Night Runner

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by Ann Toner

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SNEAKERS pounded the damp sidewalk. Cool night air flooded his lungs. Clickita, clickita, clickita, Rebel loped at his side, her white-tipped tail circling madly.

He neared the glare of a streetlight. A hedge loomed black on the right. He turned off and ran in its shadow, feeling invisible. He moved almost silently along the perimeter of Hanneman's yard. His sneakers sogg'd in the wet grass. White-tipped tail moving to and fro marked Rebel's progress across the yard. The Phantom of Glenwood and his faithful canine companion were on patrol.

The house was dark so he cut softly across the yard, instinctively avoiding the branches stacked by the garbage cans. He ducked through a gap between the garage and the hedge and was in Hill's backyard.

The grass was longer, like a soft cushion. And wetter. His sneakers squelched with wetness. Rebel burst through the gap to join him, her tongue lolling. The Hill's had lights on in their kitchen and living room. Feeling ghostly silent and very bold, he skulked past their house just at the edge of the light squares on the grass. No one knew when he was on the prowl. Invisible, everywhere, like Macavity. Scornfully, he resumed his jog and headed back for the sidewalk. Behind him, a curtain moved at one of the kitchen windows.

* * *

"Ed, there goes the Larson boy again. It's a wonder his folks let him prowl around like that every night. He wouldn't get away with it if he were my boy!"

"It's none of your business, Alma. Besides, lots of
people jog—maybe he wants to tryout for track when he gets to high school.”

*   *   *

Sneakers pounded the damp sidewalk. Cool night air flooded his lungs. Clickita, clickita, clickita, Rebel’s toenails scratched on the sidewalk. Headlights came down the street, and he swung off into the gloom of Cartwright’s house. No one ever saw the Phantom of Glenwood. He could appear and disappear, a mystery man, admired by all.

Faster, increase the tempo. A dark blob ahead. Leap! The rhubarb cowered as he soared over them. He could smell the marigolds in the garden on his left. Ahead, the giant cottonwood rustled its ghostly leaves.

When his bedroom window was open, he could hear that big old tree groaning and stirring all night long. It whispered comfort when he was sad and too old to cry. He ran into its inky shadow. Safe.

His breathing sounded loud and harsh. He tried to breathe quietly. He reached a hand out, caressing the scarred bark. He leaned one shoulder against the trunk.

Lights were still on at the Hill’s. Cartwright’s and Hanneman’s were dark—black looming shapes against the charcoal sky. Over on the corner, a lamp glowed green through the curtains of old man Miller’s place. His light was usually on—he read books most of the night. A blue glow down stairs at Reasoners—late movie probably—lights on upstairs, too.

Lights were still on in the kitchen at home. Like a stage. He could see his dad gesturing in the direction of the kitchen table, with his back turned slightly toward the window. He shifted slightly and he could see his lips working.

Too far to hear what he was saying. He didn’t need to—his heart knew all the words. Movement; a head, then a torso arose on the other side of the window. Mom. Her lips were moving now, and she was making small angry nods with her head.

Dad’s arm lowered and brought a glass to his lips, draining it. The pantomime continued. Familiar words rang
through his head—had to drown them out.

His sneakers hit the grass in soft wet thuds. His muscles strained. Faster. Rebel quartered near some raspberry bushes and hit off on the trail, moaning softly. He went on alone.

Ran past the light of Miller’s window. Didn’t care. Faster. The air singed his lungs. Shapes fled past, blurring. Sidewalk again—thudding sneakers to drown out the words.

It hurt. Each thud of sneaker rhythm sent an ache welling from his feet. Mingling with the other aches. He slowed, lungs ached, ribs ached; he passed under the glare of a streetlight, not caring.

Still slower, saliva flooded his mouth. He panted. Slower, his glasses fogged; his backbone was clammy. Walk finally—the ache blended into exhaustion. Too tired to care.

**Holocaust**

*by Stephen Heinig*

*Metallurgy Engineering, Jr.*

flashes
cold, white and quick,
silhouette springbudding trees
to a field of cutting white.
colors bleach as a welder’s arc—
or a photographer’s pan
freezing motion for a final frame.

silence in distance.
hiroshima
with the sound off.

fusion’s storm builds
orange then red and amber—
a thunderhead catching day’s last colored ray
before a long night of rain.