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## Afoul of Rabbits

a timed exercise

by Mia Sundby

I started early, took the dog. Minnie's a retired greyhound so she doesn't need long for a walk --just wander into an empty field and let her off the lead for a few laps, then pop her back on, walk for another ten minutes and back off she goes. We do this routine every day before work, have done since I first adopted her two years ago. It's a happy little routine, one which my therapist tells me is doing me wonders.

I think my therapist underestimates my ability to oversell the good things I'm doing in my life. I tell her all about the early morning walks, the uncaffeinated green tea in the morning, the three meals I have in the day, the early nights I get, the friends I call, the work I'm doing. It all sounds great when I put it like that, doesn't it?

I conveniently forget to mention the crying every morning, where I hold my dog close, the fact that the three meals are all thanks to my godsend of a Deliveroo cyclist --his name is Anku and he's the only Deliveroo courier I know who rides a mountain bike; it's the only reason he can get to me. It's the reason I know his name, as well. He's the only person I've interacted with face-to-face in a month. Even my therapist speaks to me through my laptop screen. I do call my friends, but I don't tell most of them how I'm doing and when they ask I tell them about work. It's busy! Good busy! No, I'm not taking on too much again.

The problem with having a nervous breakdown is that no one lets you just get on with it in peace.

Initially, I wanted the help. I wanted the comfort and the support circle and the doctors and the therapists. But then it just kept going, the breakdown. I've *never* been an anxious or manic person before. I've been busy, I've been A-Type, I've been a workaholic but until two years ago I had never found myself hunched over a toilet, crying and heaving, never found myself curled up under a table in the foetal position with my heart hammering a hundred miles an

hour, sure I'm having a heart attack. And in the two years since, it hasn't stopped. And despite all of their protestations, despite all of their sincere love, people get tired of it. I mean *physically* tired. I get it, I don't blame a single one of them for getting tired of my crisis. I know I am. The important ones all still check in. I know they care. Sometimes we just run out of capacity for people. I know I have.

And what do you do when you run out of the capacity for people? You pack up your anxious greyhound and your anxious body and you take the two of you to a cabin in the countryside.

"*It's for the dog,*" you say to co-workers, "*She needs the space.*" They nod and say how exciting that sounds, though they can't imagine not living next to a Costa!

"*It's for me,*" you say to friends and family, the ones who know. "*I need some space.*" They nod and smile a little sadly and squeeze you and tell you to please stay in touch.

And I have.

I. Am. Coping.

At least that's what I told myself as I wandered through the land around my cottage which I still can't work out to whom it belongs. There was a mention of land when I bought the cottage, but I haven't seen any private property signs up and when I dared to ask a passing farmer on a very very big tractor (Minnie immediately leapt behind my legs as it appeared), he smiled, shrugged and said --and I quote--

"A lot of the land out here doesn't belong to anyone. Best you and your hound stay off of it, though."

My curiosity outweighing the panic bubbling in my chest, I asked, "Why?"

The farmer --a young bloke with reddened cheeks-- lost his smile for a moment, adjusting his sunglasses (yes, I was surprised, too, I didn't think farmers were allowed to be modern and fashionable). After a very long moment, he said uncertainly, "There's ...rabbits."

I stared up at him. "Rabbits?" I asked.

Nodding vigorously, as though agreeing with himself, he cleared his throat and repeated, "Rabbits. Yep. Bad ones. They've got rabies. Bad rabies. Best keep your dog away."

With that, he hurriedly bid me good day and rode off in his very big (and Minnie thought very scary) tractor, leaving us alone in the sunny field. Furrowing my brow, I had turned to Minnie, who was now beginning to consider poking her nose out from between my knees.

"I haven't seen any rabbits, Minnie. Have you?"

Minnie shuddered, and we carried on.