

THIS ABOVE ALL;
TO THINE OWN
SELF BE
ZOO.

Vol. II No. 2

Summer Solstice 2024

In this issue,
a dog and a human participate in a group date,
and a ceremony is performed at an altar.

To the fullest extent permissible, all stories and poems herein are released into the public domain.

To Thine Own Self Be Zoo
Vol. II No. 2
Summer Solstice 2024

- 1. C.O.A.S.T.*
- 2. Basement Lounge Night*
- 3. Sidra Kaieem*
- 4. Reception*
- 5. Sin Offering*
- 6. Poems*

C.O.A.S.T.

or; Creatures of a Shared Taste

We woke up from a nap that evening, the kind of nap where you have plummeted into your deepest abandoning of consciousness, not a gallop over to sleeping and back without stopping, but sauntering over and staying, sniffing prolongedly at the clovers of dissociation, the saplings of demented all intense dream, and only pulled out back to the waking world as though we were a heavy tree being dragged by chains. In our case, being pulled back by the ringing of the phone. We woke up from a nap that evening muzzle drooling on bare stomach flesh, arm limply resting around hairy nape and hand resting twitchily on hairy side, pawpads resting against flesh and claws resting against ribs, dog breath and human breath in the air all smelling about the same, as for our lunch before napping, dog food and spaghetti had found its way rather freely into either mouth, and as we were settling in for the nap, the mouths had shared licks more directly, hard specks from the dog food incidentally passed, aftertastes of tomato evened out across each tongue and lip. We woke up from a nap that evening, stretched against one another, came back from the deepest abandoning of consciousness concretely by pressing the warm fronts of our lips together, no puckering and no licking, just pressing warm and wet lip against warm and wet lip for the sake of having them be together, and then an arm reached up and grabbed the phone

off of the cardboard box that stood beside our floor-bound, legless mattress.

Simultaneously, a sluggish word and a piercingly-high yawn greeted the caller.

A call to check in, and make sure plans were still on. Yes, today, we know. We'll get going. Limbs now stretch as the call goes on, slow licks made against salty skin, strokes of the hand deep against coat, getting the good spots, pressing to pet not just the surface of fur, but massaging the coat down and down and down again, making the ribs feel known and cared of.

The phone clunks down on its spot again, and we stand up, and go around, getting ourselves ready. Journeys back and forth through doorways with frames in disrepair over a carpet adorned in sticky wrappers and empty cans, crinkled papers, chewed sticks and crusty bowls. A change to an outfit washed of bodily scents, a gathering of car keys and loose money and little hard biscuits, and then leaving into the air outside florid with trees in bloom and grass lush, heavy air like walking out of the house and directly into a sauna that has no ceiling, only a middlingly blue expanse far away above, and a bright street light across the road that stings our eyes as we walk out. Front door locked behind us as we go forth. Looking up and down the street as we walk to the car in our driveway with the windows all down, and clean inside, we worked on it this morning, all of the clutter moved into the trash bin, surfaces wiped of crud and stick, freshly washed blankets thrown into the back. Up and down the street, some neighbors standing around in their front yards, doing work or just standing. Car doors opened, we lunge into the sweltering car, all windows down the seats are still baked hot from the apparently recently daytime sun.

The engine goes on, and we drive, the wind patting and swiping at our faces, at our hair, and cooling the car off once we've gone just down the street. We make turns and halts and speed-ups, a nose sniffs out of the window, a hand grips on the wheel and makes jerky movements, and an inverse hand rests steadying and calm on scruff, now and then petting a little, now and then when the car has briefly halted and the wind has briefly halted a warm set of words goes across the car, and a tail wags, now and then a muzzle comes back in and turns the other

way and licks at a mouth or an eye or an ear, and then goes and hangs back out of the window again.

The car enters a parking lot and parks. We exit through the same door and cross the parking lot and enter through the same door into a room abuzz with people chatting and shifting around at different tables, and others walking around in between the tables, and the clinking of utensils on plates and the smells of spicy peppers and chicken. At a big booth in the corner someone stands up and waves to us and shouts for us, and we cross the room, and people scooch over until we have enough room to sit at one end of this corner booth's wrap-around bench. Plates are handed to us and we begin, looking around at the communal bowls of foods at the center and around at the eyes, friendly eyes, of our friends sitting here. A muzzle, the only muzzle at the table, takes up shredded chicken as fast as it is placed before it, a fork now and then goes out to something and takes it into a flat mouth to be polite, though the flat mouth's stomach would rather be left alone at present, already full from earlier, and so the portions are tiny, performative. All the more goes to the muzzle, and the flat mouth is free to speak when the others want it to speak. Eventually, the deliveries of shredded chicken to the muzzle cease. A scruff is pet. The eyes of the muzzle and the eyes of the performative eater meet, and then our tongues lap at lips and teeth, sharing the tastes we've had. Others at the table see it looks fun, and begin following example among their own pairs.

One at the table announces it's time to get going if they don't want to miss it. Person by person we make our exit of the booth, money is left on the table, we all go out of the same door into the night which has cooled a little though is still warm and rich, and four cars depart in a line, and follow one another out of the busy and short roads of town, into the long roads among hills of trees and grasses.

The four cars pull off to a gravel road, our car rumbles as we go over the rocks. One by one we stop at a booth and hand money to someone inside, and then drive into a wide open parking lot, where, looming on one side of it, a screen is showing the projection of a still image, standing by for a film to play. The four cars spread out, finding their solitary spots, keeping

distance from the other cars that are already parked here and there.

When we stop, and our engine is shut off, we get out, and walk back and forth along one edge of the lot, stretching our legs, exploring the space. The noise of crickets fills the air, occasionally accompanied by the wind.

The still image on the big screen goes away, and soon, a motion picture is on display. We get back to the car, and we climb into the clean back seat, with the soft blankets and just enough space for us. We close the door behind us, and begin kissing, tilting our heads to get better access to the tasty depths of the back of a mouth, grabbing and pulling closer with hands and with claws. We see in flashes, as a bright moment in the movie briefly illuminates hair or eyes or a nose. Now and then we pause to nuzzle at one another, or to lick an eye or a forehead. When we are sated, we nestle in with one another, clothed chest breathing while pressed against breathing furred chest, limbs entangled, a hand a pillow for a furry temple that is heavy from utter relaxation, utter abandon of keeping itself up, utter non-objection to resting furry head in hand of flesh.

When the movie ends, many drive off. We who came from the booth get out of our cars, all still parked in the lot where the screen is now on standby again, and we all find a spot together in the center of the lot to stand, and converse with one another again before we leave. We are all breathless, hair all a mess and clothes all fitting oddly on ourselves.

We will do it again.

We get into our cars, and depart again for now.

BASEMENT LOUNGE NIGHT

“She has no idea what she’s doing right now.”

“Literally completely out of it.”

Jeff sat with her back against the corner of the basement lounge, grabbing with alternating hands at invisible points in the air. Earlier in the night she had been wearing underwear, but as she sat presently, Corbin, Vernon, and Mitchel could all see her balls and cock within her skirt.

Corbin began, “I am... well actually I am the most drunk, but I also have the highest tolerance. Am I babysitter?”

Vernon, Corbin’s younger brother, said, “Oh my god I had two hard apple ciders, I am literally still sober I can be her babysitter.”

Jeff let out a bark. Kind of a high-pitched, “Rrrarf!”

The basement lounge had a green carpet, wood paneled walls, and some display shelves and cases with mostly gaming memorabilia, little character figurines or framed medallions or collector’s edition contents. The space smelled a little bit like tobacco and mostly like hard cider breath and whiskey breath. Of course, a big TV on one wall, and a couch facing it, although Jeff was sat in a corner far away from the TV, far away from the couch, kind of just in a nothing corner that happened to not even have any clutter in it at the moment.

At the call of her bark, a jingling collar and a clatter of pawsteps came down the stairs.

Austin, a mix of Pit Bull, Lab, and who knew what else, went right to Jeff and pressed the side of himself against her to be

pet. Jeff did pet him, rubbing back and forth on the dog's shoulders and sides, and cooing deep dog noises, "arrrooo" and "agghh." Soon after Austin's arrival, Jeff was toppled onto the floor fully, laying on her side there in the corner.

Austin, the Pit Bull / Lab / etc mix, stuck his nose into Jeff's skirt and started licking.

Vernon, Corbin's younger brother, began, "Woah um—Austin hey!"

The dog kept licking, only wagging at his name being called.

Corbin gave a shrill whistle.

Austin stopped licking inside of Jeff's skirt, and moved up to licking Jeff's face, giving thoughtful licks to her lips and eyes; her face faded back and forth between reciprocating interest and delirious unrelated doings. Jeff did, some of the time, kiss Austin back.

Corbin suggested, "Mission accomplished?"

Vernon countered, "Well..."

Mitchel chimed in, "This is uh... within her interests."

Corbin asked, "Oh?"

Mitchel went on, "We were talking about furry stuff, and this is like. She's okay with this, I'm like, ninety percent sure."

Jeff deftly disrobed of her remaining clothes and threw the top and skirt away from herself. She and Austin made out on the green carpet on their sides, Austin pulling at her with his forepaws and Jeff grinding her now-hard dick against the dog's sheath.

"She is literally gone-gone."

"This... wow."

Mitchel mentioned, "They've... done this before, I think."

"Seems like it."

Jeff stopped making out, nuzzled her face under Austin's chin into his neck, and apparently fell asleep.

Austin licked her shoulder blades a little bit longer, and then rolled over and burrowed his back into her to little spoon.

Jeff was soon snoring and Austin appearing fast asleep with her.

"I really don't care about what we just saw."

"Yeah they seem good."

"Yeah."

“Let’s... agree to be really really nice about this?”

“Yes.”

“On board.”

“No jokes.”

“right.”

“Right, solemn.”

“Like, when she comes-to from obviously being black out right now, let’s make it obvious we know and that’s fine, she can be like this.”

SIDRA KAIEEM

Its eyes moved again and again between the windshield (which ostensibly showed the empty void of nearby space and the tapestry of stellar bodies far away) and the readouts on its console (which, so far, read that the nearby space being mostly empty was correct: the only nearby body was the scout ship with no power running and no living lifeforms aboard.) The scouting ship was not especially visible to the naked eye, and, so far, the console did not read anything too noteworthy into its being there.

It licked its lips in anticipation.

Scavenger. Parasite. Demon.

The last readout came to the console: absolutely no signs of life detected, besides, of course, itself, who sat reading the console.

Sidra placed its hands into the control field, and began making the hand signs and minute movements to bring its ship on an intercept vector with the scout ship.

It had skin as black as the void outside, two horns that came to deep red points, a 12 inch cock, DD breasts, a mouthful of pointed teeth, a black serpentine tongue. It had been born human. In terms of rights it still could be called a human, although so far out past any significant colony, the matter of rights was a rather academic hypothetical, a kind of trivia that was more likely to be assessed post mortem rather than allow it any real benefit. It had appeared normal in its youth (blonde, monogendered, omnivorous chompers) but it had visited a

moon that specialized in augmentations, and had gotten a lot done over the course of a couple of years. Then, summarily, it left behind interactions with the living, off into the distant frontiers. It had had a given name before it had called itself Sidra Kaieem. It barely remembered what that name had been.

Among its augmentations, besides the aesthetic ones, was an implant into the skull to induce sleepdeath: the death, end, cessation, of the need to sleep. Chemicals were synthesized in it to give the brain the constant benefits of having slept, without the need to actually do it. It had been awake more than half of its life now. It rarely blinked.

Its ship intercepted with the scouting ship. Its ship's black tentacles began reaching over the scouting ship, jumpstarting the scouting ship's power, finding viable entrances, patting it down (feeling it up) for anything the remote scanners had failed to highlight.

A few minutes passed before a scathing hiss from the dashboard indicated that the tentacles had successfully coupled the ships: Sidra would be able to exit its port and enter the port of the small scouting ship. No EVA suit needed. It could go in its comfy black rags.

The scouting ship was more or less a cockpit that was adjoined by a few closets for different utilities, and one beast of an engine that comprised the back 9/10ths of the vehicle, hardly hominid-enterable aside from some maintenance crawlspaces.

It went straight to the pilot's seat, and viewed the insignia on the corpse that sat there.

It whistled to itself.

"Brigadier general. Good eats."

With the scouting ship's console back online, revived off of the jumpstart from Sidra's ship, the cause of death was revealed in the series of warnings in the log history. Glitch in the life support. Huge fluctuation in temperature, dropping to -200 Celsius in a second or less, and remaining there for seven hours. Sidra had seen it before. Some common-ish model of life support technology had the same defect. Inconvenient for those who were expecting the arrival of the person the defect killed. Convenient for scavengers. Parasites. Demons.

Sidra took the knife off of the brigadier general's belt and began cutting the clothes off of the corpse, then began at cutting the corpse into its constituent meat, indulging on a few raw bites to chew on during the process. In about half an hour, a skeleton and the associated inedible flesh remained in the pilot's seat, and mounds of meat stood around the cockpit floor like buildings in a surrealist miniature city. Sidra went back into its own ship, brought a jar back into the scouting ship's cockpit, and began sprinkling over the cuts a type of bio-hostile salt that cooked, dried, and preserved within an hour's time.

As the brigadier general was cooking, Sidra went into the maintenance crawlspaces of the engine, and took out the bits that were worth having. In its own cockpit, it commanded its ship's tentacles to begin taking the power supply from the scouting ship.

It crouched beside the skeleton, facing out of the scouting ship's cockpit. For lightyears and lightyears in any direction, there was no life except for it and its own microbiome, and there was not even any former life except for that of the one beside it, now being transferred into its own life. The idea of a planet filled shoulder-to-shoulder with such interactions... It astonished it that it had ever been able to be a part of something so busy and dense.

With the scouting ship jumpstarted again, there was no doubt it had sent out a broadcast signal to inform some allies of its location, and the fact that its pilot had become deceased. Another scout would come to assess and collect.

From its own ship, Sidra obtained a brush and paints, and got to work on the scouting ship's windshield. There were classic slogans, that it had used before: a favorite was, "Fuck you, I got mine." These days it liked to do things more memorable. On the windshield, it took its time painting a dog's ass with its tail raised, and a black hand reaching to it, and sticking a finger into the dog's anus.

Some scout would have something new to write on a report.

Sidra collected up the meat, brought it back into its own ship, and decoupled, and fled away into the vast frontier.

RECEPTION

It was a muggy day outside, causing one to sweat within seconds after they had stepped out into the world. The air wavered as though the whole city were possessed by a funhouse mirror's lively spirit, and the high noon sun glared off of every surface. Through this summer day, one hundred and three residents of the city had walked, biked, or driven, to arrive at the same hospital waiting room, and fill it three beyond capacity. The air conditioning was a pleasantness to all who entered the hospital's sliding doors. In the waiting room, mumbled conversations could be heard here and there in different languages, as the receptionist steadily, if not incredibly quickly, allowed patient by patient to be summoned to the desk and then pass inside to the hospital proper.

The receptionist called out to the filled up waiting room, "John Andrews."

Two John Andrewses rose up from their chairs at the same time, made eye contact, and then awkwardly both sat back down increment by increment.

"Looking for Andrews, John."

The two Johns, glancing at one another while avoiding eye contact, both raised a hand for the receptionist's attention from their respective seats.

The receptionist, seeing this and their little glances to each other, remarked, "Oh, ummmmm let me see." She clicked her computer mouse, looked at the monitor, and then called out, "John Percy Andrews?"

Both began to stand again, and then, seeing the other, sat back down again.

“Hm! Date of birth is February 1st, 1989.”

No dice.

A few in the waiting room who had had nothing better to do during their entire wait were turning to see the hubbub head on.

“Wellll, something in the medical record will have to do... Blood type A positive?”

The two Johns looked to each other, gave exaggerated faces that conveyed “no idea,” and they each shrugged a little.

The receptionist gave an annoyed scoff, and then tried, “Currently seeing a therapist for diagnosed zoophilia?”

A few of the conversations halted, as more ears were suddenly pulled in by that exciting word. The halt in conversation cascaded through the room as others realized that something might be going on, and in very short order, the room was completely silent except for the receptionist impatiently ticking her nails on the counter. Many more eyes had turned to face the receptionist, so that they could be aware of if something was causing delays.

Both Johns’ cheeks began to burn, and they got up with half a mind to cover their face as they walked up to the front, and then, each making one farewell glance to the other, they saw that once again they had not been told apart, and in dread they sat back down among the other waiting patients once again.

The receptionist sighed, and said, “Last four social security digits are 4321?”

One John Andrews pointed to himself and mouthed “Me!” to the other John. The other John Andrews pointed to himself and mouthed “ME!”

The receptionist clicked her mouse like it was a voodoo doll made against either of the Johns in her waiting room. She then began reading aloud from her monitor: “The basis for this diagnosis of zoophilia, even as our understandings of sexuality evolve and become more permissive, is, indeed, not Mr Andrews’s attraction to his male Golden Retriever alone. It is more for the social distresses it has caused for the fact his apartment neighbors can hear him masturbating the dog and his inability to cease the activity or embrace some more private

venue; it is nearly as much a diagnosis of voyeurism, though is specific to the dog. It has caused him to lightly intersect with the criminal justice system. By his own admission this attraction interferes with his life, and by his own request he wishes that something here be cured.”

One of the Johns (both of them still possibly being up next to the desk) said to the other John, in the otherwise silent and rapt waiting room, “Would you be interested in skipping your appointment and going to get lunch together?”

“Yes.”

The two Johns both finally actually got up for realsies and walked very quickly out of the waiting room.

SIN OFFERING

It was a cool Fall morning: I felt it immediately upon waking up, the way that, coming in through the open window, the lingering chill of the night made the room idyllic for one snugly wrapped in a blanket, such as I was. I dwelled in bed a little while longer, eyes open and staring idly up at the wooden beams of the ceiling over me, appreciating the comfort, like sitting down to a campfire in the Winter, or like handling ice for quite some time and then folding your hands into your armpits. Coldness: relief. Here I had threaded into relief without having had to touch coldness at all.

The air smelled in part like dead leaves. Wet sheets of them were molded over the hills outside, deep oranges and browns, while their sugar maples stood over them naked and unburdened. The air also smelled in part like heated apple cider. My wife, Madeleine, had long been an earlier riser than I.

I lifted the blanket from myself, stretched, and in my pajamas made my way out of our bedroom, down the hall, and into the dining room. It is a lovely room with many drawers. My brother in law, being a carpenter, often surprises us with gifts of practical items of furniture: a wide and shallow chest with a cushion on top fit for sitting on and changing shoes, a hat rack with a hidden drawer in the pole, a squat chest of drawers which Madeleine keeps flower vases on top of, and many more and many more, and much of his gifted furniture has ended up here in the dining room, if we've nowhere else for it. At the table, in this room of drawers, Madeleine sat in a blue dress with a

steaming mug of apple cider in her hands, smiling at me. Across the table from her was another steaming apple cider mug.

I gave her the hand sign for *thank you*, drawing it out, really telling her, *thank you and I love you*.

Continuing to smile, she closed her eyes and rocked slightly in her chair.

I sat down on my side of the table, rumbling my chair across the floorboards as I pulled it out.

Madeleine opened her eyes, set down her mug, and asked, *How did you sleep?*

I told her all about the wonderful morning.

When it was about time for me to be going for the day, I returned to our bedroom, and changed from my pajamas to my suit. Black jacket, black waist coat, blood-red undershirt, black tie. A golden chain hanging in a U from the breast pocket, and another golden chain of the same length hanging higher up in an askew U off of the right lapel. On the right sleeve, embroidered in black onto the equally black fabric, two words, each word on its own line: *Mors Immatura*.

In the mirror on Madeleine's vanity, I groomed and oiled my beard of grey and brown. The hair atop my head, short as it was, needed attention hardly ever, and all the less the more that it receded.

As I passed into the living room on my way out for the day, Madeleine stood beside the table, holding a plucked dandelion. She held it up in front of me. I bowed down, sniffed the sour thing, gave the sun-like yellow flower a kiss, and then stepped in and shared a kiss with Madeleine as well.

We went to the front porch. As Madeleine inspected my dress for any errors, it occurred to me to ask her, *Did we receive any telephone calls this morning, before I was awake?*

She answered, *None that I saw*.

Jason, my brother, an electrician, had wired our telephone so that rather than ringing a bell to alert someone about a call, it would instead illuminate the several red lights that he had placed into all of our different rooms for this purpose.

Thank you, I signed, really signing, *Thank you and I love you*.

I love you, she signed.

I love you, I mirrored to her.

She took my hands, held them for a moment, and then let them go and turned and began inside. I turned as well, and began on my walk into town.

Many days, particularly in the Summer and the Winter, I would be inclined to drive our automobile into town—though the way by road is longer than the way by trail, being able to drive it means that I will not be sweating from the very start of the day. On many lucky days though, especially in Falls like these and in the earlier days of Spring, the weather is ideal for taking the path that winds through the woods, channeling many of the remote hillscape houses into our town.

I was quite alone on my walk this day, aside from the birds and the squirrels.

Coming out to a minor clearing, I saw that something had been constructed here, in the time since my last walk through these woods, which had been three days ago or so.

It was at the center of the clearing, and it was like this. In a circle I estimate to have been fifty feet in diameter, there was a ring of sticks that had been driven into the ground, creating a sort of fence around the rest of the construct. The sticks varied in height, some regions having sticks that rose out of the ground only a foot, such that they could be easily walked over, and other regions more varied, having sticks that rose anywhere between one foot and up to four. Within this fence, at the center, was something that I first thought to be an anvil, and then, as I was coming closer to the construction, I saw that it was similar in shape to an anvil, but in fact a fully symmetrical piece of iron, with a flat top, and broad hooks or horns coming out of the left and right. The area within the fence had a floor fully of sand, distinct from the floor of wet leaves that the rest of the woods had in this season. Besides the iron piece, the only other item within this fence was a slab of grey stone, which I estimate to have been two feet in height, three feet in depth, and five feet in width. Atop the slab of stone was wax residue, distinctly in the shape of there having been candles burning there that have been plucked off. In some places the wax ran in lines down from the slab, towards the sand.

All of this I observed as I passed by, taking the time to tread very slowly and search for any further details. The fence of sticks, the iron piece, the slab of grey stone, and the candle wax upon the stone, are what I recall from that time of seeing it. I continued on into town.

The usual sights and sounds were around in that late morning, mules and horses pulling carts along the streets, distant conversations between men who talked loudly, here and there a barking dog. I purchased a newspaper from a girl on one corner. With this paper in hand, I continued on to my own office, a building which stood alone with a wider gap between it and either of the others up and down the street, with a neatly-kept lawn of grass in the interstitial spaces. The mower, it appeared, had already come earlier in the morning.

No services were scheduled for that day, at my funeral home. I swept and dusted. I now and then spritzed perfume throughout the rooms, in the entrance and in the chief service room. I read the day's paper. I looked over the appointments and services for the upcoming days, and made telephone calls to check in on wellbeing and inquire whether any other person's plans had changed, and reassure that all would be handled here. Throughout the day, a rather slower day than usual, no one placed a call for my office, and no one entered through my door. I do not hurt for business, generally: mine is a field where I am a desired help in an unavoidable thing.

In the evening I decided that I would return home for the day, and make the walk home while there was still some light.

As I again approached the minor clearing, I could see, in the dimming evening light, that there was a man walking upon the sand within the fence. In the days following, as me and the man became friends, I would learn his name to be Fox Question, though I did not know what to call him that evening. That evening, to me, he was only an unknown man.

I paused at the side of the clearing, subconsciously unsure of whether it would be disrespectful to the man to pass by his altar as he was at his ceremony. On the slab of grey stone were seven lit candles, and on the sand before the slab of grey stone was a work of straw and flowers, a miniature statue of a goat.

The man said to me, in a German accent, “You may watch, stranger, if you want to watch.”

I approached. I lowered myself onto my knees outside of the fence of sticks driven into the ground.

The man explained to me his religion.

“My thinking on things is like this. There are Jews, Muslims, Catholics, Protestants. There are the legends of the Sumerians and there are the legends of the Greek. There are Hindus and there are Pagans. Who is to say who is right? I say, I do not know this. But I do notice that many of these gods, they are very interested in what we say for ourselves, what explanation we give to things. And so, I explain. Here, I have broken a rule of the Christian god, and put my seed in this goat. Very grave to Him. But, other gods would encourage this, sharing love with all beings. And so, here, I explain to the Christian god. I tell Him that it is done out of love of His creation. In the way He appears fond of, I give him a sin offering—no flesh, for I must be truthful to my ways and what I tell him, but rather, an offering of what she means to me, that I would craft her so carefully in straw.”

The man burned the straw goat upon the altar. As it burned, he spoke of his love towards her.

After the sacrifice was finished, I continued my walk back home. Madeleine was in bed. I changed into my pajamas and joined her. There, under the blanket, she grabbed me and hugged me.

POEMS

Said I

Fool said I you do not know
The miles each night that he and I go
The hours that I am by him led
The recesses hereabouts his paws have tread
The air heavy and humid in late July night
The air screaming and freezing in December's bite
The strange decorations on houses we've passed
The minutes we've taken to smell at the grass

He is my best friend
My north star
And I've fantasized a lot
About how if someone attacked him
While we were out on these walks
I would kill them

Happy Dog

I am in a room. The door is closed. I am in a recliner. In the next room, I can hear dog nails tick-tick around on the hardwood floor, and then arrive at the closed door to this room. Under the door, I hear the dog sniffing. Snnnnniff. Snnnnnnnnnnniff. The dog bashes at the door, standing on her hind legs to come down and hit it with her forepaws. I leap up and open the door. She runs around me three times as her tail wags, and then runs out of the room to the back door of this house. I jog after her. She is waiting at the door, poised to run as fast as she can the second the door is opened for her. I open the door. She runs left and right across the yard, again and again. I call her back in, and then have her wait outside at the back door as I go in and grab something to wipe her muddy legs with. I come back out, we wash the dog, and then we come back inside together.

Figurine Man

Jacob Bride sets his mug of coffee down on the side table, and sits himself down in the rocking chair on his back porch. He looks out at the open desert. Takes a big smell of the fine dirt in the air. From the side table, he picks up his sharpened knife and a block of basswood. He looks down at his hands as he works, though his mind's eye is jumping ahead. He whittles off the corners, molding the basswood block into a shape that is curved, organic, reminiscent of something living.

From out of the wood, Bride uncovers the rough geometry of two backs and eight legs, two tails, and four floppy ears. One figure, large with fluff, stands with all four legs planted on the ground, while the other, lithe with short hair, has only the back legs on the ground, and the forelegs locked onto the fluffy figure's hips. He carves out the undersides of the figures, leaving a sheath and testicles for the one with all four legs on the ground, and a vulva for the figure who is mounting.

With the rough shapes done, Bride retrieves his glasses from the side table. In doing so, he also remembers his coffee, and has a long drink of it now that it has gone from piping hot to warm.

Glasses on, Bride holds the wood closer to his eye level, and leans in and around the work as necessary. The fluffy figure is a tangle of waves from a windswept ocean, billowing and free. The lithe figure flexes her muscles as she humps, and her claws grab into the cloud of a coat below her. She presses her chin down onto him, reveling in his softness and the solidity underneath. He carves her toes curling in pleasure. He carves the male's back legs in a wide stance to support her weight upon him.

Bride sets the figurine on the side table. He stands steady, and she clings to him.

The Doorway

I'm thinking of a conversation I had
on my phone
in the doorway of an Olive Garden
where I told my friend
who I was moving in with
that it really mattered to me after all
that we can find a place that will allow me
to have a 100 pound dog.

Life changingly glad
that we had that talk.

Remain

It's so easy
to stay inside
all day
when no one
is asking you
to leave.

Taking out
the recycling this morning
I saw a sky and felt air
I hadn't in a while.