

Priorities by Rennie St. James

Mrs. Morrison was too busy to die.

She was also too busy to laze around under the covers on a busy week day morning. Gaining her feet gracefully despite the crackle of aging bones, she slid from the bed and stretched before padding through the eerily quiet house. With Cassie at work and the kids with their father for the week, the house wasn't just quiet but also clean. Mrs. Morrison proudly noted the lack of dirty dishes and clothes while she made her rounds inspecting her home.

A healthy, and therefore rather tasteless, breakfast left by Cassie gave her the burst of energy her old body needed to start her daily chores. The shelves were again cluttered with knickknacks. She couldn't even remember when Cassie had added most of them. Each had a story and no doubt a reason for their inclusion but her mind didn't retain those irrelevant details. Her focus was on the haphazard positioning. She needed to rearrange them to a more artfully pleasing display – Cassie unfortunately lacked that particular skill. The girl was even worse at decorating a Christmas tree but Mrs. Morrison provided assistance with that too.

With her head tilted slightly to the side, she stood and pondered the bookshelves for many long moments. The books didn't concern her but the strange gathering of ceramic frogs was disturbing. They weren't just green or yellow but a dizzying array of neon colors and strange patterns in several bulbous sizes. The colors clashed horribly with her own favorite keepsakes. With a determined stride, she moved close enough to reach up and start removing them. It had taken some time to eliminate Cassie's weird clown collection but Mrs. Morrison had no doubt that the frogs would soon follow them into the trash.

Her reward for her efforts was a snack and a quick nap. While she hated to admit it, she wasn't the spring chicken she once was. Mrs. Morrison was entirely capable of taking care of her house as well as Cassie and the kids – it just took a few extra naps to get the job done. It wasn't exactly a glamorous life but it was a comfortable and rewarding one. Despite her years of service, she knew there was still more to do in her life too.

The mid-morning sun woke her just before she heard the obnoxious neighborhood children and their yipping dog playing on her lawn. Her bright green eyes narrowed dangerously. While she adored Cassie's children that did not mean she looked upon other rugrats with equal affection. The boys were rough and mean just like their pesky little dog. It was time to put an end to their attack on the daffodils and roses and Mrs. Morrison was just the one to administer swift justice. The beautiful flowers certainly didn't deserve to be trampled into the ground.

She slid out the back door with little effort or noise. Ever so slowly she edged closer, one step at a time. Clinging to the edge of the house allowed her to conceal herself in the flowering shrubs both she and Cassie loved. Neither the boys nor their dog saw her until it was too late. Channeling a much younger version of herself, she appeared with the stealth of a ninja before issuing a terrifyingly loud cry. She

knew she also appeared twice her normal size in their frightened eyes. If it wasn't beneath her dignity, she would have cackled at the sight of them screaming and running away.

As it was, the sound of their curses fell on deaf ears while she made her way back inside. Again, she went slowly and even paused to sniff the fragrant and delicate blooms. They did symbolize her success after all.

Feeling invigorated by the exercise, Mrs. Morrison made another quick lap around the house. There really was much to do before she needed to prepare dinner for Cassie. Dinner would certainly be a much tastier affair if she handled it. Slowing to a stop, she considered her options. Her yarn was an absolute mess. However, she despaired of ever creating anything like Cassie was able to do. Best to leave that alone until later. The computer was tempting but again less fun without Cassie's presence.

The sound of the floor creaking had her ears perking up. Cassie believed their house was haunted but Mrs. Morrison was more concerned with human intruders. Sometimes Cassie forgot to tell her about servicemen but even then they knocked. She remained perfectly still and stared into the distance for several long moments. There were no other telltale signs of danger or company. With a dainty yawn, she indulged in a small bite and washed it down with a sip of water.

A flicker of color passing by the window demanded her attention. The birds had returned with the spring flowers – Cassie would be pleased. Entranced, Mrs. Morrison wasn't even sure how much time had passed while she had watched their antics. It had always been a favorite pastime of hers and it was one learned at her mother's side. Those were different times though, a different world. She always called to Cassie when the birds appeared but the girl didn't seem to enjoy the hobby. Neither did her daughter. It might be another tradition that ended with her.

Shaking off the dark philosophical thoughts, Mrs. Morrison made her way toward the kitchen. As the sun now shone through the windows there she knew it was much later than she would have liked. There was barely time to rest her eyes before she needed to prepare dinner.

"Mrs. Morrison?"

Her head tilted slightly at the familiar voice calling her name. However, sleep still called more loudly. The rocking chair was warm, soft and she was loathe to lose that peaceful feeling.

"Mrs. Morrison? Where are you?"

The voice was persistent and grew in volume but still she made no effort to move or answer. It would only be a matter of time before Cassie joined her anyway. She could hear the sharp clicks of heels on the hardwood floor which heralded the girl's approach.

"Ah, there you are. Such a naughty cat for not coming when Mom calls you."

Mrs. Morrison allowed the gentle scratching of her ears. Her purr of contentment hummed just under Cassie's voice when the woman continued speaking.

“The vet said your test results were negative so you beat it, old girl! We’ll celebrate tonight with tuna dinner if you aren’t too tired. The kids will be thrilled! Oh, by the way, thanks for breaking so many frogs but at least this time you didn’t leave a dead bird for me...”

The voice continued as sleep claimed Mrs. Morrison once again. Dreams of a field of catnip, fluttering birds, and scared puppies kept her entertained until she made time for the promised dinner. Cassie and the kids kept her busy – certainly too busy to die. However, there was busy and there was *busy*.

It really was a matter of priorities and perhaps the wise determination of the elderly that allowed Mrs. Morrison to continue enjoying her life.

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