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The Dogface West

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The DogFace West

The clock in the bus station was busted. Minute hand hung limp and bent as if someone reached inside the glass and physically tortured it. The clock was not alone. The interior of the bus station was chipped everywhere. The deserted lunch counter was lime green with worn brown patches; the stools bright orange. The lounge chairs were low and plastic, perhaps once blue. Definitely left from a time gone past. From where he sat you might of thought he was part of the decor. He was awkwardly hunched in his chair with his head in his lap. His hair was partly caught in a ponytail and his denim jacket was covered with the handy work of Harley Davidson. The only two visible possessions were seated next to him, a scabbed up dog and a flat pack of reds. The college student entered from the side and stood in the center of the room. The interior frightened him. He spoke to himself,

"Shit. What the hell am I supposed to do now?" His echo bounced off the tiled surfaces, only the dog responded to his imploring question. He jumped from his perch and stretched his way over to the student's bag, sniffing the brown canvas.

"What do you want mutt? I haven't got a thing." He moved over into a chair first checking for any weird objects that might be stuck to the surface. He then removed a tattered bus schedule from his jeans and began searching for a way out. The dog had followed and jumped up on the seat next to his. The young man ignored the possibility that this dog was his new found friend. When he finally located the time of his ride, he immediately began to grind his jaw.

"I can't fucking believe this shit. If I had known the short cut dropped me off here I would have taken the other route. God fucking dammit!"

The next bus wasn't due for eight hours. He immediately glanced at the snack bar and realized the last sandwich they had probably served was when Lennon took that bullet. As for any attendants, they were most likely hiding in the shack outside pulling on a bottle. His only chance at entertainment was the lost soul hunched over in his chair. He did the only reasonable thing and pulled out his book which he had already finished. He started over.

The buzzing of the flies awoke the college kid as one of them landed on his open mouth. They had wandered over from their tired exploration of the Harley man. He rubbed his eyes and glanced around out of habit, but knew it would look pretty much the same. The dog was still staring at him. He retrieved his book from the ground and opened his sack, placing it back inside. He then removed a cellophane sandwich and slowly undressed it. The dog leaned in to inspect the merchandise. Shifting away from the animal he removed one half and took a bite of warm roast beef that had turned an off brown color from age. The dog jumped off his stool and came around for a better look, and also to remind the student that he was still waiting.

"I can't give you anything mutt, this is my last bit of food until I reach Santa Fe."

The dog licked his nose and scooted closer.

"Aw, come on now, why don't you go bug your owner." He then glanced

over at his object of advice and realized just how desperate the dog must be. The man was still in the exact same position. He looked down at the dog again. Ripping the sandwich in half he placed the larger piece on the ground and watched the dog devour what looked like his first bite in days. He scowled in the owners direction and muttered to himself,

"People shouldn't fucking take on animals when they can't even take care of themselves. Just another drunk shit taking up space."

He decided to get up and take a few laps around the room, all the while shaking the blood back down into his toes. The dog stayed by the bag perhaps thinking he was guarding whatever food was left. As he circled the room he began to check out the owner more closely. A fly had landed on one of his hands that lay palm up on the floor. -His feet were stretched out in front. The student shook his head and imagined just how much he probably had to consume to find his position sleep worthy. He then looked out the window at the vast wasteland of brown chalky earth that stretched to the horizon. For the sake of verbal stimulation he held his own conversation.

"When I get to Santa Fe the first thing I do is find a shower without having to pay for it. Put on my clean underwear and head for her doorstep. If she is excited to see me then, no worries."

He was now testing out the water fountain to clear his throat and had to settle on a few swallows of his own saliva. A good deep clear of the vocal passage and he was off again.

"On the other hand, if she isn't that thrilled, well, then I head for Corpus Christie, Texas and visit John. Now he'll be excited. We'll talk about the coming fall and drink golden margueritas by the pool. Quitting that landscape job early was a good idea, now I can explore the west and fantasize about all that could happen. Definitely."

He was now being followed in his endless circling by the mutt, who was obviously interested in what he was saying.

"What do you think old dog? What the hell do you know anyway, you don't have enough sense to ditch your owner and opt for a new life. I guess the saying is true, man's best friend is man's best friend. And what a friend I might add."

The student decided to check out the man a little closer, however, the fear of a lurking disease kept about five feet between them. His one visible hand was pale, that blue pale you'd imagine on a ninety-five year old grandparent, who moved in with you just in time to say goodbye. There were flies trying to burrow under his straw hair, wanting to lick his neck. The student didn't voice his opinion loud in case the thing awoke, but he thought about the impossibility of a life similar to this whinos. How does anyone reach this plateau? And once there, why don't they slit their wrists? He knew the thought was evil but couldn't prevent the opinion from forming. Standing over the body he spoke to create a bigger distance between their two lives,

"I'm on my way to Santa Fe to get some loving from a beauty. She doesn't know this of course, it's a surprise. But don't you worry your soaked head over this, she'll be excited to see me, you wait and see."

By this time the dog had wandered over. He licked his owners hand and stood there waiting for the pat that usually follows.

“For Christ sakes, wake up you wino and pay attention to your dog.”

With that the student pushed the denim shoulder. There was no give, just rigid, hard bone. The college kid swallowed slowly as a hard realization set in. He had to know. Leaning over the cowboy, the kid pried his chest from his knees until the Marlborough man was sitting up, as if waiting patiently for a bus. He ran out the front door with tears falling out of his eyes and found one scraggly bush to empty his stomach. The roast beef was hardly digested. Wrapping his hands around his chest he sat over his sacrifice, silently violent. The dog's nose touching his flesh brought him back.

Later, when the sheriff came to retrieve the lost souls he picked the student up off the ground and placed him in the back of his car. He did the same for the dog. The sheriff had to fetch the kid's bag because he'd refused to enter the station. The college student had left the man sitting there alone, unable to stare into his grin, his alcoholic grin. As the sheriff climbed into the car he volunteered the information anyone would want to know.

“Dehydration and a very bad liver most likely. Nothing anyone can do for these people, they do it to themselves.” He didn't even look at the sheriff, the brown empty landscape held his attention.

- Heidi Mahoney '93