

Creative Running

Flash Fiction for Guests of the WordFeeder

Sunday, September 21, 2008

© Copyright 2009 Les Cohen (aka "WordFeeder")
Ellicott City, Maryland – All rights reserved.

"Heh, heh, whooo. Heh, heh, whooo." It was the cadence of his breathing, more prominent, in his head at least, than even the sound of his Nike's hitting the pavement. As for the pattern, it was the letter "U" in Morse Code. He'd looked it up once. Beyond that, he didn't know why and didn't care – just one more idiosyncrasy among many he'd long ago given up trying to understand.

"It was unseasonably cold that morning, not yet 5 AM, running in the dark slowly up the hill to Grey Rock. He'd remembered to take his baseball cap, but not his gloves, and now the occasional rubbing of his hands together was breaking his stri..."

"Heh, heh, whooo."

"Jesus, I've even starting thinking like I'm writing. That's got to be an early, maybe not so early sign of mental illness," he thought to himself, which turned out to be the point of it all. He was a good twenty pounds overweight, but the shape he was in or out of had nothing to do with why he ran.

"It's my time to think. Just me, daydreaming to the rhythm of my breathing and the sound of the street, enjoying the contrast between running by the occasional street light and then through the pitch black tunnels under the leaves of the trees between them. I like it. I can't sleep more than four or five hours at a time, anyway. Why not run? I get some of my best ideas when I'm running, especially in the early morning. It's the nice thing about living in the suburbs. No cars, no pedestrians, not this early. Just me and the noise of some insects I don't ever want to see, doing whatever they do in the bushes and trees between the houses."

"Speaking of running, there goes my nose. There," he paused for a moment to breathe in through his nose, "I'll just suck it up. ...Gross. Thank goodness there's no one else..."

"Good morning."

"Hi. Hi, uh," he stammered his response, surprised by the really attractive thirty-something blond who ran past him, not a foot away to his side, coming in the other direction out of the darkness ahead of him. "Crap. The one really good looking jogger in the entire neighborhood and she passes me when I'm snorting. Perfect. That's what she'll remember about me for the rest of her life. Every time anyone around her so much as sniffs, she'll think about me, the guy with the runny nose and no Kleenex. Precisely the impression I've always wanted to make on hot women I meet. Who knows? Maybe she finds vulgar personal behavior strangely compelling. Not a bad trait for one of my characters, maybe a stunning, drop dead beautiful woman with no apparent interest in personal hygiene."

"Heh, heh, whooo. Heh, heh, whooo."

“Hey!” A car turning off one of the side streets just missed him, cutting its turn too fast and too close to the curb as he approached the corner, somehow failing to see the light ban he wore on his right wrist. “Paperboy, my ass. Whatever happened to kids delivering the paper rolled up in the baskets on slow moving Schwinn’s, meandering down the streets, trying their best to lead their customers’ paths and front porches just perfectly, too cute for anyone to complain when they didn’t. ...There, I’m doing it again. ‘Doctor, doctor, give me the news. I’ve got a bad case of...’”

“Bacon?! Wow, smell that bacon. Someone’s up early making breakfast,” he wondered, looking around for the source, as if he’d stop by for directions and maybe invite himself in. “God, I love the smell of bacon. I don’t see any lights. Must be a kitchen in the back of one of these houses with a vent running over the stove. Two eggs over easy. Four, maybe five hundred milligrams of cholesterol. Some chopped potatoes grilled in a fry pan. Just what I need.”

“Actually, what I need is to get back to work. Let’s see... ..Hey, what’s that? Hey! It’s uh.. yeah, it’s a naked woman running, running badly, more like flailing down the middle of the street! There!! Just ahead under the street lamps at the corner. She’s crying so much I can’t make out what she’s screaming. I’ve got to help her. I’ll speed up. Oh, man, she’s fallen down... ..No, no. Too sexual. Gratuitous nudity. Exciting, but no substitute for quality writing. On the other hand,” never wanting to forget a good gimmick, “the idea could come in handy one day.”

“Heh, heh, whooo. Heh, heh, whooo.” Unexpectedly, our runner looks up toward the sound of deep throated exhaust coming fast down the middle of the street, the throbbing of its speakers confirming an SUV from somewhere else.

“Asshole!!” one of the young men from the SUV shouted out the window at him when it drove by, uncomfortably close to where he was running, just a couple of feet from the curb.”

Turning quickly for what he was certain would be an unheard act of defiance, “That’s ‘Mr. Asshole,’ you jerk!”

“Who gave them,” he muttered between breaths, feeling like they’d picked on him and gotten away with it, “the right to interrupt my personal time? ...Heh, heh, whooo. Heh, heh, whooo. ...Can’t they see I’m working?”

“Unfortunately, the next thing he heard was the squealing of tires doing a fast one eighty behind him. They were coming back, this time with two of them hanging out the driver’s side windows closest to where he was running, driving on the wrong side, *his* side of the street.”

“Looking over his shoulder, he had a choice: Show them he wasn’t afraid, which would have been faking it, or run off the street between the houses, maybe look for some people who might be up to pound on their door. Figuring this was no time to pretend to be cool, and without anyone around to impress, he picked up speed and headed for the curb, thinking he should turn off his wrist ban in case they stopped and chased after him.”

“Probably just some teenagers who’ve had a few too many beers,” he said to himself, doing his best to rationalize away the fear he wasn’t accustomed to feeling. “Nothing to worry about.”

“Hey!” he heard someone shout from the car, “Eat this, ‘*Mr.* Asshole.’!! ..POP. POP, POP!”

“It was the sound of something he’d never even written about, the sound of something he’d only heard in the movies and on TV, and not at all what he expected. For a second, he didn’t even understand why he was falling to the sidewalk, ricocheting off a tree at the curb, thinking he had tripped, not feeling any pain or other sensation that would have told him the awful truth, that that popping sound might be the last he’d ever.. ..hear.”

“Nahhh. Way too dramatic. Heh, heh, whooo. Heh, heh, whooo.”

-wf