

AT THE GATES OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

Ten candles in a fish stick tell you it's Gully's birthday. The birthday girl is the center of attention; she squints into the popping flash cubes. The black cat seems to know every smooth cat pose there is. She is burning for discovery in front of the camera.

Gully belongs to Mrs. Carlin. Mrs. Carlin has had her since the cat was six weeks old and slept on the stove, curled inside a saucepan warmed by the pilot light. Mrs. Carlin has observed every one of Gully's birthdays, wrapping the blue felt mice filled with catnip, wrapping the selection of frozen entrees from Mrs. Paul's, and photographing the birthday girl with her guests.

This year, Gully's guests include the Patterson boys, Pierson and Bret, fourteen and ten, and their cat, Bert. Though it would be more accurate to say that Mrs. Carlin and Gully are the boys' guests, as the party is being held in the Patterson home.

Mrs. Carlin is staying with the boys for the week that their parents are in an eastern city for Mr. Patterson's annual business conference. It is a condition of Mrs. Carlin's employment

that Gully come with her. She had explained to Mrs. Pierson that one time a cat-sitter came to feed Gully, "and Gully—there is no other word for it—screamed."

After she serves Gully's birthday cake, Mrs. Carlin brings the boys their dinner. The boys examine their plates with suspicion, and then with disbelief.

Between the two halves of the sesame seed bun, where there should have been catsup on a hamburger, rare, the boys see what looks like catsup on a cassette tape. It is actually tomato sauce on a slice of sautéed eggplant.

"Didn't our mother tell you what we eat?" says Pierson, the older boy.

"We eat hamburgers," says Bret. "We like hamburgers and smashed potatoes."

Mrs. Carlin tells them that *she* is making the rules now. She says, "Meat's no treat for those you eat."

She waits to let this sink in. "While I am looking after you," she tells the boys, "we will eat nothing with parents."

The boys look at each other so that Mrs. Carlin will see the look. They wish that Scooter were still alive to eat from their plates beneath the table.

In Alaska, begins the voice, wild gray wolves are flushed from hiding and shot with rifles from low-flying planes.

Mrs. Carlin loses her thought. She excuses herself from the table and returns a moment later with a photograph album from her suitcase.

"Duncan's parties were always more lively," Mrs. Carlin tells the boys.

Duncan, asleep in another room, is her elderly long-haired dachshund, his muzzle gone white; a perfect widow's peak in the center of his narrow forehead. Duncan was another condition of Mrs. Carlin's employment.

Through the years, the photos show the dachshund born of a Christmas litter poised on a silver platter, an apple held slack in his mouth; Duncan, a hand-knit sweater covering his rump, heading down a snow-covered hill on a toboggan; Duncan grinning at his "cake" of steak tartare, his guests straining their leads to reach their party favor chew-toys.

Mrs. Carlin thinks that reminiscing may be why the voice starts up again. This time what she hears is: *A veal calf cramped in a pen in Montana is forced to sleep on its feet.*

Mrs. Carlin asks the boys if they would mind eating alone. She goes to her room and takes two aspirin.

The boys look at Gully, still bent over her fish. Pierson spansks her lightly on the back; her body twitches, but the cat does not leave her dish.

"Takes a smacking and keeps on snacking," Pierson says.

Mrs. Carlin doesn't come out of her room until it's bed-time for the boys.

"We can have Ovaltine," says Bret. But Mrs. Carlin pours them glasses of plain milk and gives them each a tablespoon of peanut butter to go with it.

"It stimulates your dreams," is what she tells them and promises a trip to the aquarium if they are good.

In their own comfortable room, in the Pattersons' soft bed, Gully and Duncan take their cat and dog places—Gully at the head, and Duncan at the foot of the bed. During the night, when Duncan stretches and moves to the other side, Mrs. Carlin's feet seek the warm place where he had lain.

She angles her face on a plane with the cat's and breathes in the air that Gully breathes out—air that she thought would be warm but which is cool.

In a research lab in eastern Pennsylvania, a hole is drilled in the head of a young macaque . . .

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Mrs. Carlin draws Gully closer. She scratches the cat's stomach, then strokes the sleek flank that shines like a seal. She strokes the cat's fur for the cat's pleasure, then for her own, and back, and forth, until the pleasures run together and the two of them sleep through the night.

"The other sitters never took us on a field trip," says Bret.

Mrs. Carlin has taken the boys to the aquarium. The boys are warming up to her—she keeps them entertained. She tells them what she knows about the animal kingdom—that twenty newborn possums will fit in a teaspoon, that the female lynx automatically becomes infertile when the number of snowshoe hares decreases. From Mrs. Carlin the boys have learned that emperor penguins sometimes ride an ice floe as far north as Rio!

That morning, Pierson complained of a stuffy head. Mrs. Carlin had told him it was sleeping with a pillow over his face that had done it. She told him what he had was called a "turtle headache," and Pierson had asked her if everything had to be animals.

Mrs. Carlin leads the boys to her favorite part of the aquarium. It is a darkened hall with a green-lit tank that circles the room. You stand in the center, in the hole of the doughnut, and turn to watch the hundreds of ocean fish swim around you. It is called the Roundabout, and it leaves you dizzy and reaching for the glass if you turn around too many times.

The boys study the reference cards with pictures of the fish. They claim to be able to match the following in the tank: the stingray, of course, plus yellowtail, striped bass, red snapper, tarpon, and the seven-gill shark.

Always there are those few fish who swim against the tide. These are the ones that Mrs. Carlin follows. For her, the darkness and water and steady current of silent fins is immeasurably soothing. She gives herself over to the whirling sensation which, she believes, leaves her open to what she cannot control when it suddenly comes to her what day it is.

In North Atlantic waters off the Faroe Islands, it is the day of "Grindabod," the return of the pilot whales, when fishing boats herd the whales by hundreds toward the shore. There, fishermen swing grappling hooks into the whales' flesh to ensure that the others will ignore their own safety; a whale will not abandon an injured mate.

Knives are drawn, and cleave through to the spinal cord. The whales thrash once more; in a sea of blood, they snap their own necks.

A handkerchief held to her mouth, Mrs. Carlin urges the boys out of the Roundabout.

During the ride home, the boys poke each other and make fun of their teachers. They whine at Mrs. Carlin till she stops the car for ice cream. They eat it in the car, being quiet long enough to look out the windows and see lightning bugs spark the blue dusk.

"In South America," says Mrs. Carlin, a tremor in her voice, "the women weave fireflies in their hair."

And then one of the lightning bugs flies into the windshield: Mrs. Carlin has to sit up straight and lift her chin to see above the glowing smear that streaks her line of vision like a comet.

"Come here, Bert," says Bret. "Little Bert-Bert, little trout, little salmon."

Mrs. Carlin stands listening in the open doorway of Bret's

bedroom, where he is supposed to be dressing for school. He has lifted one side of his quilt and is calling for the cat under the bed.

"Where's that little naughty-pants? That furry soft furry darn thing?"

Bert stays under the bed.

Bret gives up, then sees Mrs. Carlin and knows that she has heard his string of endearments.

He tries to recover, says, "Dad calls him 'the cockroach.'" His look suggests that someone else has overheard him like this and will not let him forget it—his brother, Mrs. Carlin feels sure.

The night before, while the three of them watched television, Pierson had made fun of *her* when her eyes filled with tears during a cat food commercial. The folks at Purina see me coming, was all that she could say as, privately, she was made aware that *at an animal shelter in Oklaboma, an attendant did not clean the feces off the bowl that he used to scoop dog food from a sack.*

Mrs. Carlin is not ashamed of what she has come to call "the Tender Vittles emotion." And she does not want Bret to be ashamed of showing affection. So she asks if he will help her groom Duncan.

Duncan lies across a pillow on Mrs. Carlin's bed; he doesn't move when Bret drags the brush across his back. When Bret brushes harder, Duncan closes his eyes.

"Takes a bruising and keeps on snoozing," says Bret, proud of the rhyme.

Mrs. Carlin laughs and smooths the dog's fur. "Takes an adoring and keeps on snoring," she says, and props Duncan up. She shows Bret how to draw the wire bristles gently down the dog's hind legs. Then she asks Bret to get Duncan's pills from the inside pocket of her suitcase.

Duncan takes lanoxin for his rickety old heart. Mrs. Carlin examines the small plastic bottle and—the Tender Vittles emotion—thinks how unbearably dear it is that her pet's medication is labeled "Duncan Carlin."

Bret watches Mrs. Carlin stroke the dog's white throat to help get the pill down. He says, "I wish Scooter could have lived forever."

Mrs. Carlin looks up quickly. She pictures a plastic bottle labeled "Scooter Patterson."

She says something that is meant to be of comfort. She says, "Try to remember that God is rubbing Scooter's tummy."

She is surprised when Bret starts to laugh.

In her mind, Mrs. Carlin says to Duncan and Gully: You have made my happiness for thirteen years. Gully and the three cats before her, Duncan and the two pups before him—she owes them her life. It is for them she writes checks and congressmen to try to protect the ones she will never know.

Mrs. Carlin gets the boys off to school; then stands distracted on the Pattersons' front lawn. She walks slowly to the mailbox that is empty of mail. Then she follows the gravel drive lined with ice plants back to the house, just missing the spot where a neighborhood dog has done his business.

Mrs. Carlin slips a section from the morning paper and moves to clean up the mess. But it proves, up close, to be a cluster of whorled bronze snails, glistening with secretion, stuck to curled dead leaves.

Mrs. Carlin carries the newspaper into the house and trades it for the car keys.

She drives with one finger on the wheel at six o'clock—what the Patterson boys call "the accident-prone grip." She is tired, and tired of the voices that are sometimes visions—mar-

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mosets whose eyelids are sewn shut with thick waxed thread. Mrs. Carlin is tired of knowing when a rabbit is blinded to improve the scouring power of a popular oven cleaner.

The aquarium hasn't opened by the time Mrs. Carlin gets there, so she waits in the car.

She is tired of the voices. She says *no* to the voices. It occurs to Mrs. Carlin that the voices take a no-ing and keep on going.

She is the first visitor of the day. When the aquarium is open, Mrs. Carlin has the Roundabout to herself.

The fish—do they never rest?—are streaming behind the glass. First, Mrs. Carlin spots the single hump-backed blue-fish. From the shadow of a stingray swims a pair of sand tiger sharks.

She pivots just fast enough to track a school of amberjack the circumference of the tank. Then she plays a game with herself. She makes herself see the fish frozen in resin as in a diorama, feels *herself* the moving figure, the way, when a slow train starts, there is that disconcerting moment when it *could* be the landscape moving and not the train.

Then she lets the resin dissolve, freeing the fish to sluice through kelp and waves of their own kind.

Suddenly there is sound in the room. But not in the room—in Mrs. Carlin's head. She stands still and concentrates on what she seems to hear: *An infant gorilla, orphaned in Zimbabwe, makes a sound in the night like "Woooo, Woooo."*

Mrs. Carlin leans against the glass tank for balance. They should limit your time in the Roundabout, she thinks. They should pull you out after so many minutes the way they do in a sauna.

And then she has a vision, clear as if she were there—a Korean family looking for a picnic site. At a shaded clearing

in a bamboo forest a mat is spread, a fire built up. The family's dog, a handsome blond shepherd, is called by his master and gleefully runs to the call.

Mrs. Carlin sees the owner slip a noose around its neck. It is "Bok Day" in South Korea; "Land of the Morning Calm."

It is the picnic of death that Mrs. Carlin attends. It takes two of this family to tug the dog to a height above the flames. The dog will be hung from a tree to strangle slowly as its fur singes over the fire. The point of slow death is to tenderize the meat.

There is an indescribable sound from the choking dog, and like a person who suffers the pain of an injured twin, Mrs. Carlin gasps and drops to the floor.

That is where the couple who come in from the Fossil Hall find her. The man touches two fingers to Mrs. Carlin's wrist, then touches the side of her neck. The woman calls for a guard, and stands back.

In Belize, the eyes of a fallen jaguar reflect the green of leaves.

IN THE ANIMAL SHELTER

Every time you see a beautiful woman, *someone* is tired of her, so the men say. And I know where they go, these women, with their tired beauty that someone doesn't want—these women who must live like the high Sierra white pine, there since before the birth of Christ, fed somehow by the alpine wind.

They reach out to the animals, day after day smoothing fur inside a cage, saying, "How is Mama's baby? Is Mama's baby lonesome?"

The women leave at the end of the day, stopping to ask an attendant, "Will they go to good homes?" And come back in a day or so, stooping to examine a one-eyed cat, asking, as though they intend to adopt, "How would I introduce a new cat to my dog?"

But there is seldom an adoption; it matters that the women have someone to leave, leaving behind the lovesome creatures who would never leave them; had they once given them their hearts.

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You need me beside you
But push me away.
Bad Dog.

Home now.
Car time.
Wind in nose and ears,
Loud barks, fast tail
All the way.

Strange smells, strange sounds.
Someone new
Takes lead.

You walk
Out of sight.
Bad Dog.

Strange smells, strange sounds.
Alone without you
Beside me.
Come back soon.
I still love you.

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Calvin's Story

"Make it stop, make it stop,"
was all I was thinking,
my eyes closed, some
bully biting my body, limbs,
tearing flesh and hair.
Boys pinned me to the pavement,
each one holding a leg, holding,
me down on my back.
Another boy - so there were five?
- pressing the bully into me
head lashing at anything
it could grab with canines.
I'm surprised I didn't black out.
Then, I remember a scuffle.
I was almost unconscious,
drifting in an out.
Two men freed my limbs,
but still I couldn't move.
One chased the boys
while the other lifted me,
cradled me, into a van.
I'll never forget the smell
- camphor, maybe, almost
lavender, medicinal.
The gentle one dabbed my
wounds with a wet cloth,
stroked me slowly, dabbed
- there was a lot of blood;
were there sirens? I don't
remember sirens. (Should
there have been sirens?)
The next thing I remember
is being on a cold, metal

table - a nurse or doctor looking me over - another shaking her head. The first mumbles something (all I hear is 'dog,' that word they have for us), then I'm sure she said, "This one's a keeper, let's give him a second chance."

I wake in a crate, damp towel beneath me, head swirling. I must be in the 'pound,' there are others barking. (I wish they would be quiet, my head hurts.) Then the pretty nurse or doctor comes in, mumbles to me; I look up, try to smile (this seems to please her), and I slip in and out of sleep.

Months later,

I'm sitting on a street corner, leashed, with some of the nice pound people. A lot of people pass by, they pat my head, mumble in that way they do, until one couple lingers (a child or two are with them, I can't recall). They mumble to the pound people; one of them (Alpha, I'll call him) walks me; he has a firm hand, but is gentle, in control.

Oh how I wish for a forever family - but I don't want to get my hopes up. Then, the day is over, back to the pound - sigh - guess it wasn't meant to be. Next night, however, there is Alpha, and he's brought

some others. (Oh, let me be on best behaviour so they will take me home.) They seem to like when I snuggle, listen, take commands, lick the cute young ones - they are salty sweet! Days go by after that night, the pound people tell me to get ready. Maybe, just maybe, this is a good sign. Oh, I get so excited my butt wiggles faster and faster. Finally, the day comes; Alpha arrives with the others, and I think, *This is it.* I'm going home with my forever family - to a home; home at last for my second chance.

Osgar

What arrived as an *Andrex* puppy
Has grown into a 40kg Exocet,
A rocket-propelled, hurtling hellion,
A surface-to-air guided missile,
A heat-seeking destroyer
Of all things non-concrete.
From his observation post
By the back garden wall
He plans his expeditions,
All-out offensives,
Ground and air, against
Garden birds in echelon formation.
This slaying slayer sallies out
To do battle with mops and buckets,
Insatiable annihilator of floor coverings
Carpet, rugs and linoleum,
Lays waste all in his path.
No downpipe safe nor garden hose,
No economy of force against
The hated coal, briquettes and turf.
Flowerpots, all growing things –
Decimated. The garden ground zero
For our hero, named Osgar,
After the bravest of the Fianna.

Hector

One month, they said, and you
would be put down.
We bonded in an instant.
Golden paws
in the shape of crab claws.
Eyes of a woman you'd marry.
The first night I sang you to sleep;
Peace in the rise and fall of your homing breath.

Trust

That day at the clinic,
alert again, outstaring cats,
snuffling in corners.
Under the vet's hand,
your eyes trust me
while the filling needle mocks
both our instincts
to protect and save —
you, head cocked sideways
curiously still as I wade
into a cold sea,
I, prising open your jaws
to trickle milk
through my fingers
the time you'd been poisoned
— shock of your breath
loud and fast as
your heart gives out
unconsoled by the vet's pardon
“he owes you nothing
he gave you nineteen years”.

Cracked

He lived in the dark with rats
and rotting straw,
head endlessly cocked
from peering at the light
through the crack
under the door.
We brought him home
where he stared
at a lamp, riveted,
one eye stone blue,
the live pupil slit
to a crack.
He growled when bushes
bullied, learned to avoid
nettles like cracks
on a pavement; ambushed
wheelbarrows, lawnmowers,
left no stone unturned
knocked into gate and canine
ghosts. After six months,
he barked, an unfamiliar sound,
like crashing pool balls. We laughed.
There was more to his life now,
than light under a crack.

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Paul Genega

Dog

The light, my friend,
I see you standing
in a light so bright
and white it's painful.
In the distance, water
winks like a dizzy
old flirt, but here
on the soft sand
of a dune, you seem
somehow to solidify –
lean-limbed, released,
sniffing the wind of
eternity. And almost
grinning, you hold
that pose, proud,
totally assumed.
Until moved by what-
ever it is moves you,
you spring down
the slope and run,
run and run. Run,
dark speck making
for the ocean, over
the next crest and
nowhere to be found.

Desmond Gough

Zach

You were not my dog – you were her dog.
But I was there when you arrived,
A long-legged pup in her office.
We walked you home across the windswept park.
I had to carry you in case you blew away.

I let you into my bed on that first night.
That was it.
We bonded as good as any AVATAR dragon-bond,
For life.

When I'd call to her office you'd stride up
And jump and knock me backwards
That was our game
Time passed
You grew big.
I moved away.

The day I met her with you on the street
You ignored me for a while.
Then I saw your recognition
As you jumped up, front paws planted on my chest,
Knocking me back onto the pavement
I was happy to fall down to your level,
Touched by your loyal affection.

No, you were not my dog, you were her's.
Yet tears well up as I write these words
Because you loved me.

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William Pitt Root

From One Old Dog to Another

In Memoriam: our sweet Oscar Wild

With even a casual glance into your eyes
I've seen light deep as the bones of my body
glow back out at me, your
tongue of pure pink joy hanging lathered and wide,
your heart, so powerful it leaps like a rabbit baffled by your ribs,
thumps under my hand.

With you I regained from my youth knowledge of raw delight
gradually supplanted, put to sleep year by grey year
habit by habit.

Even our nights run parallel: Until I lay the dog of my body down
you remain beside me, flopping curled at my feet when I sit,
rising when I rise

eyes upon me always, even while I mull the dull leafy white meals
I hold between us, the books you sometimes sniff,
puzzled. And when I flop

before TV, on the black beanbag you claim for you own
in all the intervals, you slink slyly behind the set itself,
to lie in my line of vision

during the hours actors manufacture lives of moving light -
your head resting on a stuffed toy, until I snap the TV off
and wake

back to our life, tossing you the belled lamb you quickly, gently
snatch from air before it hits the floor, your eyes brighter
than most human laughter. Once

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I finally join our Pam in the bedroom, within seconds you're
beside us in the dark, at your own inalienable post
facing the door, guarding our sleep.

Now and then I've been wakened from nightmare by your nose
in my face and I've heard you, as well, whimpering in terror,
felt your legs, dream-bound, twitch.

Placing my human hand on your inhuman trembling face,
I've felt the muscles anchoring your jaws soften,

go easy with that ancient glow in which I recognize myself,
and I've known things man alone
cannot hope to know.

Thomas Lynch

The Blood We Paid For

Our old dog, long into his dotage, yawns — a half-blind version of a breed that bred among the Celts and kept their women clean by barking off the covetous among their kind when the husbands had gone off pillaging, making poems and chaos in the next county.

Later, when the Celts themselves had settled in and took to one god and wearing collars, their dogs grew tame and even-tempered, tending sheep and living to a good age; slept for hours the way our own dog, sprawled on the linoleum, listens to the breeze sing underneath

the door we never weatherstripped and hears in some corpuscle of his ancient blood the rage of wind mauling his wet fur back, sending a lather up from the seawrack to float among the sea birds, hears them screech above a band of wild men half-blind with drink,

who, having brought their plunder to the land's end, ready their flimsy boats along the beach.

It was, of course, the blood we paid for. Spent good money in bad times for a pedigree — a hundred dollars, fifteen years ago for what my wife claimed was a dog with character.

Nor will she let me, much as I'm inclined (watching the pearlescent cataract bloom in his good eye) when he's wholly blind, coax him toward a stand of trees out back and, because we've both grown overcivilised, murder him with utmost dignity.

Ted Kooser

January 19, Still Thawing, Breezy

Arthritic and weak, my old dog Hartie stumbles behind me over the snow. When I stop, she stops, tipped to one side like a folding table with one of the legs not snapped in place. Head bowed, one ear turned down to the earth as if she could hear it turning, she is losing the trail at the end of her fourteenth year. Now she must follow. Once she could catch a season running and shake it by the neck till the leaves fell off, but now they get away, flashing their tails as they bound off over the hills. Maybe she doesn't see them out of those clouded, wet brown eyes, maybe she no longer cares. I thought for a while last summer that I might die before my dogs, but it seems I was wrong. She wobbles a little way ahead of me now, barking her sharp small bark, then stops and trembles, excited, on point at the spot that leads out of the world.

Breda Wall Ryan

Meanwhile...

(i.m. Porter, a.k.a. *Willemberg Count Hawk*)

Meanwhile our lives go on
much as before
but grass has grown back on the path
you wore in the lawn,
magpies menace
the songbirds in the yard
without you to chase them
next door's marmalade cat
with fire-struck eyes
stalks the ground-feeding doves
you don't come when I call
but the children still play
in the woods by the river
without you to chivvy them home
they swim in the sea
without you dog-paddling
offshore as lifeguard.
Meanwhile I chatter on
as if you were here
but you don't quirk an eyebrow
to say, Enough, already!
The door to your kennel
framed such an ache
that we took it apart
plank by plank
We've folded away
all our dog-scented things –
the brush and stainless steel bowl

your hair-laden Indian blanket
the muzzle you wore in the street
Some days I catch a black-and-tan flash
bounding over some landscape –
deep woodland or mountain, the field
near your grave. Then memory
makes you appear in a gap between dreams.

In one voice they called him *Threena*
Four working legs now down to three-and-a-half.

Soon he visited his carers
His new name and limp a signature

Tune announcing his arrival
For a snack and gambol with the children.

Jake and the Last Day of Summer

Perhaps it is the last day of summer
and you are sitting in the backyard
missing an old dog.
Perhaps you remember how the sun
grows an inch a year but how
a damaged heart cannot gain
back what it has lost.

The fountain still spills
water down its river bed of rocks
and warmth coaxes colour from
the flowers in their pots.
Sun comes over to join you,
but, looking up, you see
that grassy spot, Jake's favourite,
where he lay, head raised, watching.

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A Bouquet of Ephemerals

On your first day among us,
 you ate my Barbie doll. I cried
 when I saw the pink leg
 sticking out of your mouth,
 without knowing it would only be
 a few years until I buried
 that one-legged doll with you.

Born a Saint Bernard you felt
 at home among our garden blooms.
 I showed you how to smell them,
 you taught me to savour their petals.
 Three summers we spent
 scouring the tall grass
 for palatal excitement.

Mint flowers tasted minty,
 red roses like strawberries,
 lavender like mummy's soap,
 chives like onion soup.
 Dandelion buds so sweet,
 their corolla so bitter,
 like love-me, love-me-nots.

The spring of your fading,
 every morning I offered you
 my fingers dipped in honey.
 Too sick for dog food, yet never tired
 of the garden's bounty, you had
 a daily fancy for white clover heads.
 On your last day you found

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The Truth About the Dog

None of it was easy
 when her kidneys failed
 and she stopped eating
 and her pink tongue finally turned
 purple. In three months all that was left
 of the dog was her collar
 and the lingering question
 of what to tell the two-year-old
 when he asks about the dog
 that slept beside his crib,
 that chewed through Elmo's stuffed fingers,
 that followed him through
 the house when he ate like a New Orleans drunk
 behind a Mardi Gras float,
 eyes glazed and trained for falling
 beads and doubloons.

He'll know the dog's gone
 and will ask "Where's Zoey"
 and look for her floppy ears
 behind the couch and, because everything
 I know I learned, I'll tell him.
 what my father told me when my lab died
 and what his father told him
 when his wolfhound ran away.

"Where's Zoey?" he'll say.
 "Ask your mother," I'll tell him.

Noël Hanlon

Maggie

She's happy, even though
she doesn't bound with lolling
tongue. She's elegant,
her long nose is good
for sniffing gopher tunnels
and slipping quickly between
unsuspecting human thighs.

Hold a stick above her
and she's airborne,
undiscouraged by lack
of wings.

She loves her life,
tracing the edges of fields
around the house, barking
at sparrows when they settle
or catching and eating
honey-bees of all things.

She smiles, sashaying
inside her black and white,
matted fur coat,
delighted with farm life.

She's courageous, stays
outside all night - not tied up -
chasing coyotes away from the sheep,
keeping raccoons and skunks
out of the chicken coop.

a four-leaf clover among poppies.
I rewarded you with forget-me-nots,
which you chewed dutifully,
while watching the clover
wither away in my child's hand,
and sniffing the ephemeral
bitter-sweet scent of pleasure.

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For Prince

Who Passed On Just Before Christmas

Not, mind you, that we were more than passing acquaintances – I had a few glimpses as he came a-courting his two lady friends. But he seemed such an estimable beast, at quick glance: sharp-witted, agile. *Only a dog*, you'd say, missing the mark by a hair – a dog, yes, indeed, but *only*? I think not.

For Pine Goose the best dog in the history of the world

(With apologies to Jerry Joseph)

When I am an old dog, I shall wear a purple collar, with a red leash that I will chew in half when you're not looking.

I shall run down the street, ignoring you as you call. I will forget all the commands you've taught me (or at least pretend that I have, unless you have treats).

In December, if it's very cold outside, I shall imagine I'm in a big forest and pee on the Christmas tree (you'll explain to your friends that I'm confused by the piny smell, and I'll laugh to myself.)

I shall bring you a ball, but when you throw it, I will not chase it. Instead, I will lie down and go to sleep, exhausted with the effort of entertaining you.

I shall stand and stare at a blank wall for long minutes, until you get up and come to see what's there. I shall then walk away with a disdainful expression (ha, ha, made you look!).

I shall sleep in your bed, under the covers, and grumble and growl if you try to move me. You'll feel sorry for me in my old age and let me stay. I will then snore very loudly, so that I am the only one who can sleep.

I shall wander about in the middle of the night and meet monsters in the kitchen. You'll hear me crying and get up to rescue me. (Thank you.)

I shall have to leave you long before either of us is ready.

You will never forget me.

688B

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Rick Bass (born March 7, 1958) is an American writer and an environmental activist.^[1]

Bass was born in Fort Worth, Texas,^[1] the son of a geologist, and he studied petroleum geology at Utah State University. He grew up in Houston, and started writing short stories on his lunch breaks while working as a petroleum geologist in Jackson, Mississippi. In 1987, he moved with his wife, the artist Elizabeth Hughes Bass, to the remote Yaak Valley near Troy, Montana, where he worked to protect his adopted home from roads and logging. Rick serves on the board of both the Yaak Valley Forest Council and Round River Conservation Studies. He continues to give readings, write, and teach around the country and world. He lives in Montana, with his family.^[2]

His papers are held at the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library at Texas Tech University^[3] and Texas State University-San Marcos.^[1]

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Rick Bass

The Odyssey

An Excerpt



at the time.
Truth be known, I believe
myself to have been
a tremendous hit
with Gordon.
You might
say I was,
for the time that I was,
the life in his life.
Hell, the song in him you could
even go so far as to maybe say.
Not just cut-up
prose
for the sake of a cut-up dog
in a cut-and-paste book
for a C-note of a fee
and one more fucking proof
of a grown-up human being
at his
natural mongrel perfidies.

—Ricky

We are hounds. We have always been hounds. The long-ago
faceless people-Before dumped us roadside in Mississippi.
There were three of us, all females. We must have had an energy
even then. The one sister got hit by a truck that just kept going.
We stayed by her on the roadside and watched her not get up.
There wasn't anywhere else to go. Then his old truck came, the
next day, or the next. Driving slower. An old dull-colored thing.
It was the color of old red clay.

It was spring and he was driving slow to keep from hitting the
box turtles that come out of the earth at that time.

We had mange and ticks and fleas and worms, which is I sup-
pose why the long-ago faceless people-Before dumped us.
Perhaps they had children around the house. Perhaps . . .

689 #F

111

110

He drove past, going way around our sister, and we jumped out and ran down the road after him, barking, wobbling on short legs. We had not done that to other trucks and cars that passed. I don't know why we did it to him.

He was weak, had not ever owned a dog before. He was going to keep going.

We must have known he was weak, is why we chased him. It's hard to remember. He looked in the mirror and saw Ann, fat little Ann, jump out of the weeds and run down the road after him. Easy Ann.

He stopped and backed the truck up.

He was a do-gooder, I could tell that.

He was going to take us to the pound, a place all dogs know about in their hearts.

I jumped out of the weeds and

ran down the road after Ann,

barking at her to come back, to wait for a better one.

We were living in an old ratty house the color of a buzzard's neck.

The old house was back in the high green weeds, set up on cinder blocks to let snakes and wildcats and rodents pass beneath it.

We lived in the back room on the south side, in what had once been the kitchen. We went to the bathroom on old newspapers and magazines in a corner bedroom. It was a big house, all the doors and windows busted out, and it listed like a ship about to go out to sea, or about to slide to the bottom of the sea. He got Ann. He picked her up. Delighted, she immediately rolled over on her back and began peeing, which is why she is called Peeing Ann, a golden fountain in the spring sunlight, in Mississippi, pee of happiness.

Handwritten scribble



690

He hadn't ever *touched* a dog before; didn't know what to do. Stood there and held her, waiting for the pee to run out. I barked shrill and wild, a puppy, snapping at his ankles. Trying to get him to give her back. He tried to pick me up with his free hand but couldn't, I dodged and twisted, yapped though I am not a yapping dog. I am a hound. He took Ann back to his truck, put her on that awful littered floorboard, then came back for me.

I ran into the woods and hid. When he kept coming—crawling under the rusting barbed wire fence, catching his shirt on it

—*Good heart* I thought quickly, examining him in my mind for the first time—

I ran up the steps, into that rotting old mansion. He kept coming. I hid in a slumping down closet.

The back door had been blown off by a hurricane or a tornado or any of a thousand other sheer malevolent bad lucks that roamed through the Mississippi woods.

He's not smart. He searched quickly through the house, Thinking, I could hear, "A pair would be nice, they ought not to be split up."

When he came to the place where the door had been blown away, he assumed I had leapt off the porch into the brambles far below, into that great void. He underestimated me. He expected the least of me. He wrote me off, sold me off and out But still I love him.

He went back to his truck, that hideous old death trap.

I could hear him thinking, "At least I saved one."

I could hear him thinking, "That one would have been too wild, anyway."

I heard him drive away.

It was an awful kind of loneliness, when he was gone:

He and Ann.

The woods grew larger.

Light seemed suddenly to get sucked out of the old house; it slumped further.

43

691

I crawled out from under the old newspapers and went out to the road where my other sister, the one-who-remained, still was. He didn't take that one away.

I sat there to keep the buzzards away, and waited, though I didn't know what for.

After a while, I could hear him thinking, about five or six miles up the road, thinking guilty thoughts, thinking, "I didn't try hard enough."

The awfulness of what he had done—taking my Ann!—

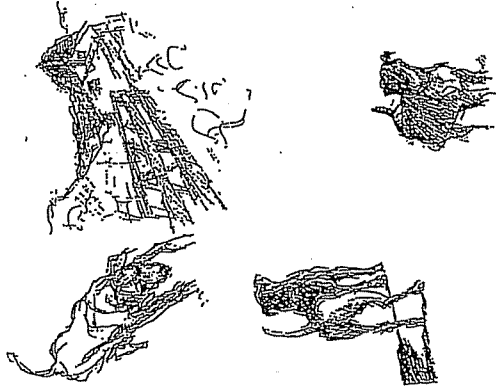
beginning to settle heavy on him like a slumping house.

He came driving back.

When he came around the bend, I ran at his truck, barking, but when he got out of it again I ran back under the fence, through the weeds, and into the shack—but this time I willed him to catch me.

He's not bright. He made the same mistake. Went to the same door, the same torn-off one, and stared down into the bramble-maw. Figured I was wilder than wild, and left. Again.

Now my dog-heart was flattened. I went back out to the road,



even before he had driven out of sight But he didn't see me. He was busy looking down at the floorboard, admiring Ann, who was on her back, thumping her tail, and who had begun to pee again.

But he came back a third time, saw me sitting by the roadside again, at the edge of the tall weeds, in the heat rising from the black road in waves, and chased me once more.



He figured out that I was not leaping into that void each time,
and he stalked the whole house instead,
like a detective, and this time
he found me, in there under all those papers,
as if I had been birthed from that rotting old house,
as if the trash and papers were my afterbirth.
That was almost ten years ago.
Of course I wonder about the Ones-Before-Him,
What it would have been like, with them.
I suspect they were deer hunters.
We would have been only two in a pack of fifty,
chasing deer through the night,
baying on silver nights
frost nights,
baying hard on the heels of antlered deer
running wild like kings through the forest . . .
No.
The other master, the one-before,
was weak and cowardly and coal-hearted.
He would have used us for bait on his trotline
He would have made us fight in pits with spiked collars.
He took Ann and me over to his girlfriend's, Elizabeth's.
They fed us watery milk from a bowl
on the back porch of her house
with the cows lowing out in the field
and the blue dusk sliding in from the bayou below:

the groans of cows in the spring,
and then the night, the fireflies, this new world.
We slept in a big shoebox with our bellies warm and full,
round and drum tight, snoring, slobbering in our happiness.
And though they had never had dogs before
they did not take us to the pound.
What dog knows its parents, anyway?

I am the Alpha and the Homer.
I am a female, spayed so I will live longer,
and I am loyal, the faithful Homer-Dog,
named for another orphan, Homer Wells.
The more feckless Ann gets,
the more loyal I must become, to balance her sloppiness.
She walks right through mud puddles.

She farts;

I never fart.

Ann takes big dumps

wherever and whenever she feels like it.

I go into the woods

and hunker behind a tree.

I am modest; I am loyal.

We are twins.

Children are the only ones who can tell us apart.

They know things: we like being in their company.

Ann licks them, slobbers their sweet faces with kisses,
even when she has been out eating cow pies.

693

She pretends not to understand the command, "No licking," just as she pretends to be too dense to understand "No farts."

I wonder about the one who's not here, the third one, what she would have been like. By now it is clearly established that I am the Number One Dog, the Ultimate Dog, the best.

He quit his job not long after he rescued us. And we liked this. He was home all the time, then: the three of us.

He carried each of us in his arms, one in each arm, like a loaf of bread, or a football, and we went for long walks, beneath spring-green canopies of light, past old barns, past cattle, past muddy ponds and buzzards, herons, and skunks; hay fields. Hot. It was always hot, in Mississippi.

I am the Alpha and the Homer, but things always happen to me, never to Ann, who, despite her gracelessness, has the slippery luck of a fish, and glides or blunders through things untouched.



Once I was running hard, running fast, young, running strong just to feel my speed. I ran through a pile of pecan leaves, head high: I aimed to just burst through their midst.

But there was a stone wall hidden in their midst. I hit it going about ninety miles per hour and cartwheeled, limp, knocked out. They thought I was dead. But Ann licked my face, revived me. We were not even two years old.

I walked in circles for hours, staggering. A concussion. I hit the wall first because I was fastest and best. Ann was waddling along behind me and when she saw me smack that hidden wall, she had veered off. I don't know this for sure but I think I am older than she is, by a minute or two.

4/16

694

After he quit his job and was just living out on the farm like a bozo, just writing, instead of doing muscle-work, he got poor quick, and when it came time for our annual worming, to save money he didn't take us to the vet but instead tried to do it himself.

He saved two dollars by buying horse-worming pills—Big blue gel-caps the size of garden slugs, filled with turpentine. I went first because I was, and am, the loyal one; because I came first when he called, just slightly ahead of Ann.

We were in the sunroom sitting up on the old iron bed late in the afternoon. The room was filled with golden light. The last light I would ever see, it almost turned out.

He put me up on the bed like he was a real vet instead of a fuck-up; as if it were an examining table. He held my muzzle skyward and tried to slip that giant blue slug-pill down my throat.

I panicked, and gagged; I chomped down on it, punctured it with my teeth.

It was a horse-sized portion.
A horse weighs twelve hundred pounds; I weigh only forty.
The turpentine-slug exploded and I inhaled it, all of it, straight into my lungs and began coughing.
My eyes and ears were on fire
My throat and heart, my very essence was in flames.
Turpentine vapors shot from my nostrils as if from a dragon's;
To light a match in that room would have been disastrous.

I fell over on my side and went immediately into convulsions.
He scooped me up in his arms shouted my name
shouted "HOMER!"
I could hear him shouting calling me
like he was a long, long way away and though I was shaking, convulsing as if electrocuted
I roused myself from that near-place, the one where he was calling me away from and, as ever, I came to his call.

417

695

We rushed ninety miles an hour,
forty miles to town, to the
emergency room,
with which I was much familiar.
We left Ann sunning herself
on the porch: basking.

I shook and rattled the whole way
I flooded the truck with the scent of my
turpentine-breath, so that his eyes
were watering; and he was crying, too,
for what he had done to me.
But I made it. I am the Alpha and the Homer.
And I have never, ever, had worms.

We ran and never got tired, all day long.
At night the murmuring calls of chuck-will's-widows
bathed us as we slept.
All of these things are life
All of these things are a gift from him to us,
and from us back to him.
Someone has to be alive to see all this.

He missed the mountains.
His stories were starting to repeat themselves,
filling again and again with the colors green and yellow
while his heart and his body
were longing for the ice colors of blue and white.
It's said that dogs can't see color

but we can feel it, like leaves, like heat,
like cool drafts, and warm scents.

He drove north, he and Elizabeth,
with us, looking for a place with these colors.
We spent the summer roaming the West,
where he had gone to college
before we were born.

Before he knew or dreamed us, and
the way we would change his life—
the way everything, each day, adds up
to change your life, to steer it, turn it.
Dogs know this.

The best thing you can do about this
is to take long naps and let it,
the decay of life,
go on past you, as if uninterested in you—
though it is always interested.

I can tell by the way he looks at us sometimes
That he wants us to be young again;
That he wants to believe it is all in our minds,
that we have gotten lazy:
that we have not paid close enough attention;
that we have wasted time on too many naps
and that it is all going by so fast, now,
but the truth is we're just getting old. And tired.
Our coats aren't as glossy as they were.
We're lumpier with gristle, now, not muscle.
We snore.

418

696

He exercises us daily—
wanting us to become young again.

But that is not the story, what we are now
That is only one day of the story—
and all the ones that came before today
are more a part of it than today is,
though today will sometime become a part of the story.

Every dog gets old. That is no story at all.

The one we left by the side of the road
The sister who was hit—she did not get old
But in a way, these days are her days, too.

Skunks; we had found skunks
back in Texas. We caught an armadillo there, too,
followed it down into its hole,
tunneling just behind it, sending up
roostertails of rich brown dirt.

We almost caught it—
just as we almost caught rabbits
and almost caught squirrels.
We have never caught anything,
though it always seemed like we were close,
right on something's tail,
and gaining on it.

It seemed like we were destined for greatness
but we were just hounds, alive.

ii

Right away they knew
it was where they wanted to live
when we drove through the dark woods
and then over the blue mountains
and spied the green valley below
the clear river rushing through it like an arrow,
but pausing too and lingering, in places.
Those two old colors were still there,
green in the meadows, and yellow in the flowers
daisies and lilies and even sunflowers—
but up above were the blue mountains,
blue forests, blue grouse, and the icy spines of glaciers.

He finagled a job caretaking an abandoned hunting lodge
where there were the stuffed violent heads of dozens of
horned beasts, which made our hackles rise,
even though we knew they were dead.

We drove back to Mississippi for the last time. It was late
summer.

The lodge where we'd be living now
was huge, like a castle. It would be cold in winter.
We said good-bye to friends in Mississippi:
our home, our old home.

697

419

He rented a big yellow truck
loaded it all one Saturday
and left that same night.

We slept on the big seat next to him.

The truck rumbled,

it made a vibration that went all the way into us,
it was a powerful truck
taking us into yet another life.

And this is where our years have passed, now—in Montana.

Our third, fourth, fifth,

sixth, seventh, eighth, and now

ninth years: this is where we have spent them.

You can only spend them in one place
and they don't come back.

Sometimes we spend them napping

and other days running to the tops of mountains.

We had to learn about porcupines.

We had to learn about mountain lions and bears.

We had to learn about coyotes.

The coyotes won't bother you eleven months

out of the year, not if Ann and I

stick together, but when their pups

are young in May and June, look out:

if you get too near their den while their pups are little
they will come after you even if days later, for revenge.

They got me bad, last year; four of them caught me behind
the cabin and opened me from behind to chin:
They had me down and were at my belly.

Ann barreled into them

gave it her all:

ready to die with and for me.

She was ferocious, and chased them off.

I crawled home,

my intestines dragging in the dust.

I lay on the back porch and almost

bled to death, too weak to even whine,

but at least I got home.

Ann whined for me—

Elizabeth heard her and came out.

We went to the vet in Libby,

with whom I am much familiar.

He cleaned me up, sewed me back together.

It took weeks, but I survived.

I am the Alpha and the Homer

I was made to experience this world

It was created for me—

I was meant to move across it.

Not forever and ever, but for a few years

A few good sweet years; I will not be denied this life.

~~495~~

698

It used to be a joke, about
not dying in winter, because
that was when the ground was frozen too hard.
Now it's not a joke.
We still have some more years left
and they will not be the best ones,
but I like a good nap anyway.

This was the first year, the first winter,
that we have seen that look cross his face,
the realization that if we went now,
it would be almost impossible to dig our grave.
It had always been such a big joke.

I truly don't think he understood
that dogs get old.

They have a daughter now. She loves us
as he and Elizabeth once loved us,
and as we still love them,
as we love all three of them now.
If there is one word a dog has the right to use
it is that one.

People pull their punches, refer to dogs' love
with words such as *loyalty, obedience, or even submissionness,*
but it is love.

We take long naps in the mountain sun, now,
or try to, while the baby tugs on our ears,
covers us with leaves, grass, and dirt:
trampolines on our ribs, just to hear us grunt.

130

We all go for walks, each day, the five of us.

He plants trees. They both do, on special occasions:
birth-trees, birthday trees, anniversary trees—
Maple, apple, cherry, ash and lilacs;
Larch, ponderosa pine, spruce fir and cedar.
As we walk, he talks to Elizabeth about their daughter,
being thirty years old someday and seeing these trees he's
planted for her. He talks about how he'll be
sixty-five, then, and she, thirty, and how she can look at them,
knowing he planted them for her: how big they'll be, then.
He strides from tree to tree, looking up.

We will be thirty years gone, at the time of which
he speaks, casting his thoughts into the future, and-sometimes,
as he walks and says these things, he forgets
to look down at us, looks only ahead and beyond.

When we sleep for good, I would like a tree.
I would like Ann to have a tree, too.

We can be side by side,
on one of the hills that we used to explore.

My tree will be bigger. I loved him more.
Ann is the one he picked first. But he came back for me.

END

—Homer Bass

699

131

Ron Carlson

Max Who Caught a Car

When I found out that one of my years was seven of theirs, I started biting absolutely everything.

—Max Carlson

I'm now a legend underneath this porch where old age has me tethered in the yard, and every young pup carries his own torch to me, the dog that caught a '60 Ford.

The story's known from L.A. to New York, how I dragged the Fairlane back onto the grass and chewed it up like so much tender pork. It took me years to swallow all that glass.

And still these young dogs come to see if I can offer any help with their technique; they scratch and piss and bark into the sky, macho doggy stardom what they seek.

I smile at their bravado, all that toil, and then I sleep, as always, drooling oil.

—Max Carlson, *Australian shepherd*, b. January 1, 1983



~~433~~

700

Walter
Kirn

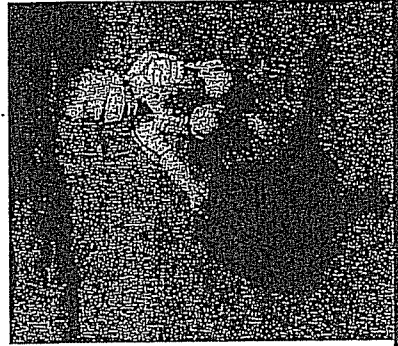
Envy

I left. I'd finished raising you. I walked down the drive past the red-flagged mailbox following the bus that came each day for you and your brother, who'd played rough with me once. The problem now was your neglect as I grew older, an object of respect—wrapped treats at Christmas, a plaque above my rug: "No trespassing. Property of Jolly Dog."

All unwanted. Such gentle treatment's harsh on one who used to scramble through the brush after cruelly far-flung sticks, or swim roped behind a boat, if you could catch him.

You always could. I never played hard to get until you began to go easy. Then I left.

—Jolly Dog



Susan
Minot

Devotion

You left. One by one there were less of you
Less bicycles tipping off their stands
Less leftovers I would get of stew
Less and less shouts and then fewer hands
To pull back my ears and smooth at my head
Or strangle my neck till my tongue got dry.
Some of you changed tastes, slept with cats instead.

Once, apart, you whispered you loved me: a lie.

You went, not I, with a suitcase shut.

I loped after each car. Barks at the end

Of our drive. I could only stray so far. What

I was attached to in you would not stretch or bend.

When the last who'd sucked his bottle sleeping on my
fleece side.

Left, I ambled off to where dogs bereft alone go,
and died.

—Jason

~~MINOT~~

701

Alicia Muñoz

Hunting Accident

I heard you park by the road.
Your whistles released me, your
tongue reeled me in.
I pissed through the bars,
inhaling wild boar, baby bats, deer,
a dirt-lipped underworld of rabbits.
I could hear everything, even the geese
snapping crickets by the mill,
where you lay your jacket
in the grass, eating from a can,
your heavy hand of fish and leather
blanketing my eyes.

There's blood in my mouth.
I always find it, soft and still
warm between rotten trunks,
or in a cluster of weeds.
But why do you rock me in your arms,
crying like a bird?

—Canali

Maxine Kumin

Gus Speaks

I was the last of my line,
farm-raised, chesty, and bold.
Not one of your skinny show-world
thirty-five pound Dalmatians.
I ran with the horses, my darlings.

Rivers they forded, wet
to the elbow, I swam. Their lot
was my lot, my lope matching
their stride mile for mile.
Their smell became my smell.

Joyous I ate their manure.
Its undigested oats
still sweet, kept me fit.
I slept with one broodmare.
I curled at her flank.

My head on that bay haunch
we lay, a study in snores,
ear flicks, and farts in her stall
until the hour of her foal.
She shunned me most cruelly.

~~702~~ 702

Spring and fall, I erred over
and over. Skunks were my folly.
Then, I was nobody's lover.
I rolled in dung and sand.
My heart burst in the pond.

My body sank and then rose
like a birch log, a blaze
of white against spring green.
Now I lie under the grasses
they crop, my own swift horses

who start up and spook in the rain
without me, the warm summer rain.

—*Caesar Augustus*



Wyatt Prunty

Coach

All trucks were from Hell and deserved my bite,
All children sheep and not to leave the yard.
Before I came, the house was unsafe;
The man whistled and no one heard,
And the huge trucks lumbered.

When the boy walked out, ball in hand,
I coached. He called me that. "Coach,"
He'd say, and I'd bark back, "Now! Now!"
Till the game was "Here Coach, Fetch Coach,"
And I was off and straightway back, unless,
Of course, one of the trucks from Hell passed by.

Thrown objects were my specialty,
The lazy sticks, their high trajectories,
That, and the knack I had for words—
Here, fetch, hunt, stay, sit, lie-down . . .
And names, for the boy, his sister.
I lived those names twelve years, a diplomat
Who read the world four different ways,
Nose, ear, eye, and sometimes what was said.

When my coat thinned, legs stiffened and I
Turned deaf, I was practical; I didn't run,
Limped wisely over, once the stick had plopped.
Then the children left, as sticks were lost,
As the man's whistle rose past hearing,
As all sounds stopped, and I was nose and eye,
Watching the trucks from Hell roll by,
Each silent and deserving of my bite,
Which the last one got, till I never let go.

—Morgan

~~704~~ 704

Edward Albee

Samantha

They weren't with me
When I was taken in to die.
They were in Spain.

They lay on a bed in Grenada
With the phone to their ear
And they cried when they told them,
Cried into the phone.

I know that much.

I was kept for them
Curled in a frozen sleep
Until they came back.

They dug a hole then
(He and his friend dug a hole then)
On the point, by the ocean
Where all the others had been laid:
Poochie, Jennifer, Harry, Andrew, Jane
and the cats

Cunegonde, Sarah, Leslie, Dorothy, Jake.

They dug a hole and put me in it.
Gentle Diane, the potter,
Baked clay biscuits for me
Placed them.
(Very Egyptian for an Irish Wolfhound
—but nice.)

I liked being with all the others,
On the point, by the ocean,
Especially Andrew, especially Jake.

I wonder—
when it comes time
For the diggers, for gentle Diane,
Will they be put here too?
On the point? By the ocean? With us?
I hope so.

~~Albee~~ 705

Kate Clark
Spencer

When I Died on My Birthday

My heart broke for you.
I nudged your face while you called my
name over and over and
cried no until there was no sound.
You couldn't feel it.

Strange seeing your own
body lying on the grass. My
eyes were slits, my ears
black triangles. And my long legs
were tan and smooth as

polished oak. Not moving. You were
desperate, so I
gave you butterflies, the symbol
of the soul and of
rebirth. I prompted Kim to buy

a book of butterflies, gemlike,
the microscopic
photographs, you said, dazzled you.
I got Max to grab
that tablecloth her mother made

embroidered in thread
with seven butterflies. Andy
made a cloth and wood
dog you used to show me. Yes, I
knew the dog was me.

Butterflies weaved into the silk
were rust-brown like me,
and iridescent. I was in
the canyon when a
butterfly followed

you along the creek where you found
my stone. And I watched
you press your cheek against the words
you had Kris sandblast:
BELL we will discuss butterflies.

—Bell

~~766~~

766

Stephen Dunn

Buster's Visitation

I'm a dead dog for real now;
no longer can I rise
from my fakery, alert to commands
I'd come to think of as love,
though I never did obey
as well as Sundown did
or as a truly good dog would.
To play the slave, not be one,
was my code. You understood,
who would play the master.
From my grave in the yard I see now
you had no gift for it, or heart.
Bad dog, you'd say,
so little conviction in your voice.
In seconds you'd be patting my head.
Forgiveness made you happy; I'd tip over
the garbage to be forgiven by you.
Let me tell you it's no life
being dead. I'd give anything
to chase the gulls again.
But clarities come when the body goes.
For whatever it's worth

you should know—you who think so much—
only what's been smelled or felt
gets remembered.
And in the dark earth no doors open,
no one ever comes home.

—Buster

~~131~~ 707

Arthur
Miller

Lola's Lament

I worry.
I have to because nobody else does.
Some strange car comes up the driveway—
They go right on talking. They trust,
I don't. Threat crosses my nose
Twenty times a day.
No wonder I bark and menace,
Who knows who it could be at the door
Specially in these times.
Walk in the woods with them
You'd never know they're passing
Under two tremendous owls perched way up,
Or stepping on fresh coyote piss
Or a hair of an elderly rat on a blade of grass
Or the spunk of rutting deer last night,
Or the rubbing of a bear, God forbid,
On a bent birch beside the path.

So I worry.
Sleep with my ears up, not soundly.
When I'm not watching I'm greeting.
People are not grateful enough
For visitors. I am. I worry
About them not being grateful enough.
So I make up for it by howling
Till they get up off the couch
To shake hands. Between the dangers
And the greetings I'm simply exhausted.

—Lola

~~708~~ 708