

September Morn

By Tudor Robins

It's early morning - too early to be out from under my warm covers - and the ever-approaching presence of the year's first frost is in the air. The chill from the window, wide open the way you like it, sends a skid of goosebumps racing up my arms and across my neck and shoulders.

I shiver. I'm sure I was never cold before; in my old apartment, in my old life. I'm positive sunbeams always danced through the window at just the right angle to warm my skin and make any breeze feel gentle and zephyr-like. *If I was there now I'd be warm*, I think.

But I'm not there. Somebody else pays the rent there now. Instead I'm here, scrambling in the curtain-filtered autumn half-light, to find my shoes, a shirt, clean underwear. I've left the light off to avoid waking you but the shuffles and bumps as I attempt to negotiate the cat, the laptop and our tangle of laundry set you stirring anyway.

*Oh no*, I think. *Oh crap*. Dumb cat, stupid laundry and who leaves their laptop at the end of the bed anyway? Life was easier when it was just me.

I cast a wary eye towards you, to see if I've woken you up, steeling myself against your annoyance. I've managed to

struggle into my underwear, stretching over the laundry basket for the sock drawer when you blink and sit up.

"There you are," you say, your speech muffled with sleep.

"Where did you think I'd be?" The question is borderline snappy. Just you dare give me hell; I'm ready. Boo-hoo-hoo if you think I'm getting you up too early; in my old downtown apartment I'd be two short bus stops from work. I wouldn't have to get up for another half-hour anyway. If I'm up early it's your fault and you can deal with it.

"I thought you were here," you're saying but, I have to admit, I barely hear your words. I'm searching for my black socks and am feeling distinctly suspicious of the cat - your cat - who looks happy. I imagine she's been tossing black socks around the apartment all night.

"I expected you to be here so I rolled over to put my arm around you and I opened my eyes and the pillow was empty." Your words come slow and sleep-slurred.

"My whole heart jumped," you say.

This part, I hear.

In one instant I am seized with love. It reaches up from somewhere in my gut and wraps around my heart and squeezes hard. I am breathless.

The cat jumps to the bed and, where she was sitting, are my socks.

I pull them on, warm and soft around my feet and ankles.

I sit on the edge of the bed and put my hand on the bump of you under the covers. You are warm. My feet are warm. My heart is warm.

I feel ready to begin my day.