

B. Scott Boring

An Alarming A.M. Ambulation

The slimy, wet tongue of the Chiweenie designer dog — half Chihuahua, half Dachshund — woke him fully at 5:00 A.M. faithfully. Scott hadn't set an alarm clock in five years. He didn't need one. The Chiweenie had an uncanny internal clock which was irritating as hell. Scott would have loved remembering what a wake-up call of 6:00 was like again, but since rescuing this little canine cuddler, a later start seldom if ever happened.

Nonetheless, Scott could never part with Meeks, for the two adored one another. He had never owned a smarter dog, and Meeks wailed like a bereft mother who had just buried a child whenever Scott headed for the garage with his car keys. Their days were spent watching television, morning and evening walks, and plenty of play sprinkled throughout the day often resulting in sloppy kisses for Scott.

Scott rolled out of bed but first things first; nature was not only calling for Meeks but also for the soon-to-be 62-year-old. Afterward, Scott grabbed his headlamp, for it was still dark outside, affixed it around his skull and across his forehead, then sought out his flip-flops. As soon as he donned his footwear, Meeks would go crazy, the signal his pre-dawn constitutional was imminent. Meeks didn't disappoint. His behaviors were as predictable as his sense of time. He yelped, wagged his tail, and ran around the 1250 square-foot bungalow like he had just won a canine lottery.

After grabbing the leash and some puppy-waste bags, Scott sat down, and Meeks ceased his crazy excitement, sprinted over to his owner, and squeezed his head through the harness to be buckled. Once the front door opened, the little 15-pound love bug was in charge. Scott didn't take Meeks for a walk; Meeks took Scott for a walk. Oh, Scott was ultimately in charge, and Meeks would obey if he overstepped his excitement, but Meeks tugged on the lead and directed where they would be going. First stop was his favorite patch of grass to void his bladder.

He still urinated like a female dog. Having never been around male dogs to learn the instinct of lifting his leg and marking his territory, Meeks did what his mother did. Scott was grateful Meeks had never learned to mark. His previous male canine companions could never distinguish or understand this was reserved for hydrants, hedges, posts, and poles, not furniture and potted plants inside the home.

After Meeks relieved himself, the daily chore/excitement commenced. For Scott, it was a task which had to be completed; for Meeks, it was pure exhilaration. The two companions stopped at the end of the driveway. Meeks always decided the direction of the early morning ambulation. To the left lay the manicured lawns and to the right the "lake." It was just a water management canal, but it was wide and long with many coves and inlets upon which the residents loved to kayak. Unfortunately, the lake didn't have well-maintained waterfronts. They got the bi-weekly cut from the homeowners' association landscapers only. In between cuts, and depending on the amount of precipitation, the weeds became unmanage-

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able. Meeks loathed tall wet grass and would slam on the brakes choosing to remain on the asphalt instead of navigating the moist meadows; however, the fauna was much more plentiful near the lake, and Meeks oh so enjoyed chasing the menagerie of local wildlife which gathered at the watering hole. Rabbits and squirrels were his favorite vermin to bully, but he had also challenged a variety of wading birds, Egyptian Geese, Mallard and Muscovy Ducks, even a trio of Sandhill Cranes. Scott knew one day Meeks would meet his match, but Dachshunds are fearless. Bred to go down badger holes and have subterranean savage scraps, Meeks had inherited all the breed's bravado. Nothing intimidated him. He is a loving, friendly, darling of a dog, and loves to play with other canines and humans, but any other living thing on two legs or four brings out his instinctive desire to maim, kill, and destroy.

Once a retired German Shepherd police dog charged Scott during an afternoon walk, and Meeks put himself between the trained canine constable and Scott. The tiny tot did not cower until the German Shepherd had lain down and rolled over into a submissive posture. This little nothing of a dog cowered a police dog! Both the retired policeman and Scott stood stunned with mouths agape. The owner had never seen his long-time police partner submit to anything. Meeks and Major became bosom buddies after that — eagerly waiting to greet and wrestle each afternoon until the elderly Major passed away. To this day, Meeks whines when he passes Major's house.

Today's morning perambulation took the pair toward the lake. It seemed like Meeks knew the landscapers had done their job and left his playground ready for inspection. Perhaps he could smell the fresh cut-grass, but off the two went to check out what fauna or fowl were ready for an early morning flight or sprint. If only Scott and Meeks had known today would have been the day for a turn to the left, their morning would have been far less harrowing.

Under a bush, Meeks dashed to furrow out some bunnies and nothing; they were all out foraging. Then he went behind a flower bed to catch a sleepy lizard. He came up empty again. Today, his potential prey were wise to his antics. Meeks next dashed around the posterior of a Norfolk Island Pine hoping to catch an unsuspecting squirrel but to no avail. Finally, Meeks turned the corner for the lake and scoped out the scenery. None of the usual suspects were at the watering hole. This was very strange indeed.

Rabbits were always in this field, and it seemed they loved to torment Meeks, knowing he was tethered just out of reach, and even if he wasn't, they were far too fast for him. Today, there was nothing. The lake had been swept earlier in the year for alligators and relocated to the Glades, or so the residents were told, so there was no threat from those ancient reptiles. Still, Scott kept a watchful eye on the pond just in case. The lake this morning was eerily and hauntingly quiet.

Scott switched off his headlamp as he could see the swarming insects attracted to the bright light beginning to advance toward him. In the shadows, Meeks began his morning ritual to find the perfect spot to move his bowels. Finally, Meeks ended his "poopy dance" as Scott called it, so Scott flipped the switch on his headlamp to scope the exact spot where

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he would collect the present Meeks would leave behind. Whether it was providence, fate, or just dumb luck, it was fortuitous Scott turned on the head lamp precisely at that moment, for swooping in from the east came a large bird of prey.

Instinctively, Scott ducked. A bird-lover and watcher, Scott tried to identify what attacker was upon them. Falcons and hawks would never attack anything over five pounds; anything over was far too heavy to get airborne again, but a large eagle or owl had the wingspan and strength to support heavier prey. The attack was so swift and so sudden Scott could not identify the feathered foe — not a feathered friend this morning — a foe. This bird meant to have his pup for its meal, and it wouldn't have to eat again for a month if successful. The sudden flip of the switch and the brilliance of the headlamp must have blinded or startled the taloned terrorizer, for he veered off south at the last minute. Meeks seemed unaware of the danger, continuing to conduct his business. It was Scott who had almost joined Meeks defecating. Thinking the danger was over, Scott turned his headlamp south to see where the bird had flown only to discover it was circling back to make another pass.

Scott stepped closer to Meeks hoping to block the pup from the bird of prey's view and encourage it to look elsewhere for its morning meal. This raptor was not to be discouraged and coming into full view of the bright light, Scott saw it was a Great Horned Owl, the identifying feather-horns easy to notice. Scott put up his hands to fend off the attack, one of fear not bravado, and the owl shrieked as it swooped past them.

Then Meeks took over. He had heard the screaming owl. He deduced his favorite person was under attack. The pup didn't realize it wasn't Scott who was in danger. Fearless Meeks raged with hair-raising growls and snarls. The raptor took one last turn back toward them. Meeks was on his hind legs ranting. The upright, taller, and louder Meeks discouraged the owl, for it veered north instead. Scott lost sight of the mighty, winged wonder.

The rest of the walk was eventless, but Scott kept his eye on the sky until safely back in their humble abode. Meeks, however, proudly pranced down the street, knowing he had staved off another threat to the dog's best friend. Scott imagined Meeks thinking, "I have taken on attack dogs and birds of prey and lived to tell the tale. Don't mess with me! I will tear you up!"