalk in front of us. I must not have noticed it before. That’s probably what Bishop was afraid of. Sometimes you can’t tell what’s going to scare that dog.

As we went around the ball I noticed two small children hiding in the weeds of the garden. There was a little girl and a little boy about the same age. I couldn’t tell who was older if at all. Maybe they were twins. Both kids had brown hair that hung in their faces and had dirt smudged on their cheeks. They must have been playing in the dirt of the garden. They watched as we passed.

“Hey guys!” They turned and ran inside. They probably were told not to talk to strangers. That’s probably good. I am quite the dangerous psychopath. Bishop tried to pull left but I kept him going straight.

“No buddy we’re going this way.” We kept going forward as a slight breeze pushed the tire swing gently and made the leaves under it dance as though somebody were tossing them into the air. We walked for another block before Bishop stopped again. I turned around and bent over to pet him.

“You’re a good boy Bishop! You’re such a good boy! Just a couple more blocks and then we’ll be home baby!” I stood up pleased with my calming of the dog and saw that the street ended suddenly in front of us. How could I not have noticed that?

“That’s strange. Macy goes all the way to Ginter.” I looked up at the street sign and noticed that it now said Parkview. I had never come across a Parkview before. I turned around and started heading back the way we came but I didn’t see anything familiar. I couldn’t even find the yellow house with the children. How had I gotten lost in one block? I guess my mom was right I really was directionally challenged. I tried turning onto a street on my right that said Halloway and seemed to go the way I wanted.

This street was completely different than all of the ones I had seen earlier. This street had huge houses two or even three stories tall. All of the yards were extravagantly decorated with gruesome Halloween decorations. Skeletons hung from trees, gravestones sat by bushes and spider webs dripped from every inch of possible surface. The weirdest part though, was that all of the houses looked exactly the same. They were the same color, same shape, even the lawns were the same height. The only thing that differed was the size. Even the decorations seemed to be the same.

I walked along the street with Bishop hesitantly at my side. It felt as though we were trespassing on some freaky Halloween party except no one was outside. I wanted to go home then. It no longer mattered which home I went to I just didn’t want to be outside anymore. The cold wind began to pick up and tore at my long sweater playing with the buttons I hadn’t buttoned. Daylight was fading now and we needed to get home. It seemed as though a storm might be coming soon.

We walked further along down the street though nothing looked familiar and it all seemed the same. I looked behind me and the same street went on for as far as I could see, all exactly the same looking. Even the cross streets now looked the exact same way. I began to panic. I had no idea where I was or how I had gotten here. I wished someone would come out of their house so I could ask for directions. Then I noticed it. The one thing that truly freaked me out. I saw nothing but green on the ground. There were no leaves anywhere.

We ran.

I don’t run but we ran and I wasn’t sure where to but we just kept running.

My lungs hurt from gasping the cold air but we kept running.

Bishop kept pace with me.

My legs began to ache.

We kept running.

We ran for about ten blocks before I heard the scream.

I stopped.

Bishop stopped with me.

I looked down.

The sound hadn’t come from me.

I looked around.

There were two teenage girls running from one house to another.

The houses looked different from each other. One was one story and brown and had a feng shuied yard. The other was off white with a fountain and a bench in front of it. I was on Howell and Ginter. We were one block from home. I took a minute for my breath to catch back up to me and I calmed down. It was all just my imagination. When my pulse had slowed back down to a normal pace we started walking again. Bishop seemed just fine. He was panting and his tail was wagging behind him. I think he liked our run. Paul always takes him on runs.

I could see Paul’s house just ahead with its white paint and leaves and the tree that I park my car in front of and my car the black compact SUV. We walked along the street towards home and I fondly noted his walking style. I always like how puppy dogs walk one side at a time. Right legs, left legs, right legs, left legs. It’s sort of like a four-legged waddle. I petted him on the head and looked up. I saw the same old man in the blue sweater from before walking his little spotted dog. I waved as he approached me and said hi.

“Oh who’s this little girl?”

“This is Bishop, we met before, outside your house, remember? Now we’re outside my house isn’t that funny?”

“What are you talking about? This is my house” I looked up and we were standing outside the rotting blue house.